

## Luke 10:25-37

### The Good Samaritan

**Prayer** Father, we come to church, we come to Community Group, we come before you in prayer with a lot of questions. Chief among them, we want to know how we avoid death. We want to know that our lives mean something beyond being born, living for ourselves, and for our passions, and priorities, and then dying. We want our lives to mean something, but we also want there to be something beyond the grave. Your word makes it clear that death does not have the final say, but we come to you like this lawyer, wondering what the process is to inherit eternal life. Father, as we read Jesus' answer together today, break our hearts of the hardness that often incases them. Show us your grace for us in loving and caring for us when we were broken and ashamed and lead us to love for our neighbor, whoever they may be.

**Intro** - The Parable of the Good Samaritan may be the most famous of Jesus' parables. Even if you didn't grow up in the church, you have probably heard the phrase "Good Samaritan". Non-profit organizations dedicated to helping others take their name from the Good Samaritan, laws about helping those in need are called Good Samaritan laws. In fact, breaking the Good Samaritan law by not helping a man being is what ended Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer in prison during the finale of Seinfeld.

Our culture knows this story, but I worry that what happens is that we take the teeth out of the Good Samaritan parable. We water it down. We take this story and we make it about being kind to other people so that we can give ourselves an attaboy, a pat on the back for doing a good thing for people. We read this parable and we make ourselves the hero of the somehow.

But we need to shift our perspective. We need to read Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in a way that we are entirely unused to.

And that begins with understanding the context in which Jesus told this parable. This parable is a response to being asked by a lawyer - really an expert in Old Testament law - how a person inherits eternal life. Now, this lawyer was trying to trip up Jesus, to get him to say something heretical or stupid. This guy was a "Well, Actually" Guy. He wanted to prove that he was the smartest person in the room and so he cut to the chase. Luke 10:25 "And behold, (Behold is kind of a big word in the Greek. Luke is basically saying, "Get a load of this guy!") a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>1</sup> This guy may have mixed up motives, but it's a great question! I don't know if there is a more core question to human existence than this question. We desperately want there to be more life than being born, spending our lives working to amass wealth, and dying. Human beings want there to be an answer to this question and we will devote our lives to either finding it, or despairing that, drowning our senses with whatever entertainment we can pump into our lives to cover up that despair. Entire philosophies and religions are built around the concept of an afterlife. Is this all there is? Or is there something more? And how, if there is an afterlife, does one attain it. Is it by special birth in a certain ethnic group? Adherence to a code of conduct? By killing members of another religion? Is it simply, as much of our culture would answer the question, salvation by being a nice person? "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 10:25.

We make this parable a moralistic little tale, like an Aesop fable or an after school special, but before we go further, I want you to see

### 1. **The Eternal Weight of the Good Samaritan**

The conversation that leads to the Parable of the Good Samaritan is about the fate of a man's eternal soul. I cannot stress this enough, Redeemer. When we think about the Good Samaritan, we cannot think about something so low as getting an award or getting a thumbs up on Facebook. We have to think about our eternal souls. What will happen to us when we die?

This lawyer has problems, no doubt. But he's right, and Jesus agrees with him that we are meant to be eternal beings. We are not merely flesh and blood that wither and die. But we are also our souls which have eternal fate. This man's question is about how that soul can avoid an eternal death in Sheol, or the grave, and instead partake in what many Jewish people in his day believed would happen - that God would, at the end of history, resurrect his people so that they could live forever with him. If this question is how the conversation starts, we must take care to not approach the rest of the Parable cavalierly.

So what's the answer to this eternal question that the lawyer asked? Well, Jesus does this thing that was typical of first century rabbis, or Jewish teachers, and he answers Jeopardy style, in the form of a question. <sup>26</sup> **He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"**<sup>2</sup> Basically, Jesus, aware of the test this guy is administering wasn't going to play his game, but his question is revealing. By asking this lawyer, a man who is by definition supposed to be an expert in the Law,

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 10:26.

what is written in the Law, Jesus was saying, the answer to your question is in the Law, it has been revealed by God and if you know the law so well, you'll be able to come up with an answer from the Law. Sometimes we are tempted in modern Christianity to say something like, "The Old Testament is hard. It's confusing. It offends people. Let's just unhitch the Old Testament from the New Testament and just be Christians who only read the words of Jesus." But that's stupid. If you take the word of Jesus seriously, we must take the Old Testament seriously because Jesus takes the Old Testament seriously. We may not be on the hook for ceremonial aspects of the law or laws that governed only Old Testament Israel, but when asked core questions about our eternity and our morality, Jesus turns us back to God's revealed Word to his people which will stand for eternity.

