

The Parable of the Good Samaritan – Luke 10:25-37

Bob Bonahoom

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Adapted from: "Parables", John MacArthur, 2015 pp 75-95

Open your bibles to Luke chapter 10 and verses 25-37, which includes ***The Parable of The Good Samaritan***.

At the end of May we covered the parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard from Matthew 20. We learned when and why Jesus began using parables, etc. Recall from that teaching, a biblical parable is simply a long simile or metaphor that extends a comparison into a longer story. The parable always has a point of spiritual truth, but it is not necessarily obvious. We also spoke about several confrontations with the Scribes and Pharisees that ultimately led Jesus to shift his teaching style to that of parables. Jesus began revealing truth to his disciples and those with ears to hear while hiding it from the unbelieving rejectors, and the parable was how he did it.

Remember also that parables are not to be mined for layer upon layer of secret significance and minor elements within the story are not to be laden with spiritual meaning. The parable's lessons are simple, focused and without much embellishment. In most cases the parable makes one simple point and teaches one central lesson.

The parable of the good Samaritan is the most misunderstood of all Jesus' parables. Throughout church history it has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and allegorized. That continues even today as the parable is frequently used to justify alleviation of poverty, re-allocation of wealth, taxing the rich in the name of social justice and so on. It has been cited extensively by politicians to justify all forms of Marxism, Socialism and Communism.

This parable is very familiar to all of us and most people assume Jesus' main point was about being kind to strangers and those in trouble. But that is a bit too simplistic, so I thought it would be instructive to examine it a little closer.

Jesus told the parable during his ministry in Galilee around the same time he sent 70 of His disciples on a final mission to take the gospel to the cities in the area.

Jesus had once again angered the area's religious leaders when he condemned the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum in Luke 10:15.

A little later a Jewish legal expert (an expert on Mosaic Law) came forward with a question intended to trap or embarrass Jesus. Let's pick it up in Luke 10 and verses 25-29.

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 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 said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

First, this was not an honest question from someone seeking to learn; it was a test or a challenge to try and trap Jesus or confound him by posing a moral dilemma or paradox that this lawyer believed had no clear answer.

Even though the lawyer's motive was likely to trick Jesus, his first question, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life," was a really good question. That question was in fact the greatest question ever asked or answered! It was on the heart of Nicodemus when he came to Jesus under the cover of darkness in John 3. It was a very same question the Rich Young Ruler raised in Matthew 19. In fact, that same question was posed frequently to Jesus and appears elsewhere several times in the Gospels.

As we already know, most Jews had been taught by their rabbis that their lineage from Abraham, their circumcision, their ceremonies, and their traditions were what qualified them for the eternal kingdom.

Even so, there must have been a nagging sense of uncertainty and guilt in many hearts, so people constantly raised this question with Jesus.

Their own hearts must have accused them, and they likely feared that despite all their ethnic and religious qualifications, despite what it looked like on the surface, they were only superficially keeping the law.

This time, when the question came, Jesus answered the question with a question of his own. He asked the lawyer *"what is written in the law? How does it read to you?"*

Jesus was referring here to the daily reading aloud of Deuteronomy 6:4-5: *"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with your soul, and with all your might."*

In reply this lawyer quoted from that exact passage, and he also added the last half of Leviticus 19:18 as well which says: “...*you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”

It was a perfect summary of the law’s moral demands. It is precisely the same answer Jesus gave in Matthew 22:36-41 when a different lawyer said to him “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?*” At which point Jesus answered with Deuteronomy 6:5 when he said: “*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. This is the great and foremost commandment.*” Then Jesus cited Leviticus 19:18, when he added: “*The second is like it, YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets.*”

After our Luke 10 lawyer answered correctly, Jesus said: “*Do this and you will live.*” So, Jesus basically told him if you want eternal life obey the law. This is reminiscent of Jesus’s answer to the rich young ruler also.

At first glance, Jesus’s answer seems to contradict the heart of the gospel! Galatians 2:16 says “...*we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law...*”

So, what’s going on here? Why did Jesus not preach the gospel instead of the law to this man?

