

Luke 10:25-37 (DHT)

²⁵Behold, a lawyer rose up to test him, saying: Teacher, of what I am already doing, will I inherit eternal life? ²⁶He said to him: What has been written in the law? How do you read it? ²⁷He answered: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind, and *love* your neighbor as yourself. ²⁸Then he told him: You have answered this correctly. Do this and you will live.

²⁹But wishing to justify himself, he asked Jesus: And who is my neighbor?

³⁰Having taken up *the question*, Jesus said: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers who stripped him, inflicted him with wounds, fled, and left him half-dead. ³¹By chance, a priest was going down on that road and having seen him passed by on the opposite side. ³²And likewise, a Levite came to the spot and having seen him passed by on the opposite side. ³³But a Samaritan on a journey came to him and having seen him felt compassion. ³⁴He approached and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he put him on his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵On the next day, he took out two denarii. He gave them to the innkeeper and said: Take care of him, and whatever more you expend I will repay you on my return. ³⁶Which of these three, to you, seems to have been a neighbor to the one who fell among the robbers?

³⁷And he said: The one who has already shown mercy to him. Then Jesus said to him: Go and do likewise.

Introduction

In the sitcom Seinfeld, the four main characters found themselves unexpectedly in a small city in Massachusetts. While there, they saw an overweight man get carjacked. They stood on the other side of the street, mocking and maligning the man rather than calling for help. To their shock and chagrin, the city had passed “The Good Samaritan Law,” so the four were arrested for “ignoring a fellow human-being in trouble.” As they grappled with their predicament, George asks, “Why would we want to help someone? That’s what nuns and Red Cross workers are for.” The four were declared guilty and sentenced to one year in jail for being “very, very bad” people.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine a little over three weeks ago, the UN estimates over 3 million Ukrainians have relocated to a foreign country and another 6.5 million have relocated to Western Ukraine, already one of the largest refugee crises in history. Eight years ago, I went to Western Ukraine to support a missionary organization serving orphans and gypsies.

There is a city called Przemysl (*puh-sheh-muh-shl*) in southern Poland, a four hour drive from the Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod where I served, and a two hour drive from another Ukrainian city where one of the men I served and have stayed in touch with has taken his family for safety. In the first week of the invasion, the mayor of Przemysl announced that any and all Ukrainians are welcome in his city for *however long it is needed*. Przemysl became a hotspot for Ukrainian refugees. This city with a population of 60,000 has processed approximately 400,000

Ukrainian refugees. For comparison, this would be the equivalent of Dixon processing approximately 135,000 people, Vacaville processing approximately 660,000 people, or Fairfield processing approximately 770,000 people within the last three weeks alone. Inspired by Przemysl’s exemplary model of a *city of Good Samaritans*, the UK has lifted all caps on refugees from Ukraine and extended their freedom to stay in the UK without a visa to three years.

What does it mean to be a Good Samaritan? From pop culture and politics, being a Good Samaritan means helping someone in need. The parable of the Good Samaritan is seen as challenging us to just *be like the Good Samaritan*. But this is *not* the conclusion Jesus makes. Separating the parable from the conversation that prompted it will cause us to misunderstand the parable just like our culture has misunderstood it. If the parable of the Good Samaritan is simply about being a kind person or helping someone in need, then of the 39 parables, this would be the *only one* about something *other than* salvation. “All parables are salvation stories.”¹ We must, then, approach this parable centrally as a salvation story. This is not to say, however, that Christians should abstain from helping those in need. Other Scripture passages clearly speak to this principle.² What I am saying is that *this* parable is not where we should go for that.

Exposition of the Pre-Parable

Behold, a lawyer rose up to test him

In the first century, it was common for students to stand up to ask the rabbi a question as a sign of respect for them. It was also common for rabbis to sit while questions were asked as a sign of respect to the students. If the rabbi got a good question, he would stand to answer the question. We see this when this lawyer stands to ask Jesus a question; however, Luke tells us he stood to ask his question not out of respect but rather to *test* Jesus. This is not a lawyer in the judicial sense. This is a lawyer in the theological sense. This is a theologian.