Our Lawyer friend understood this and he responded correctly in verse 27: And 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." And he [Jesus] said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

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The Lawyer's answer comes from Deuteronomy 6:5, a passage of Scripture devout Jews would repeat twice a day<sup>4</sup> and from Leviticus 19:18. Together, these two passages are said, by no less an authority than Jesus, to sum up the law (Mt 22:45-50, Mk 12:28-40). Love God and love your neighbor. That is the path to eternal life.

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 10:27–28.

<sup>4</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 316.

Simply love God with all of your being and love your neighbor as would love yourself. All the eternal weight of how we live with God forever rests on these commands. It's so deceptively simple. Man asks Jesus how to have eternal life, Jesus asks man what the Bible says, Man explains Bible says to love God with all your being and your neighbor as yourself and Jesus says, "Do this, and you will live." What are you waiting for? Your eternal life is in the balance what are you waiting for? Go love God and your neighbor! Redeemer, when we talk about our vision, Christ - Community - Culture, a big part of the culture aspect is simply loving our neighbor. That can be formal ways, like participating in Redeemer International trips to Mexico to build homes and share the gospel, or Taiwan to practice English with students and connect them to a local church. It could be by helping refugees through Refugee language project. Loving your neighbor can be informal, like having over a non-believer to dinner, or mowing the single mom on your block's yard, or what Tim Keller called in Ministries of Mercy, "A general attitude of neighborliness. Loving our neighbor as ourselves should be something that is tucked deep into our ethic, causing us to sacrifice parts of our comfort and convenience for other people, not because we will earn good Karma or avoid shame or rack up facebook likes or to move product or score political points. The Christian ethic should be an other-focused ethic where we love people simply because they are image bearers of God. Tim Keller recently contrasted this ethic in a speech to the British parliament with the self-centered ethic that characterized the Pre-Christian world and is beginning to crash back in as the Christian church loses cultural cache.

Except this isn't simple at all. Our hearts, our bodies, our minds are corrupted by sin, by a desire to put ourselves on God's throne so thoroughly that we cannot possibly love God with our whole being and because we don't love God with our whole being, we do not even begin to love our neighbors as ourselves. All of our efforts fall short. My wife and I recently got to love our Taiwanese neighbors by sharing the gospel with them, but also got in a fight in the San Francisco Airport. You know the kind, the where you're not really yelling or anything because it's a public, but you're pretty annoyed at each other. I don't remember what it was about, but we didn't talk to each other for the walk back to our terminal from the Peet's coffee. Even our best attempts at love are sullied by our sin nature.

## 2. The Good Samaritan Parable is about the insufficiency of human love.

In fact, I believe that this parable at its core is about the insufficiency of human love. Being reminded what the law requires, this lawyer, Luke tells us **"He, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"**<sup>5</sup> In other words, the lawyer, wants to make sure he avoids conviction, and so he asks for details that he thinks will set the bar low enough that he might be able to convince himself that he truly has loved God with all his being and his neighbor as himself. In his day, many people interpreted this old testament command to be about loving people within the Jewish community. Loving the neighbor meant loving people just like me. But really, how narcissitic is that? "I only will serve people who think like me. I only want to be in a community group with people in my age range because I have nothing to learn or nothing to give to people who are different. I will treat people with a different shade

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<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 10:29.

of skin with suspicion. I'm not going to go out of my way to care for someone who hurt my feelings that one time." The lawyer wants his neighbor to be another person just like him, because that person is easier for him to love. And so he asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus responds by telling the lawyer a story about **"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."**<sup>6</sup> The road to Jericho was a notoriously dangerous place. It was a sharp downward trail that offered a lot of hiding places for thieves and people traveling alone were traveling at their own risk and in Jesus' parable, that is exactly the situation this man, likely a Jewish man, much like the lawyer Jesus was telling the parable to, finds himself in.