Recall about a month ago that Pastor Jeff taught from Galatians that the law is like a mirror. This seems to be a case of Jesus holding the “mirror of the law” up to this legal expert to demonstrate how the law itself condemns him.

This lawyer who was an expert in the study of God's law, should have been especially broken by the laws message. He should have felt deep conviction. He should have been repentant, contrite and humble. Instead he replied in verse 29 with self-righteous indignation and pride saying: *"And who is my neighbor?"*

Notice how this man skipped right over the part about loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Instead, he wanted to discuss a technical point about the identity of one's neighbor.

Now this is key in the context because in those days the traditional rabbinical and popular interpretation of Leviticus 19:18, *"you shall love your neighbor as yourself"* was that "you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy" which takes all the force out of the command because if you're free to hate your enemy then your relieved from the duty of loving anyone who you decide is your enemy.

Under that interpretation people had no legal or moral obligation to love anyone they didn't really want to.

This lawyer probably wanted to entangle Jesus in a debate about who is a neighbor and who isn't. Perhaps he thought he could make a convincing defense of the traditional notion that one's enemy is not one's neighbor?

What happened next is important and we don't want to miss a key point here. It is that Jesus does not condemn this self-righteous and arrogant man. Instead He shows gentle compassion and models for us the very principle he is about to illustrate in the parable!

Ok, so on to the parable. Our parable is a crushing story that produces immense conviction. This is not just a simple lesson on how to help the less fortunate although it certainly has implications for both charity and good manners.

It is not a lesson for children about how to share their toys and be kind to the new kid in class.

No, this is the story Jesus told to a self-righteous nonbeliever as an evangelistic effort! Jesus wanted to bring the man to understand the depth of his sinfulness and his most urgent need for mercy.

It was Jesus appealing to a deeply religious, but doomed soul. Jesus was urging the man to wake up and see how lost he really was. Let's read it. [Starting at Luke 10 and verse 30.]

Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. "Likewise, a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.' "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

So, Jesus' reply in the form of a parable stands out for its warmhearted, gracious, loving restraint. Remember, the lawyer was deliberately trying to goad Jesus. He was hoping for a sharp answer which he planned to pursue with heated debate. But Proverbs 25:15 says *"a soft tongue breaks the bone"*, and a soft tongue is what Jesus uses with him.

Keep in mind that Jesus is not telling this as if it were a true story. It's a parable, a tale spun to dramatize in an unforgettable way the key point he wanted to make to both this man and to all of us.

Analyzing the parable:

The parable begins with a journey over the very dangerous road between Jerusalem from Jericho. You may recall that we described this same road in much detail when I spoke about Psalm 121 two years ago.

On this road a traveler would encounter a 3,200-foot drop in elevation over 17 miles of winding road through barren mountains and over rough terrain. The road was lined with caves and high places which were hideouts for thieves, and it was very dangerous.

In the parable the predictable happens. A Jewish man who is traveling alone is jumped by a band of these thieves. They didn't just rob him, but they stripped him of his clothes, his money, and everything he had and then they brutally beat him and left him for dead. We would say that he was a dying man in critical condition on a lonely desert road.

By chance, a priest, who represented the best of men in that day came upon him. This priest would be a man who was familiar with Mosaic law and knew that he was to love his neighbor as himself.

But when the priest saw the man, he passed by on the other side of the road. The verb used here, and nowhere else in Scripture, is an active verb signifying that this priest deliberately relocated to the opposite side of the road to avoid the man. He purposely shunned this critically injured man in need.

Jesus turned our legal expert's question upside down. The duties of the second great commandment are not defined by the question of who our neighbor is. The full meaning of that second great commandment includes the principal Jesus made clear in Matthew 5:44 where he said we should love even our enemies because they are also our neighbors and therefore we are obliged to bless them and do good for them and pray for them.

Jesus was not making the point that the priesthood per se was evil. Rather, the priest represents all of us with knowledge of Scripture and familiarity with the duties of the law.

The next person who encounters our injured man was a Levite. Levites were from the tribe of Levi but were not descendants of Aaron and therefore they were not priests.

They served in subordinate roles in the temple and assisted the priests. Their lives were however devoted to religious service, so they were expected to also have a good knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, but we see this man doing the exact same thing as the priest!

