

## Luke 10:25-37, the Good Samaritan

For years I was baffled by this classic popular parable. Jesus seems to be asking us to exhibit a love that goes far beyond human capabilities. Most of the sermons I have heard on the Good Samaritan made it sound like keeping the law of loving your neighbor is a way to eternal life. This is contrary to the means and basis of salvation as being by the grace of God received by faith. Therefore loving your neighbor as the Samaritan did must be a way of Christian life after our salvation. Then I remembered the story of the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-27 who asked the same question of Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" In each case, Jesus directed their attention to keeping the law. In both Luke 10:25 and 18:18, Jesus knows that these men believe they are saved by keeping the law of Moses. Therefore Jesus asks them questions about the law. In Luke 18, the rich young ruler's problem is that he was breaking the first law of not putting anything in the place of God. So Jesus told him to sell his idols (properties), but the man refused. In Luke 10:25, Jesus knows that the lawyer's problem was in failing to love his neighbor as himself. By revealing to them and us that they are breaking the law that they hold as the means of their salvation, Jesus was establishing their great need for God's grace. In each case, Jesus directed their attention to the law that they might understand their failure to perfectly keep the law, and might then look to God's grace for salvation. The Parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates their inability to keep the most important commandments. In Galatians 3:10, Paul quoted Moses in Deut. 27:26 "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the law, to perform them". Therefore if you live by the law, you will die by the law. James 2:10 says "If you break any of the law, you become guilty of all". Paul also says in Romans 7:10-11 that "The commandments which were to result in life, proved to result in death for me". What he meant was that he tried to be saved by keeping the law, but when he broke the law it brought death.

The classic politicians defense against breaking the law is to qualify it and give it loopholes. The first century Rabbis taught that the "neighbor" you were supposed to love can be limited to your countrymen, family members, close friends, and members of your tribe and race. If my neighbor is defined broadly by Jesus in the parable as even my enemy, then this is a command too hard to keep. Therefore, the parable teaches that we are all lost. We are like the helpless guy on the road that needs help, and Jesus alone is the Good Samaritan—only Jesus loves this way. Therefore if I am to be justified before God, "I must be found in Christ,

not having a righteousness of my own, but that which is through faith in Christ" (Phil. 3:9)).

### Context of the Parable of the Good Samaritan

In Luke 10:21, Jesus had just praised God for hiding the secrets of the kingdom from the wise, learned, and proud. Now in v.25, a lawyer (scribe), asked the all important question of what he could do to inherit eternal life. Remember that in first century Israel there was no separation of church and state, so lawyer/scribes were experts in the Mosaic Law. Jesus, knowing the guy's belief system, answers his question with a question about the law, "What does the law say?" The law expert said that the most important law is to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus' reply was that he should do just that. The lawyer wishing to limit the law and find loopholes in it, asked "who is my neighbor?" We know his motivation because v.29 says he asked because he was trying to justify himself. If he could limit it, like the rabbis taught, to Jews, relatives, friends, etc. then he could justify himself. This is really why people argue, not to get the truth, but to justify themselves. Jesus wisely knew that it would be futile to be drawn into a long heated debate about the law, so Jesus told the wonderful story of the Good Samaritan to answer both of the man's questions. Don't miss the intended shock value of the dramatic reversal of expectations. Jesus used the very priests that they would expect to show love to give the example of failure to love, and Jesus used the Samaritan, a hated enemy, as an example of properly loving your neighbor. What you thought should happen, doesn't. A priest and a Levite should care but don't, while an enemy is loving and caring.

Jerusalem is about 17 miles to Jericho along a winding hilly road that drops over 3000 feet in elevation. It is a barren wilderness that made a perfect hiding place for robbers to attack travelers. Getting robbed and beat up happened often on this road, therefore Jesus' audience could relate to the story. Many of the priests and Levites had homes or vacation homes in Jericho which they often travelled to from their jobs in Jerusalem. First century Jews hated Samaritans for many reasons. In 536 BC, when the 50,000 Jews returned from captivity in Babylon, their mission was to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. The Samaritans lived just to the north of Jerusalem at that time. They were a mixed race of Jews and other countries caused by Assyria's invasion of Israel in 722 BC. The Assyrians had exported the Jewish leaders and imported many other conquered peoples in order to intermarry with the Jews. The capital of this country begun by Assyria was Samaria, therefore the new mixed race of

Jews and foreigners were called Samaritans. They developed a new idolatrous religion, and built their own Temple on Mt. Gerizim. When the Jews came back from the Babylonian captivity, the Samaritans opposed them, and initially prevented the building of the Temple. Therefore to a first century Jew, Samaritans were half breed pagan enemies that had a neighboring rival country and religion.