Teacher, he asks, from what I am already doing, will I inherit eternal life?

If you were to ask this question, Jesus is the right person to ask. But it’s actually a bad question. Luke has already told us this question was asked with an ulterior motive. He’s asking a question he already thinks he knows the answer to; he merely wants his teacher to tell everyone else how *good* he already is.

¹ John MacArthur

² Some examples include: Deut. 15:11; Ps. 41:1; Prov. 14:31; Matt. 25:35; Luke 12:33-34; Gal. 2:10; 2 Cor. 9:7; Heb. 13:16; 1 John 3:17-18

In Greek, this is in a grammatical tense form we do not have in English; there is no straightforward translation. This speaks about something that has both *already been completed* and yet is *also ongoing*. So this lawyer is asking Jesus: “Rabbi, from all the things that I have done and that I continue to do, will I inherit eternal life?” The audacity to ask such a question! What can any of you do to inherit *anything*? If it is an inheritance then it was earned by someone other than you and left to you by them not you! Who do you think you are?

Jesus said to him, “What has been written in the law? How do you read it?”

That Jesus answers the lawyer’s question with a question was a common practice. Jesus recognized the question was bad to begin with because it placed the emphasis of salvation entirely on man rather than on God where it belongs. Jesus questions the question by inquiring how the lawyer views the law.

The lawyer answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

When pressed by Jesus for what it takes to inherit eternal life according to the Law, this lawyer quotes two passages from the OT, from Deut. 6 and Lev. 19. These commands summarize all of the Ten Commandments, all of which force us to look *outside* of ourselves in terms of relative importance.

Then Jesus told him, “You have answered this correctly. Do this and live.”

Elsewhere, Jesus cites these exact same two laws as summative of God’s will for all of humanity. In Mark 12, a scribe asks Jesus about the Law and Jesus gives these same verses and it is the *scribe* who says Jesus is correct. This lawyer had done his homework on Jesus. Jesus’ response, “do this and live,” is a sarcastic quotation from the OT. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Just love God and your neighbor totally without any hesitation. Follow these two commands that encompass all commands and you will have eternal life. Simple and easy, right!? *But wishing to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”*

The lawyer wasn’t testing Jesus to trap him into blasphemy like some of the Pharisees and Scribes had tried to do; no, he was testing Jesus because he wanted to show off his *own* goodness to those who were there. He was trying to declare himself *already* righteous. That Jesus’ response “do this and live” is sarcastic is seen immediately by the lawyer’s response. This lawyer had not asked what he must do (future tense) to inherit eternal life; he asked if he had already done enough to inherit eternal life.

That the lawyer responds with a question about “loving one’s neighbor” is telling about how he viewed his relationship with God—it was already perfect! He *already* loved God with *all* his heart, soul, mind, and strength, no doubt about it! That task is checked off the list! But since I already love my neighbor, according to how *I* define the word neighbor, I’m pretty sure I have this second task checked off the list as well, but please, Jesus, clarify so I can be sure... You can just hear the self-righteousness ooze from this lawyer’s lips.

Having taken up the question, Jesus said...

This is a critical phrase in this passage. While there were undoubtedly other questions, it is *this* question Jesus chose to answer. “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells the famous parable *as an answer to the second question*. It’s at this point in the synagogue when the lawyer would have sat down and Jesus would have stood up, commanding the attention of the room, to answer *that* question: Who counts as a neighbor?

Exposition of the Parable

The parable begins with a generic Jewish man who is stripped naked, beaten, wounded, and bruised, and left to die by some robbers. He is then met by three people: a Priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. The parable forces us to look at the responses of these three individuals. Jesus uses repetitive language to place these three on an equal plane to leave the lawyer no wiggle room for the question Jesus will ask at the parable’s conclusion.

