

February 4, 2015/ Luke 10:25-37 The Good Samaritan (ESV¹)

This is the parable of the good Samaritan, a parable preserved for us only in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 10:25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

The NIV begins "on one occasion." The ESV says "and behold." There is no context given here.

A lawyer stood up. This is an expert in the law, one learned in the Law of Moses, an official interpreter of the Law of Moses. His duties were to study, interpret, expound and teach the Law in the schools and synagogues, to decide questions of the Law, to act as a judge in matters of the Law.

The body language here tells us something about what's going on here. This guy is an aggressor, he has also drawn attention to himself and thus stands to lose face if the exchange goes badly. We're at a news conference, with a question asker not really asking a question to learn something so much as to trap the speaker and establish his own importance and agenda.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It appears that this matter was a big topic of academic debate at this time. See the story of the rich young ruler in **Matthew 19:16-30**. It is, after all is said and done, one of the few central issues of life. The man's manner and intentions weren't worthy, but the question is an essential one. How does one present oneself to a holy God? Note the phrasing of the question. What to "do" to "inherit"? The lawyer's thinking is mixed, but with some understanding of the truth. There *is* "doing," but probably not in the way the lawyer is thinking. It's not cause and effect. It's not a matter of works by which we're made right with God. Rather, as he goes on to imply, eternal life can only be given by God as an inheritance.

²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

Jesus, in good Jewish Rabbi fashion, answers a question with a question. The ball is back in the lawyer's court. Jesus seems to be saying that the lawyer has asked a question whose answer is clear from the Law if this guy knows his stuff. Note that Jesus refers the man specifically to the Scriptures. Not to any other supposed authority. Not to his own reason. Not to the opinions of rabbi so and so. Not to latest book on Oprah's reading list. Not to the testimony of some crazy movie star. But to the Scriptures. They are the first and last word on the matter.

²⁷And he 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."

The lawyer replies with **Deuteronomy 6:5** and **Leviticus 19:18**. This is the correct and orthodox answer. The Deuteronomy verse was recited every Sabbath in synagogue. Jesus Himself used the combination of verses in reply to the question of which of the commandments is most important when quizzed by a teacher of the Law (**Mark 12:28-34**). The guy has it right, in theory. One should love God with all one is, and in turn love people. The word translated "neighbor" is more

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than one who lives nearby. There is in it the thought of community or fellowship. Note the order. The second is a corollary of reality in the first. Love God truly and you will love people truly.

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

Jesus says that the issue is following through on what is clear from Scripture.

John 13:17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

This is not a new form of salvation by works. This is a statement that if we truly love God in the sense of really relying upon, trusting in, cleaving to Him, then we will truly love others and there will be real eternal life. Real everlasting life, real life that God's life. This statement is that relationship to God is life itself. The lawyer is asking for a set of rules to follow to assure heaven. Jesus is saying that there is no such set. There is real relationship to God, that necessarily brings with it love for people.

29But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

What is meant by "to justify himself"? There are two possibilities. 1) He's now on the defensive, having asked a question with a simple answer or 2) he is lashing back at the implication that he has not been "doing."

With this question he's really saying "Listen! It's not as elementary as you make it sound. What do the commands mean? I'm looking for a precise interpretation here!" The lawyer has in theory made the right answer to the big question, but is now attempting to limit the scope of its implications. It's interesting that the lawyer blows past first part of the correct answer to the "How do I present myself to God?" question and wants to debate its corollary. He doesn't argue about "**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**" but rather about the implications thereof. In our time and place, all kinds of people want to say that they "believe in God" without any evidence that they love Him in any way that distinguishes their lives from those who profess no love for Him. But love for God is never some abstract thing without implications in behavior. Jesus tells the parable in response to the lawyer's attempt to limit the applicability of the "love your neighbor as yourself" and make love for God an academic matter.

30Jesus 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.

Jerusalem to Jericho is about 17 miles and a drop of elevation of around 3000 feet. This was rough terrain, infested with thieves. According to some commentators, at the time there were about 750 priests per week and 420 Levites per week making their way to Jerusalem to take their turns serving at the temple. Apparently Jericho was a favorite place for such people to live.

A man was going. The presumption would be that he is a Jew. The robbers stripped him and beat him. The guy has injuries, is probably in shock and is exposed to the elements. He's half dead, and looks the part.

31Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.