As this man is lying there, bloody and bruised, a victim of his own poor planning and the sin of the vagrants, Jesus painted a picture of a couple of men passing by. First comes a priest, the representation of the religious life of the Jewish people, responsible for sacrifices and maintenance of the temple system. Second comes a Levite, a person born to the tribe from which the priests are called. They are fellow countrymen with the victim, so surely, we could expect them to stop and provide aid to this man. But neither does. Maybe they have somewhere to be, perhaps they are avoiding defilement that comes by touching a dead body, maybe they are afraid of being mugged themselves. We don't know. Jesus doesn't give a motive. But the point is this, the men that should treat the victim like a neighbor, who should love him, who should bind his wounds, who should obey the commandment of God's law to

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<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 10:30.

love their neighbor as themselves, fail to do so. They are not very neighborly at all. These men are an indictment on the lawyer for his callous attitude, his desire for a loophole. They are an indictment of our own love for neighbor and love for God falling short. If you are callous toward other people, you should be convicted of your callousness; God is calling you to repent and allow your heart to be softened to people in need. If you are proud of how loving you are, God is calling you to repent of your pride and to recognize that you do not love half as well as you think.

We could think of a lot of a jillion reasons we are callous toward others and where our love falls short. Sometimes it's because people look differently than us. We stereotype them or are reticent to extend a helping hand. Sometimes it's that they think differently than us. I get a weird kick out of how some people who talk about love on Facebook are the first ones to cuss out people who have different political views. I tend to be callous toward people who annoy me. If you annoy me, my temptation, God help me, is to fold up my arms and want to take my ball and go home. I think that God is working on my heart there, but I've got a way to go.

Are we going to be able to solve all the world's woes if we do repent? No, we're still finite and the fullness of God's blessing won't be felt this side of eternity. But we are responsible for taking care of our neighbors when need arises. As Paul puts it in Galatians 6:10 puts it, **“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”**<sup>7</sup> We are not going to fix everything, but we are to put our hands to the plow and help where we can. And, Redeemer, the opportunities are many. I don't want you to try to serve

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<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ga 6:10.

people out of shame, though. Or because it will earn you accolades. I don't want you to serve because you are trying to make yourself the hero of the story. I want you be a good neighbor, because Christ has been a good neighbor to us.

### The Glory of Christ's Love

And this is where we finally arrive at the Good Samaritan: v. 33 **But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.**<sup>8</sup> I don't know if we have a social equivalent to Samaritans. Jesus chose somebody who was so completely other to the lawyer as to be jarring. Samaritans were a half breed people. Their ancestors were part Jewish, and part Gentile. That made them, to the Jews, worse than the average Gentile. They had a heretical version of the Jewish faith, with their own temple in Samaria and having rejected all the Jewish Old Testament except the first five books. Historically, the Samaritans had behaved badly, coming from the slightly more idolatrous Northern Kingdom of Israel and then making life hard when the Jews returned from Exile in Babylon and tried to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. The two groups of people got along about as well as Palestinians and Israelis today.

But Jesus deliberately uses the Samaritan, a person so far different from the lawyer, that the lawyer cannot possibly put himself in the place of the Samaritan as the Samaritan risks assault himself, binds the victims wounds, pours on expensive oil and wine, takes the man to an inn and drops an exorbitant amount of money to make sure the guy is cared for. The lawyer cannot make himself the hero of the story. We should not make ourselves the hero of the story. At best, we are the man who is

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<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 10:33.

beaten on the side of the road, bleeding out and in need of someone to identify with us. Our sin and the sinfulness of the world, the brokenness and distortion has left us mutilated. And yet Jesus, someone who in his humanity identifies with us, yet in his deity is totally other from us, paid an exorbitant fee to rescue us, to bind our wounds, to care for us. Jesus is the Good Samaritan, he is the hero.

In verse 36, Jesus asks the man, **“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”** He said, **“The one who showed him mercy.”**<sup>9</sup> It is Jesus who has proved himself our neighbor in a way we have failed to be. He has shown us mercy in a way we have not showed each other mercy and given us eternal life. His love for us surpasses our love for God and each other.

Unfortunately for this lawyer, he was determined to inherit eternal life by himself. When Jesus told him, “You go, and do likewise,” it was damning. This man was not going to be the neighbor he needed to be. If however, we will put our trust in Jesus neighborliness, we will read the words, “You go, and do likewise,” as a commissioning for people who have received grace in undo proportion and are simply being charged, not to save ourselves, but to emulate our Savior and Neighbor, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 10:36–37.

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## Discussion Starters

1. Why is love of neighbor of eternal importance? How many ways do eternity and love intersect?
2. What are ways you are, like the lawyer, tempted to justify yourself (defend yourself, or take to make yourself appear righteous enough for eternal life under your own strength)?
3. Who is your neighbor? Which neighbors have you had the opportunity to love and have taken? Who have you passed over? What opportunities are still in front of you know that you could take advantage of?