While many have speculated reasons for *why* the priest or the Levite would have not helped this man, those reasons are irrelevant. This is not a true story! It is a fictional story by Jesus to answer the question: Who is my neighbor? The point is not for us to justify why the priest and Levite couldn’t help the naked, beaten man; the point is they did nothing! The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan all went to that spot. The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan had all seen the man. But the priest and the Levite passed by on the opposite side. The Greek word begins with the prefix *anti* and means to be against or opposed. It’s not just that they passed on the other side; they passed by as far away as possible.

But while all three went to that spot, and had seen the man, the Samaritan responded to what he saw differently than the priest and the Levite. Rather than pass by on the opposite side, the Samaritan felt compassion for the man. The *compassion* the Samaritan felt for the naked, beaten man prompted the Samaritan to respond. While the priest and the Levite went against

him, the Samaritan approached him. The Samaritan bound his wounds, thus taking care of his nakedness. The Samaritan poured oil and wine on the man’s wounds to prevent infection, thus giving immediate attention to his injuries. In other words, the Samaritan clothed this man’s nakedness and took care of his wounds in a way that was *totally normal and necessary*. The Samaritan placed the man on his own beast and brought him to the inn, which meant the Samaritan traveled to the inn by foot.

Although he already took care of him; the Samaritan checks the man into the inn and stays with him through the night, continuing to take care of him. The next day, the Samaritan took two first century Roman coins, which were each about a full-day’s wage—think about the amount of money you make in two days. This Samaritan gave it to the innkeeper to take further care of this man, enough to give this man about two weeks of recovery time in this inn. The Samaritan also pledged to return and pay the bill for anything extra this man needed to recover. Bankruptcy wasn’t a thing in the first century. If you took out a loan and were unable to repay it, your only option was becoming a slave to pay your debt. By pledging to repay any and all further expenses, the Samaritan risked his own slavery to save and protect this man from slavery. The Samaritan went out of his way; above and beyond with his time, his energy, and his money for the simple fact that he saw a need and felt *compassion* toward him.

Which of these three, to you, seems to have been a neighbor to the one who fell among the robbers?

This Jewish lawyer would have been absolutely offended at the notion of a Samaritan being anything but disgusting and evil. The Jews hated the Samaritans ever since the days of Jeroboam in the early 900s BC because they intermarried with the Gentiles. The Samaritans were *mug-bloods*; half-breeds. The Samaritans had their own temple at Mount Gerizim and rejected Jerusalem, which only exacerbated Jewish hatred of them. In their animosity the Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple in 128 BC. The Samaritans took revenge by defiling the Jerusalem temple. And they kept going back and forth. Of all people, that Jesus uses a Samaritan as the one who cared for a *Samaritan-hating Jew* was the final nail in the conviction-coffin for this lawyer’s self-justifying arrogance.

Which of these three, to you, seems to have been a neighbor to the one who fell among the robbers? And the lawyer said: The one who has already shown mercy to him.

The lawyer only uses the definite article that would normally come before a noun, such as “*the* lawyer.” But the lawyer simply says “the” as the identity of the true neighbor. This lawyer doesn’t even have it in him to acknowledge the Samaritan-identity of the true neighbor. The second part of the lawyer’s response has some irony to it. The phrase “who has already shown” is the exact same word with the exact same grammar as from that opening question. “Teacher, from what I am already doing...” “The one who is already doing mercy...” The point is what this lawyer tried to use to prove he already inherited eternal life, as it turns out, that behavior is actually what the *Samaritan* in Jesus’ parable had proven to do.

Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

What is Jesus telling him to go do? The typical answer is that Jesus is telling the lawyer to go help people in need. But that’s *not* Jesus’ point in this parable. The whole parable is an answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” This question from the lawyer came in response to the lawyer’s recognition that God’s will is that we wholeheartedly love him and our neighbor. “But who is my neighbor?” Historically, there was actually an intense debate in first century Judaism about whether “enemies” counted as neighbors. Jesus chimed in on this debate.

