

# The Good Neighbor

## Luke 10:25–37 (ESV)

**INTRODUCTION:** The passage before us today, commonly referred to as the “*good Samaritan*,” is one of the most recognizable in all of the Bible. Hospitals, organizations, movements, and institutions have been named for this passage. Believers and non-believers alike know at least some portion of this story.

That makes it difficult to preach. You’ve heard it all before. But we will see if we can find some new jewels in this old mine.

**CONTEXT:** As Jesus moves from the rural villages of Galilee toward the metropolis of Jerusalem, he begins to encounter opponents with more power, more influence, and more education. The challenges against Him will become more complex and astute. It is likely that the elite of Jesus’ day would assume that Jesus was no more than an uneducated country hick, and he would be quickly confused and trapped by their use of superior arguments. That was not the case. Look with me at verse 25...

### **TEXT: Luke 10:25–37 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to **put him to the test**, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Now, here at FBFirst, we have an abundance of people in the legal profession. At last count, we had around 15 lawyers...and frankly, I like them. They are all good people. In fact, I have yet to meet a lawyer that I didn’t like....except for the guy over **Morgan and Morgan commercials** ... nobody needs to have that many commercials.

A lawyer in Jesus’ day was different from those in our day. This lawyer was not an expert in civil law but rather in Ecclesiastical law. That is the law of scripture, the Mosaic Law.

Rome allowed its client states, like Israel, to enjoy a measure of cultural autonomy. The Jewish Sanhedrin was allowed to stay in power under Roman occupation.

The Sanhedrin comprised 70 men, all educated, all men of substance. They were served by a number of lawyers - or teachers of the law who wrestled with the minutia of the OT commands. That was the sort of lawyer Jesus was facing.

So the question makes sense, “**What shall I do to inherit eternal life**”?

<sup>26</sup> He (that is Jesus) said to him, “**What is written in the Law? How do you read it?**”

I find this interesting - I have several Jewish friends from our travels to Israel, and for some reason, **the Jews like to answer a question with a question**.

I asked the tour guide once, ***“Why do you Jews always answer a question with a question?”***. He said, ***“Why not?”***.

As we have seen already - a question properly framed is one of the most excellent tools in the teacher’s arsenal. Jesus asks this lawyer - what does the law say? And how do you read it or interpret it?

<sup>27</sup> And he (that is the lawyer) answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

This is a combined quote from two passages of scripture in the OT.

- The first is from **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** and is called the Shema. A devout Jew would repeat it twice each day (Deut. 1:1–4). **Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
- The second is from **Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

On another occasion, a different lawyer asked,:

**Matthew 22:36–40 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

Jesus gave the same answer...

<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

It was understood in Jesus's day that these were the two penultimate commands of the OT.

- The 10 Commandments could be understood as a commentary on these two commands. 6 commands about loving your neighbor, 4 commands about loving your God.
- There were 603 commands in addition to the Ten Commandments that served as a commentary on the Ten Commandments.

But to love God and love people was the sum of your duty toward God and man.

In one sense, the lawyer gave a good answer to Jesus's question. But in another sense, the answer was incomplete. Because no one has done that perfectly, notice what Jesus says...

<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

If you can love God perfectly, perpetually, and love your neighbor as yourself, from the day you are born till the day you die - you will inherit eternal life.

But there is a problem: no one has done that - except for one.

I haven't done that, you haven't done that...this lawyer hadn't done that.

So, an appropriate follow-up question might be - what if we mess up? Is there any hope for the sinner? To which Jesus may have said, "Oh yes, you see, there is LAW, but there is also the sacrificial system - which pointed to the need for atonement, found in the lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.

But the lawyer didn't say that... look at verse 29....

<sup>29</sup> But he, ***desiring to justify himself***, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

**The greatest threat to the human soul is the sin of self-justification.**

This is one of the mega themes throughout Luke's gospel.