The point here is that these two represented the best educated and most highly esteemed of the religious elite in Israel. But neither really knew God, and neither was truly fit for heaven.

They were, like all people, like all of us, sons of disobedience and therefore objects of God's wrath. If these men fell short, then what was the implication for everyone else?

They didn't truly love God because if you love God you keep his commandments. They also didn't love their neighbors because when they faced a real and urgent need and had an opportunity to demonstrate love, they refused.

They are striking illustrations of religious hypocrites observing the ceremonial law and even devoting their lives to the service of the temple but lacking real virtue in their hearts.

But, if we focus only on their hypocrisy, we are missing Jesus's point!

While it seems right to condemn the callous disregard of these two religious men and look upon their deliberate callousness with scorn, in doing so we condemn ourselves as well!

This reminded me of Matthew 7 where Jesus teaches us to take the log out of our own eye before we look for a speck in our brother's eye. He said we will be judged by the same measure that we used to judge others.

So be careful, because the attitude of the priest and the Levite is precisely what we see in our own human nature.

We think, I don't want to get involved. I don't know what this man or those people who beat him up might do to me. He's probably on drugs or alcohol so he doesn't deserve my help. And on it goes.

We must therefore confess that we too are guilty of similar blind indifference. Even if we don't turn away every time, we see someone in need, we fail enough to stand guilty before the law with its demand of utter perfection.

Now along comes the Samaritan, which brings an unexpected twist into the story.

The robbery victim was a Jewish man, which would've been perfectly clear to Jesus' listeners because the setting of the story was Israel on the desert road heading out of Jerusalem. Gentiles rarely traveled there much less Samaritans.

In the minds of Jesus's original audience, a Samaritan would be the least likely source of help for a Jewish traveler in distress on the Jericho Road. Also, Samaritans avoided that road at all costs. A Samaritan would travel there only if it was a dire emergency forcing him to do so.

And more than that, Jews despised Samaritans and vice versa. The mutual hostility between them had divided these two people groups for centuries.

In fact, Jewish travelers going to Galilee took the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho precisely because they wanted to avoid Samaria!

It was an indirect route to Galilee, longer and more dangerous, but it bypassed Samaria. Jewish people considered the Samaritans ethnically and religiously unclean. The Samaritans likewise resented and despised their Jewish cousins.

We could talk for another hour about the history of all this and how this came to be, but we don't have time for that. Suffice it to say that the Jews considered Samaritans worse than gentile pagans because of the way they felt they had polluted Judaism.

In Jesus's time the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans was especially fierce. In John 8:48 some exasperated Jewish leaders lost a public debate with Jesus. They then tried desperately to discredit him by insulting him in the worst way they could imagine saying: *"Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"*

So, here in our parable, we have a Samaritan man who is the blood enemy of the injured traveler. If the priest and the Levite turned their back on him what will this most despised Samaritan do?

Jesus' listeners probably imagined that he would kill him and rob his corpse!

But the text says in verse 33: *"and when he saw him, he felt compassion"*. What was Jesus trying to say? So here comes the main point which centers on how this Samaritan man loves.

He bore the injured man's burden as if it were his own. He went to him, which was the opposite of avoiding him like the priest and the Levite did.

He bandaged his wounds pouring on both oil and wine. This wasn't just dabbing it on with a Q-tip! He poured both oil and wine on the man's wounds. Remember that everything of value had been taken from the injured man so whatever the Samaritan used for dressings came out of his own bag or from his own clothes.

The wine was antiseptic, and the oil was a balm. This would both sanitize and seal the wounds in a way that would help prevent infection.

The oil would moisturize, soothe and soften the skin. Where did the oil wine come from? Travelers on a long journey would carry oil for cooking and wine for drinking because water along the way wasn't safe. These were most precious items.

In fact, you might say they were of almost infinite survival value on a dangerous desert road, yet the Samaritan poured them on the injured man. Jesus was purposely stressing the lavishness of the Samaritans generosity.

Then Jesus says he set him on his own animal, probably a donkey or mule. So, the Samaritan walks with the injured man riding. Jesus wants us to know this is not minimal care. The Samaritan is making an extraordinary sacrifice for someone he didn't even know.