When Jesus says, “Go and do likewise,” he’s talking about the command to love your neighbor as yourself; Jesus is saying go love your neighbor, who is the very one you hate; the very one whose existence you go out of your way to avoid acknowledging; people we’d rather didn’t exist. Who do you hate? For some Christians in the world right now, the one we hate is Vladimir Putin. For some, perhaps the one we hate is someone with different skin color or a different country of origin than us. Perhaps the one we hate is the homosexual or trans-identifying individual. Perhaps the one we hate is a family member who has wronged us in a significant way. As inspiring as it is, Jesus is not commanding this Jewish lawyer to be like the Samaritan; he’s telling this Jewish lawyer *to love the Samaritan*. You want to inherit eternal life? Love the very one you hate, whose existence you cannot stand; whose death may even bring you joy. You think you wholeheartedly love God and your neighbor? Who do you think you are?

“The standard is to love God unfaithfully with all one’s heart, mind, soul, and strength, and consistently love [every] neighbor as much as the self. As Paul enunciates, the problem is not the law, the problem is that we cannot keep it (Rom. 7:13-20). Here the standard set by Jesus eludes our finest efforts.”³ Why? Because “I have a natural tendency to hate God and my

³ Bailey, 287.

neighbor.”⁴ Jesus does not close out this exchange with “Go and do likewise” as if to suggest this Jewish man actually could; no, Jesus responds this way “to crush this [Jewish lawyer’s] self-righteousness. It’s really a wakeup call that he is damned and doomed” by his arrogant self-justification.⁵ This lawyer’s study of the law should have driven him toward the promised Gospel of God’s Messiah who would remove his heart of stone and replace it with a new heart that delights in the *mercy* of God.

Luke’s Wide Angle View to See the Cross at a Distance

It is the lawyer who correctly summarizes the Samaritan’s actions as the showing of mercy. This word for mercy appears seven times in the Gospel of Luke. Every other time, mercy is spoken of as *God* extending *salvation* to his people through the Messiah, which makes Luke’s use of it here all the more intriguing. I recently watched a movie and noticed that, because the audience has more information, the scene actually had a meaning to the audience that transcended the meaning to the characters in the scene. Similarly, the conversation between Jesus and the lawyer carries with it a meaning that transcends the exchange about who counts as a neighbor, because Luke has clued us, the audience, into a larger storyline this lawyer is unaware of; and this wide-angle lens Luke provides us actually answers the lawyer’s *first* question about inheriting eternal life.

I recently preached a message on the Transfiguration from Luke 9. In that passage, the voice from the cloud declares to Peter, John, and James that Jesus is the Messiah from the line of David. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah have a conversation about his *exodus*—his journey of departure from Jerusalem. In Luke 9:51, Jesus began that journey to Jerusalem. One of the first things we read after the beginning of Jesus’ exodus journey is this parable. Therefore, especially including this parable, *everything after Luke 9:51 should be read as Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem to die on the cross, be raised from the dead, and ascend in the clouds to the right hand of God.*

Jesus is the Good Samaritan. This is evident in how the Samaritan is designated in the parable. It was first a priest “going down on that road,” then a Levite who “came to the spot,” but it was the Samaritan who was “*on a journey.*” On that journey, “the Good Samaritan saves the

⁴ Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 5

⁵ John MacArthur

man from death, he heals him, he pays it all, and he guarantees he’s not a slave.”⁶ Is this not what Jesus did on the cross and by his resurrection?

Ezekiel 34 says it this way, speaking of the false leaders of Israel and the future messiah:

“Woe to the shepherds of Israel...The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought... As a shepherd seeks out his flock...so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from...darkness... I will bind up the injured, I will strengthen the weak... I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David... They shall know I am YHWH when I break the bars of their yoke and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them.”

It is this Davidic messianic servant-shepherd who will do for God’s people precisely what the Samaritan does to the naked, beaten man.

Turn to Isaiah 53. *How* does this Davidic messianic servant-shepherd do these things? “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and *afflicted*. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and *with his wounds we are healed*. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; YHWH has laid on *him* the iniquity of us all” (vss. 4-6). This suffering servant took what belonged to us: the outpouring of God’s wrath against sin.