***Interestingly, he thought he might slip into heaven on a technicality.... A legal loophole. You see, Moses didn't define the word, "neighbor". Gotcha Jesus - how am I supposed to know who my neighbor is?***

I mean, if it's a family member that goes to the same synagogue as I do and doesn't get on my nerves too bad... I'm good. But you don't expect me to love everybody, do you?

***ILLUSTRATION:*** It reminds me of the case against President Clinton back in the 90's, ***"It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is."*** It was the idea that concrete truth could get fuzzy in the existential reality he was privileged to inhabit.

Well, the grand jury didn't buy it - and Jesus didn't buy it from this guy.

<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead."

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was known to be incredibly dangerous. It is a 17 mile, very narrow, dangerous, winding road that is bordered by steep cliffs on one side and barren hills on the other side. Even to this day, if it has rained quite a bit, the

road is impassable. As a matter of fact, the road was so dangerous that in those days it was called "the way of blood."

It was dangerous for another reason - Bible scholars estimate that there were at least 12,000 thieves in that Judean wilderness surrounding Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

People didn't take this journey alone, but for some reason, this man did, and he was robbed. Jesus says the robbers stripped him of his clothing. In that day, you didn't have a closet of clothes; you had one or two sets. Your clothes typically showed the world your place in society... much like a uniform does in our day. He was stripped, he was beaten, and he was left for dead, barely breathing on the side of the road.

*Jesus continues...* <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.

Typically, you would pray that if you were left for dead on the side of the road, a priest would pass by. If anyone would help you, it would be a priest. But, as this lawyer would understand, if a priest was leaving Jerusalem and going to Jericho, he was likely returning home from his priestly service. He had been away for some time; if this man on the side of the road was dead, or if he died while being helped, the priest would have to return to Jerusalem and go through the process prescribed in the OT for ceremonial cleansing. A red heifer was sacrificed, the ashes poured into a water basin, a hyssop branch dipped in the ashes, then sprinkled over the priest.

This priest hadn't been home in weeks... he wouldn't risk it.

<sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. Those not serving in active duty as priests would have other responsibilities, much like a deacon, a choir member, or a missions team member in our day. This Levite also passes him by.

<sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.

We keep returning to the Samaritans, don't we? They were the half-Assyrian / half-Jew race that lived in the Promised Land alongside the native Hebrews. The Jews, especially this lawyer, despised them. We see later that the lawyer wouldn't even say the word Samaritan.

But nevertheless, this Samaritan had compassion... literally he was moved from the inside to help him. He felt something. He probably thought that it could have been me if I had left an hour earlier.

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<sup>1</sup> James Merritt

34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

This man would survive, and he would return to his family, all because of the good care of this good Samaritan.

**NOW, Jesus flips the question.** The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Remember? But Jesus turns it around....look at it in verse 36:

36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

It seems like the question should be, "Who was the neighbor to the Samaritan?" But instead, Jesus asks, "Who was the neighbor to the victim?"

37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

NOW - this is very important. When you watch a movie or you read a story, typically, there is someone in the story that the author or producer wants you to identify with.

Generally, that is the hero - In Star Wars, it's Luke Skywalker. BUT HERE, Jesus flips the script. **He calls the lawyer, and all of the rest of us, to identify with the VICTIM, not the HERO.**

That is very important. This man, the VICTIM, we are to identify with encounters three types of people. The first is....

## 1. THE TAKERS -

That is the **robbers**.

Takers say, ***"What's yours is mine, and I will take it."***

The world is FULL of TAKERS.

- They wake up in the morning asking, "What's in it for me?"
- They go to work asking, "What's in it for me?"
- Some even go to church asking, "What's in it for me?"

Takers are so concerned about their own lusts that they will use you for their satisfaction, even if it destroys you in the process.

Takers aren't concerned about helping others; they are concerned about themselves.

Some of you are dating takers.  
 Some of you are hiring takers.  
 Some of you are working for takers.

*The first people the man encountered were the takers.... The second group was like unto them....*

## 2. THE KEEPERS -

That is the **Priest** and **Levite**  
 Keepers say, ***“What’s mine is mine, and I will keep it”***.