Next he brought him to an inn and took care of him. He didn't just leave him there but instead stayed with the wounded traveler. He acquired a room, got the man settled, and then stayed with them to help nurse him back to health.

He probably continued to treat his wounds providing food, sleep, comfort, water, and whatever care the injured man needed. He stayed with him through the night because verse 35 says on the next day when he departed he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said to him: "take care of him and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you."

Recall from our last parable, that two denarii were about two full days wages for a Roman Soldier. This was a lot of money!

From what is known about the lodging rates in that time, this was enough money for two months room and board at a wayside inn.

This was remarkable charity considering the men were strangers to one another and would have been deemed to be bitter enemies. Yet the Samaritan gave up his own clothes, his supplies, his time and a significant sum of cash with a promise to pay even more if necessary.

There was never a question or hesitation. In other words, the Samaritan never stopped to ask what the lawyer had asked: “And who is my neighbor?”

So here it comes... The far more important question is: Whose neighbor, am I? And the answer is: Anyone in need. So, if we ask ourselves, have we ever set aside everything to help a total stranger in a desperate situation? And more to the point, have we ever done that for someone who was our enemy?

Well, there is in fact someone each of us has done all these things for: Ourselves. That is precisely how we look after our own needs, right?

Give me whatever I need, call the best doctor, get me to the best medical facility, arrange the best care I can get, take care of me as long as I need it, pamper me, don't skip on the amenities.

Now we might get close to this level of true self-sacrifice with a loved one or very close friend. But who would do this for a stranger and an enemy? There is probably no doubt that we've done something like this at some point in our lives. But do we truly love strangers like this all the time? Of course not.

So, here is the one key message of the parable. Jesus is describing a rare love that has no limits and He wants us to see what an impossibly high standard the law sets for us in this regard.

It is a rebuke not just to the lawyer, but to all of us. If we always truly loved our neighbors the way we love and care for ourselves, the Samaritan's generosity wouldn't seem remarkable!

The point of the parable teaches the law demands that you love like this all the time.

Deuteronomy 27:26: *“Cursed is the he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”*

James 2:10 *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all.”*

So, when Jesus told the lawyer to go and do likewise it should have moved the him to plead for grace and forgiveness.

The law demands absolute and utter perfection and no one who has ever sinned can be fit for eternal life on the law's terms.

That's what the lawyer should have realized and so should we. The full truth is that even Christians into whose hearts the love of God has been poured out, do not consistently love like the law demands.

The deeper lesson here is that the way the good Samaritan cared for the traveler is exactly the way God loves sinners.

In fact, God's love is infinitely more profound and more amazing than the Samaritan.

God gave his own beloved son to die for sinners who deserve nothing more than eternal damnation. What Christ did to redeem his people far exceeds the lavish act of benevolence pictured in the parable.

Now if the lawyer had only confessed his guilt and admitted his inability to do what the law demands, and pleaded for mercy, Jesus would have been ready to offer him an eternity of mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

But apparently, he didn't because that is the end of the story. The anonymous lawyer simply disappears from the narrative and we never hear about him again.

Perhaps, like Nicodemus. he came to faith later, but we will not know that this side of heaven.

Or perhaps, like the typical proud, self-sufficient religious person, he made a resolution to double down on doing good works in order to prove himself worthy of divine favor and eternal life?

Such people are oblivious to or else refuse to believe what the righteousness of God really demands of them.

They seek to establish their own righteousness without submitting to the righteousness God has revealed in Christ.

They read the parable of the good Samaritan as if it were nothing more than a mandate for humanitarianism.

It is certainly fine to be motivated and sanctified by this parable. To care for and perfect our love for our neighbors.

But if that is our only response to the parable, it may be the worst response we could have to the lesson Jesus was teaching.

That's because this parable is meant to move us to confess our sinful weakness as revealed in our lack of compassionate sacrificial love. And then to see God's grace and mercy when we turn with repentant faith to the savior of our souls, Jesus.

And some might even say, Jesus is our Good Samaritan! But if that's too much allegory for you, I don't think you will disagree me that no matter how you look at it, this parable is all about the good news of the gospel to save sinners!