

“THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.”

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Scripture Texts: Luke 10:25-37

Introduction.

Years ago I went to lunch with a lawyer who worked for the Supreme Court of Oklahoma. My intention was to ask some probing questions about his spiritual life. But I never even got to first base. By the time the lunch was over I was the one being asked probing questions for which I didn't have immediate answers. Some came to mind later as I was driving home. I can't say for sure but I have a suspicion he did that to keep me from asking him questions.

Lawyers are trained to ask hard questions, sometimes tricky questions and leading questions and questions that can get us tangled up and turned around. That was this lawyers intent.

Luke 10:25-28, a lawyer's first question.

Jesus experienced numerous questionings by skilled lawyers and this one was a specialist in Jewish religious law. His particular question was on the minds of many in Jesus' day. The Gospels record three separate occasions when someone asked Jesus this question.

We are told this lawyer's question was a test to trap Jesus. He asked the most important question of the most important person but with the wrong motive. As we have seen before, Jesus answers his question with a question.

“You ask what you must do to inherit eternal life. You answer me, what does the Law say?”

Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life, who is the Word made flesh could have said, “I, Jesus of Nazareth, am the way you inherit eternal life.” But Jesus pointed him to the Scriptures. Why? A couple of reasons. First, because the question was a trap to get Him to say something that would be misinterpreted as against Jewish Law and grounds to arrest Him. And second, to show the man's hypocrisy as he knows the answer.

The man answer with the Shema, which has been said every morning and every evening in every Jewish synagogue for thousands of years and still is. What a great gift was given to the Jews to have the words of life and to know the truth, yet what a great tragedy that what was in their heads was so far from their hearts. Don't know Jesus as a doctrine, and fail to know Him as your personal Savior and Lord. Don't say you love God if you don't know Jesus.

What if on the Day of Judgment when we all want eternal life, the question is put to us, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it? What use have you made of the book of life?” What answer will we give? Do you want eternal life? Open up the book of life. Do this and you will live.

Luke 10:29-37, a lawyer's second question.

The lawyer asks a second question and once again he shows himself not to be genuine but rather self-righteous. “Desiring to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “*And who is my neighbor?*”

He’s a Jew, he knows Jesus is a Jew and he expects a Jewish answer. After all Jesus gave the perfect Jewish answer to his first question so he expected this answer to have to do with Jews being his neighbor. The Jews were notorious for their hatred and ill-will toward anyone who wasn’t one of them. Jews basically said that only those who deserved to be their neighbor were their neighbor and it was lawful to hate their enemies.

Jesus tells a story using two of the most un-neighborly groups of people. The Jews hated the Samaritans with a bitter hatred. They despised them, looked down on them, cursed them and spit on them.

There’s a better chance of an Ethiopian changing his skin or a leopard changing his spots than a Samaritan helping a Jew. Today this would be an Israelite who fell among thieves and a Palestinian Muslim helped him. Can you think of other examples from history or life?

A southern white colonist fell among thieves and a black freedom fighter helped him. A Nazi German soldier fell among thieves and a Dutchman or a Frenchman helped him. A Goth dressed, multi-pierced, tattooed skateboarder fell among thieves and a middle class business man helped him. A rain soaked homeless bum fell among thieves and someone in a Lexus picked him up and helped him. A Canadian fell among thieves and a Whatcom county resident helped him.

You fill in the blanks for yourself. The question isn’t who is your neighbor, the question is who do you see in need around you and what will you do?

He had compassion.

There is the key phrase. The story isn’t about who is in the ditch, who is lying on the sidewalk, who is helpless or needy, the story is about who had compassion. Two walked by and one stopped to help? Who had compassion?

If you love God then you are a new person with a new heart.

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

A new heart is a heart of compassion, it does things, crazy things, kind things. Love does.

Luke 12:34-35 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.’

Compassion. It’s hands-on, messy, time-consuming, costly, stressful, unpleasant, inconvenient, hard, in a word, Christ-like.

Compassion has a lot of faces. Making a meal, changing a diaper, showing up, visiting the care home, serving at the food bank or senior center, crying with someone in a crisis, stopping to help

someone stranded by the road, paying someone's bill, riding a bike for poverty, taking a turn in a Tractor show booth to help the GEMS girls, holding a sign outside of Planned Parenthood, not complaining when your wife is sick, but actually helping her, teaching a SS class, sending a care package, visiting a jail, writing a real letter, letting some go ahead in line, not holding a grudge, doing a random act of kindness just because.

Who is my neighbor?

Jesus makes this lawyer say words he would never in a million years want to say. He has to say the Samaritan was more merciful than the Jewish priest and the Levite.

There are several shocks and surprises in this story. This is a story meant to mess with the minds of all people who think they are spiritual or religious. Jesus has a way with exposing our hearts.

Jesus puts the value of all human life in the spot light. Who is my neighbor? The whole world, the entire human race, one person at a time. The sick, the oppressed, the imprisoned, the poor, the orphan, the pagan, the hungry and thirsty, the dying, the one in some need that I can help.