A priest was going. Why did Jesus use a priest as an example? Why not a civil official or a merchant? Because without question this guy knew and presumably subscribed to the Scriptures that the lawyer had just quoted.

It's worth contemplating what good and what not so good reasons the priest might have for not stopping. It's worth doing because those are probably like our reasons for not helping those in need. He's busy. The guy may look dead, and if he is dead, touching him would make the priest unclean. And if he's headed for Jerusalem that would be awkward for his temple service. Stopping might make the priest late. And perhaps in stopping, he might expose himself to attack by the thieves. In our lives it is mostly a matter of inconvenience and being afraid that helping will use up resources that we think we need for our own families and selves. I've only got this little amount of resources, and if I use it on you, there will be nothing for me and mine. We think as if they were ours to begin with and as if the God we serve has only so much Himself.

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

A Levite came. These were assistants to the priests, doing things ranging from singing to acting as janitors in the temple. This fellow also passed by on the other side, apparently after looking him over more closely than did the priest.

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

But a Samaritan came. This is one of the half-breeds that had been settled in the territory of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians. They mixed their own pagan religions with the worship of God in a way that the Jews despised.

2 Kings 17:41 So these nations feared the LORD and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise, and their children's children—as their fathers did, so they do to this day.

This Samaritan "had compassion." Why use such a person as an illustration of compassion? First, there is no family/nationality reason for him to stop. In fact, he's the last person that might be expected to stop. If the lawyer was hoping for some limits on the meaning of "neighbor," this choice destroys those hopes. If a Samaritan is a neighbor, there are no limits. Second, there is a good chance that the Samaritan would not have been expected to know the orthodox answer that the lawyer had given to the big question. The point is not the "knowing" of the answer in some abstract intellectual sense, but the DOING of it.

The word pity/compassion is a deep feeling of sympathy. This is a wonder. The story teaches that true brotherly love and compassion are rare things. And here they are found in one who isn't even a countryman. Ryle said, "We have in this striking description an exact picture of what is continually going on in the world. Selfishness is the leading characteristic of the great majority of mankind. That cheap charity that costs nothing more than a trifling subscription or contribution, is common enough. But that self-sacrificing kindness of heart, that cares not what trouble is entailed, so long that good can be done, is rarely met with ..." And it is this kind of self-sacrifice that is the character of our God. He, in Christ Jesus, voluntarily took on our misery and real guilt, and at infinite expense to Himself dealt with our sin.

34He 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.

Where was this guy going to get bandages? By tearing up some of his own stuff! Olive oil and wine were the common medical practice of the day. The alcohol in the wine made a disinfectant. Note that the Samaritan didn't simply take the guy to the inn and figure that he had done his part. He stayed and nursed him.

35And 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.'

He took out two denarii. The NIV has "2 silver coins." It's not completely clear how much this is. One source I read said 2 days' wages, another said enough to keep him for up to 2 months, another said both. At any rate, the Samaritan took something significant out-of-pocket. BESIDES, he essentially gave the innkeeper a blank check! The Samaritan not only felt for the man, but substantially put himself out for him.

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

Consider how Jesus is now using the word "neighbor" in comparison to the way the lawyer is trying to use it. The lawyer wants it to be a static matter of limiting responsibility, a definition applied to separate up others into groups. Jesus makes it a matter of doing. AND HE APPLIES IT TO THE DOER, NOT THE DOEE!

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

The lawyer couldn't bring himself to even say "Samaritan."

Again Jesus brings it back to a matter of action. The real question is not "Who is (passive) my neighbor" but rather "Am I acting as a neighbor?"

Jesus is not teaching in this parable that all that is required for right standing with God is self-sacrifice. That would make salvation a matter of works rather than grace, and potentially qualify rebels who really at the core hate God. He's rather insisting that genuine love for God will be seen attitudes and actions. Attempts to make limits on how far the implications of love for God extend have to be seen for what they are, denials of His character, things that make a mockery of His great mercy toward us.

It's one thing for us to hear this parable. It's another to act on it. How do we avoid finding ourselves to be in the place of the Priest or Levite, concerned about only ourselves and perhaps our families? It is a matter of premeditated cold-blooded decision to depend upon Christ and not look the other way. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Our LORD spoke this parable and meant it to be taken seriously, not simply to be agreed to in some abstract sense. The work the good Samaritan did, is the work of all those truly rightly related to God in Christ.