This is the spirit of Cain that sees his brother in need and asks, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”. In other words, it’s not my concern. It is his problem. I have my own problems to worry about.

The keeper asks, ***“What will happen to me if I do stop to help?” rather than, “What will happen to him if I don’t stop”?***

A Gallup survey discovered that only 10% of American church members are active in any kind of personal ministry, and 50% of all church members have no interest in serving whatsoever.

In other words, 50% of the church is saying loudly and clearly, "We just don't want to get involved. It's of no concern to us".

Keepers get consumed with the ***“what ifs”*** - what if I help, and those people get dependent on my help, and others follow; well, that’s all I will be doing is helping. Then, I will be the one in need.

They say to themselves, “Since I can’t afford to help everybody, I won’t help anybody.”

But their soul begins to turn inward, and they become sad, lonely individuals...and the only thing there to comfort them is their stuff.

*The takers... the keepers....*

## 3. THE GOOD NEIGHBOR -

That is the **Samaritan**  
 Takers say, ***“What’s yours is mine, and I will take it.”***  
 Keepers say, ***“What’s mine is mine, and I will keep it”***.  
 Neighbors say, ***“What is mine is yours, and I will give it”***.

- He tore his **robe** and made bandages for the man.
- He took his **flask** of wine and cleaned his wounds.

- He took his **oil** and poured it as an ointment on this man's sores.
- He provided a **roof** over his head and food in his stomach.
- He even served as a **guarantee** should the need grow worse. He offered his own credit on the man's behalf.

That is the good neighbor; Jesus knew it, the lawyer knew it, and we all know it.

**BUT REMEMBER - Jesus didn't call us to identify with the story's HERO, but the victim. Why is that? Because therein lies the answer to the original question - what must I do to inherit eternal life??**

You see, when it comes to spiritual reality, we are in the place of the man left for dead. We are in the words of Paul, dead in our trespasses and sins - on top of that, we have encountered a number of people who have made our condition worse:

- We have encountered **TAKERS**,
- We have encountered **KEEPERS**,
- Our only hope is to encounter the **GOOD NEIGHBOR** - Jesus.

One who takes our sin upon himself, one who would heal our wounds, one who has a balm of Gilead to pour over our heads, one who has a place prepared for us, one who reaches deep down into His own good credit with the Father and says - whatever they owe you charge it to my account.

***What am I trying to say? Like a good neighbor, Jesus is there.***

Like the Samaritans, Jesus was despised and forsaken by men. He was mocked and beaten, but he did not return evil for evil.

As He hung there on the cross - with your sin on his shoulders. He was moved with compassion...He said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do".

***Like a good neighbor, Jesus is there.***

Oh, I don't know about you - but I can relate.

When I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore, very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more, then the "Master of the Sea" heard my despairing cry, from the waters lifted me now safe am !!! LOVE LIFTED ME.

***What am I trying to say? Like a good neighbor, Jesus is there.***

**Have you been there? Have you met the good neighbor? If you have truly met a good neighbor, you will truly be a good neighbor.**

**CONCLUSION/INVITATION:**

I read a story about a man working in a shoe store in Europe once. It was during the wintertime and he noticed a barefoot little boy outside the baker's shop next door to the shoe store. He was trying to keep warm by standing on a grate blowing hot air outside the bakery. All these shoes surrounded this shoe store owner, but he was uncertain about what to do about that little boy. All of a sudden, a middle-aged lady walked by.

She bent down, spoke some kind words to the child, brought him into the shoe store, and bought him some brand-new shoes and socks. As that boy shivering in the cold put on those warm shoes and socks, he said to the lady, "**Are you God's wife?**" **She said, "No, son, I'm just one of His children."** **He smiled and said, "Well, I knew you must be kin to Him somehow."**

When you get the Lord into your heart, you will get love in your heart. When you get love in your heart, you realize everybody, regardless of color, creed, race, or religion, is your neighbor. Just like Jesus, you'll be there.

***What am I trying to say? Like a good neighbor, Jesus is there.***