When you see another in a need and you have the resources or means or ability to meet that need, do so regardless of their circumstances or position or reason for being in need.

Application and conclusion.

There are two applications for us today, one from each question.

First, the principle question that faces every single human being, men and women, young and old, is ***what must I do to inherit eternal life?***

What must I do to have my sins forgiven? How can I escape the fires of hell? How can I flee from the wrath of God that will be poured out on all transgressions and iniquity and rebellion?

We should not let our souls rest until we have a clear answer to that most pressing question.

The question is not what will I do when I grow up? Or who will I marry? Or how will I provide for my family? Or how can we get some more money? Or how should I deal with this child or that friend or some situation? The question is what will happen to my eternal soul when I die?

What is it that keeps you from surrendering your soul to Christ in complete submission? What are you afraid will happen? What are you afraid to give up?

Are you afraid He will make you do something too hard? Has He not said:

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Do you think you aren't a sinner and you don't need a Savior? Or are you afraid that you are too bad or too sinful or too far gone? Has He not said:

I John 1:9-10 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Are you too ashamed or too guilty, are you afraid of actually saying to Him what you are or what you have done, you want to keep it a secret? Has He not said:

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Do you like your sin too much or just want to do your own thing and don't want the inconvenience of following Jesus? But no man knows the number of his days. What if this night your soul will be required of you and you will have to give an account?

Remember the rich fool in the parable who said:

Luke 12:19-21 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, [and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?]' 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Luke 12:15 And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Remember the rich young man who asked about eternal life but didn't want to change his ways or part with the things he loved. He didn't go away happy, he went away with a deep, profound sadness in his soul.

When earthly cares and concerns and desires are more important than God's invitation and gifts, we will ultimately find ourselves in a far worse condition.

Our souls grow or shrink according to what it finds pleasure in. The more we desire the things of this life, the more our soul will shrivel up and become small and dull and finally die.

May our souls grow and become alive as we truly repent of and turn from our sin and shame and guilt and as we find our faith coming alive in God's mercy through our Savior Jesus Christ. May we find true joy in His salvation and true life through walking with God. This is eternal life, when as children of God we are heirs of His inheritance.

Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and see if love for God will lead you to the best life you could have known. Give up your love for yourself and see what love for God will do.

Second, who is my neighbor, or how can I be a better neighbor? Jesus is making a bold appeal to our consciences.

First, Jesus appeals to our conscience by showing us how rare true compassion is. Even those from whom we would most expect it kept their distance, stayed detached, uninvolved.

Selfishness dominates our lives and infects all our hearts. Self-sacrificing kindness is hard to find these days.

But we can add to selfishness a host of other reasons for not wanting to get involved, fear, too busy with our own lives and affairs. Or the “I gave at the office” mentality, where we do our compassion from a distance, making a contribution and calling that good enough.

Second, Jesus appeals to our conscience by showing to what extent our compassion should go. The Samaritan didn't just feel bad for the poor man. His pity was not only passive or in word only, but in deed, he got involved. Yes, it took time, money and trouble. It was inconvenient, but needs and problems always are. They seem like interruptions and distractions. “Lord, I don't need this right now. Don't you know how busy I am or how little money I have or what more important things I have to deal with?”

How often do we see a person who is kindhearted and generous not just to himself or his family and friends and church? How often do we see someone go way above and beyond, not just helping with immediate needs, but extending long term care and provision? This wasn't just a tug on his heartstrings, a quick fix; this was an objective, intentional desire to really help.

Jesus calls us to love our neighbor who is in need. It's our duty to lend them some assistance. If we are uncompassionate, uncaring, or even condemning of them we fall under Christ's rebuke, “I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink” (Matthew 25:42).

Someday that Priest and that Levite will be asked, “When I was hungry and thirsty and naked and in need why didn't you help me?” And they will say, “But Lord when did we ever see you; if we had seen you we would have stopped and helped?” And Jesus will remind of the time they didn't just pass by but they took a wide berth and averted their eyes.

How will we live out this parable? How will we show this kind of love and so fulfill the second commandment to love our neighbor? Will our actions commend Christianity to others or will our actions condemn Christianity to others?

The question is not who is my neighbor, but to whom am I called to be a neighbor today?

The question is not what kind of person is my neighbor, but what kind of person am I?

The question is not what kind of person is worthy of my love and kindness, but am I the kind of person who gives love and kindness without thinking about whether they are worthy or not?

To be a neighbor requires love, and this kind of love means we have to be willing to be flexible, adaptable, interruptible, and ready to change gears and improvise.

Isn't all our love a small reflection of the neighborly merciful love we have been shown and have received in Christ? Isn't compassion a reflection of the compassion shown us by Christ?

He wanted to know the way *to* eternal life and Jesus points him to the way *of* eternal life. Do the commandments *and* do what this Samaritan did. Do this and you will have life.