Turn to Hosea 6. The reason why the flock of God’s people have scattered is due to sin, which verse 7 ascribes to our commonality in Adam. God judged his people for their sins. While the judgment was *because* of their sin, it came from YHWH. But there is always hope in the midst of judgment; God’s glory in salvation is always revealed through judgment. And in Hosea 6:1-2 we get one of the glorious hopes for God’s people who repent from their sin and turn to him, for it tells us *when* this Davidic messianic servant-shepherd would bind the wounds and rescue from death those who call on his name. “Come, let us return to YHWH; for he has torn us *that he may heal us*; he has struck us down, and *he will bind us up*. After two days he will *revive us*; on the third day he *will raise us up*, that we may live before him.” Paul clings to this in Eph. 2:6 when he says that we who are in Christ are *so* united to him that when he was raised from the dead, so were we!

⁶ D.A. Carson

Jesus is the Good Samaritan: Gospel Presentation and Conclusion

It was this Jesus on a journey to Jerusalem, ready and willing to show compassion to all who need it. Isaiah 30:18 tells us “YHWH waits to be gracious to you; he exalts himself to show compassion to you.” Isaiah 55:6-7 commands you to “Seek YHWH while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to YHWH, that he may have compassion on him, for he will abundantly pardon.”

It was this Jesus on a journey to Jerusalem, ready and willing to bind the wounds of the afflicted and pour healing oil and wine to stop the spread of death in us. Isaiah 53 says he would do this by bearing our wounds upon himself.

It was this Jesus on a journey to Jerusalem, ready and willing to pay the debt for our brokenness. Paul writes in Col. 2:13-14 that God “forgave *all our sins* by canceling the record of *debt* that stood against us *with all of its legal demands*, setting it aside by nailing it to the cross.”

Jesus lived the life we fail to live and died in our place the death our sins deserved. On the cross, Jesus paid our debt, rescued us from enslavement to sin, and healed our sinful, broken hearts. After two days, on the third day, God revived Jesus by raising him from the dead, thus proving Jesus to be the long-expected Messianic King, the very one he claimed to be. After being raised from the dead, Jesus ascended into the clouds to sit at the right hand of God the Father. But there he will not forever stay. For just like the Samaritan to the innkeeper, Jesus has promised he is coming back; coming back not as a suffering-servant; not as a crucified-messiah; but as the victorious-king; coming back to gather those who call on his name and believe in his resurrection; coming back to judge the world and all the wicked therein.

Jesus went out of his way; above and beyond to graciously help and protect from a life of indebted slavery not just a complete stranger who needed help; but for *those who hated him and had no other outcome from our situation but to remain in our sin, headed toward death*. Paul says as much in Romans 5 when he says that *God demonstrates his own love for us like this: though we were [enemies of God] Christ died for us* (vss. 8, 10). Jesus is not just the Good Samaritan, he is also the true neighbor who loves even his enemies. Is it any wonder the Samaritan’s actions are summarized as “mercy,” the word only used elsewhere to speak about *God’s salvation through the Messiah*? What glorious news it is to be healed and rescued from the power of sin and death by Jesus our Messiah!

So what must we do to inherit eternal life? The answer is simple: No matter how hard we try, we *cannot do anything* except receive by faith the grace of Jesus who actually did do something to earn it for us. This is why we say we are “justified by faith.” Justification is when God declares righteous the unrighteous because he looks at *everything* about us, and included in that *everything* is our faith in the Righteous One who bore our unrighteousness on the cross. We are justified—we are made righteous not by what we do but by faith! The word of faith I proclaim to you is simple: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For the Scriptures say...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:8-13). Have you done this? Today is the day of salvation; I invite you to wait no longer and put your faith in Jesus the Messiah today, and if you do then he will change your heart to actually love God and your neighbor; making you “wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.”⁷

Let’s pray.

⁷ Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1