“Do This and You Shall Live” v. 28

The religious leader had asked Jesus what he could do to have eternal life, and now Jesus confirms that if he could keep the commandments “you shall live”, but Jesus clearly knew the guy was not keeping the commandments to love God and to love his neighbor. Jesus told him to do it and he would live, but then in the parable Jesus proves that he was not doing it. “Do this” sounds simple, but it is impossible w/o God’s love within you. The guy asked what he had to do to be saved, but he would have to be saved to be able to do it. The guy wanted a limited interpretation of who our neighbor is with plenty of loopholes so that he could “justify himself”. He wanted Jesus to give an answer that he could then say he fulfilled, and he wanted to limit his responsibility. Instead of arguing with the guy, Jesus told a convicting story that revealed the truth. Jesus’ answer to his question was in a parable which was a story they could understand to explain a truth they could not understand.

The Responses of Three Different Groups of People

In Luke 10:30, the robbers response to the man traveling to Jericho was to attack him and rob him and leave him for dead. Their belief system was “What is yours is mine”. You would expect this of robbers and worldly people, and the audience knew this was a common occurrence. But in v.31-32, our expectations are shockingly mistaken. We would expect religious leaders like priests and Levites to stop and help the man in need, but both see him, cross over to the other side, and pass him by. I thought these guys were paid to care about people, I mean isn’t that their job? We might ask why they passed him by, and there are several possibilities. First, dead people were thought to be ritually unclean and touching them would make the priests unclean and unfit for duty. Also, I’m sure they had all the usual excuses like, “That’s not my job, I’m not a medic” or “I’m way to busy, and I can’t be late” or “I just don’t want to get involved”. Their belief system was “What’s mine is mine”.

Then in v.33-36, we have a dramatic reversal of expectations that no doubt shocked Jesus’

audience to the core. A Samaritan, a hated low down half breed idolator, stopped to help the beaten man. The key statement is “he felt compassion”. He not only helped the guy, but he genuinely cared about him. He also went the extra mile to care for him at great expense, and to pay for his future care. The Samaritan’s belief system was “What’s mine is yours”. Thus we have the three different responses- what’s yours is mine, what’s mine is mine, and what’s mine is yours and I will share it out of love.

### Jesus’ Question That Cannot be Avoided

The lawyer/scribe had provoked this parable with a question, and now Jesus answers with His own question that the scribe cannot avoid answering. Jesus asked, “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who was robbed?” The scribe had to give the obvious answer even though he hated it because it convicted him. Jesus then told him to do the same as the Samaritan, which the scribe probably nashed his teeth at the implications. Jesus’ story not only convicted the lawyer/scribe, but also convicted the legalistic religious community that taught that you are saved by works.

### Our Question Today

Nothing has changed in 2000 years, as the vast majority still believes they can be saved by works. If that is true, then they must perfectly keep the important commandments of loving God and loving people, yet to my knowledge Jesus is the only person who has ever done it. We may think we do, or that some good person we know does, but remember Jesus is talking about loving unlovable people. Have you ever heard of the “Good Al Qaeda person” or the good Nazi? No way, but that may be the 21st century equivalent to the Good Samaritan. I don’t know about you, but I don’t think it is natural to love your hated enemies or the poor guy half dead in the road. To be honest, I probably would pass on by and hopefully I would send paramedics back. If I saw my enemy laying half dead in the road, I don’t think I would feel compassion like the Samaritan did.

The lawyer wanted a list of rules that he could keep, but Jesus gave him God’s own perfectly righteous standard to keep. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus prescribes not rules to keep, but a relationship with Him. If the essence of the Christian life is the sacrificial love that Jesus alone perfectly modeled, then we must have a relationship with Jesus. Keeping the law is not a way

TO eternal life, but if we have an abiding relationship with Christ, then the law of God becomes a way of life. You must first love God and in 1 John 5:1, the Apostle says that “whoever loves God the Father loves Jesus the Son” and then in verse 2, John says that if we love Christ then we can love each other.

When the lawyer asked “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Immediately we should have known that the guy had a major problem. The correct question is, “What shall God do?” God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to offer a vicarious sacrifice for our sins so that by receiving Him, we can have an abiding relationship with him so that then we have the “life” and loving as God loves can become a way of life.

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