

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

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Scripture

On his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus taught his disciples that love for God is demonstrated by love for others.

Let's read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37:

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "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. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ 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." ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

Introduction

In research done by Darley and Batson at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1973, a group of theology students was told that they were to go across campus to deliver a sermon on the topic of the Good Samaritan. As part of the research, some of these students were told that they were late and needed to hurry up. Along their route across campus, Darley and Batson had hired an actor to play the role of a victim who was coughing and suffering.

Ninety percent of the “late” students ignored the needs of the suffering person in their haste to get across campus. As the study reports, “Indeed, on several occasions, a seminary student going to give his talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan literally stepped over the victim as he hurried away!”¹

Jesus taught that our love for God is demonstrated by our love for others. He used the parable of the Good Samaritan to teach this truth.

Lesson

The analysis of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 teaches us that our love for God is demonstrated by our love for others – especially our enemies.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Occasion for the Parable (10:25-29)
2. The Overview of the Parable (10:30-35)
3. The Observation from the Parable (10:36-37)

I. The Occasion for the Parable (10:25-29)

First, observe the occasion for the parable.

¹ Marshall Goldsmith, “Goal 1, Mission 0,” *Fast Company* (August 2004).

Most people know the parable of the Good Samaritan, but they do not always recall the occasion for the parable. Jesus rejoiced that his Father had revealed his truth regarding the plan of salvation to people with childlike faith instead of to the wise and understanding. That prompted a question.

A. *The First Question (10:25-26)*

First, notice the first question.

Luke said that **a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** (10:25).

It is helpful to note that **a lawyer** in Israel in Jesus' day was a theologian. This man knew the Scriptures and sought to apply them to daily life.

Now, he asked the question that is of supreme importance, **"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** There is no question more important in this life, is there? All people have a sense of eternity, and want to know how to get there.

However, the lawyer was not asking this question with sincerity. Luke noted that he was putting Jesus to the test. How foolish to put Jesus to the test!

But the question itself was contradictory. The lawyer asked, **"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** An inheritance is by definition a gift. It is something that is received, usually because of a relationship with the donor. The lawyer misunderstood the nature of **eternal life**. It is not something that is earned or deserved; it is a gift that is received.

In typical fashion, Jesus responded to the lawyer with a question of his own. **He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"** (10:26).

B. The Answer (10:27-28)

Second, notice the answer.

The lawyer **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”** (10:27).

That was the correct answer because it is the answer that is written in the Law. Actually, the lawyer joined two Scriptures together in his answer. He joined Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 in his answer to Jesus.

So Jesus commended the lawyer and **said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live”** (10:28).

Loving God and neighbor perfectly is all that is required for inheriting eternal life. But, obeying these two simple summaries of the Ten Commandments is easier said than done. Who is able to do it? No one, except the sinless Son of God. As the Scripture says, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20; cf. Galatians 3:10). In other words, no one can ever be saved by obeying the law – not because there is anything wrong with the law, but because there is something wrong with us.

Jesus was showing the lawyer that he could not fully obey the law and that he desperately needed a Savior.

C. The Second Question (10:29)

And third, notice the second question.

The lawyer should have realized the impossibility of perfect obedience. He should have said something like this, “Jesus, it is impossible for me to obey the Law perfectly. I cannot love God the way he commands me to love him, and I do not love anyone nearly as much as I love myself. Tell me how a sinner like me can receive eternal life.”

If the lawyer had answered Jesus like that, Jesus would have explained the way of salvation to the lawyer. He would have told the lawyer that salvation is found in no other name under heaven given to men except in Jesus Christ. He would have told him that Jesus is the only one who has ever fully obeyed the entire law of God and that his obedience can be credited to men and women who respond in humble faith.

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (10:29).

The lawyer was trying to save face. He had tried to stump Jesus, and was made to look foolish. Even a young Jewish child knew that the Law was summarized in love for God (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) and love for neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). He was saying, in effect, “Yes, yes, of course, we all need to love our neighbors, but exactly how do you define ‘neighbor’?” The question assumed that some people fell into the category of “non-neighbor.” C. H. Talbert summarized the lawyer’s question, “How can I spot others who belong to God’s people so that I can love them?”²

This is what always happens when we do not submit to God’s plan of salvation. We either think that we are good enough to obey God’s law perfectly, or, if we at least recognize our inability to do so, reduce God’s law to something we might be able to keep. We make God’s law manageable. The lawyer tried to make God’s law more manageable.

II. The Overview of the Parable (10:30-35)

Second, look at the overview of the parable.

Rather than offering a mere definition of “neighbor,” Jesus answered the lawyer’s question by telling a parable.

² C. H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1982), 122.

A. *The Trip (10:30a)*

First, notice the trip.

Jesus began the parable with a man going on a trip. He said, **“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. . .”** (10:30a).

Jerusalem to Jericho was about 15 miles and about 3,500 feet lower in elevation. The road was steep and dangerous with many caves and rock formations that were used as hideouts for robbers. A journey on this road was so dangerous that ancient travelers called it “the bloody way.”³

B. *The Trouble (10:30b)*

Second, notice the trouble.

Jesus continued his parable and said, **“. . . and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead”** (10:30b).

C. *The Test (10:31-35)*

And third, notice the test.

Three men passed by the wounded man, and each one was tested regarding his compassion for helping the wounded man in desperate need of help.

1. *The Two Who Failed the Test (10:31-32)*

First, notice the two who failed the test.

Jesus said in verses 31-32, **“Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the**

³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Luke* (1858; reprint Cambridge: James Clarke, 1976), 1:380.

place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”

Both men simply passed by without helping a wounded man in desperate need of help. Most likely they were coming from Jerusalem where they had been involved in their religious duties. Some have said that they could not help because they would defile themselves and they would not be allowed to carry out their duties. But, if it is true that they were *coming from* Jerusalem rather than *going to* Jerusalem, then their lack of compassion was even more tragic. They were going home and it would not have been a problem to be unclean for a few days. But Jesus did not tell us why they did not stop to help.

The last thing LaShanda Calloway saw before she died was people literally stepping over her to continue shopping as if nothing had happened. Calloway had stopped to shop at a convenience store in Wichita, Kansas, when she was stabbed in an altercation. As she lay dying, a surveillance camera recorded no less than five people stepping over her to continue down the store's aisles. Only one person stopped briefly – to take a picture of Calloway with a cell phone camera.

“It was tragic to watch,” police spokesman Gordon Bassham said. “The fact that people were more interested in taking a picture with a cell phone and shopping for snacks than helping this innocent young woman is, frankly, revolting.”⁴

What kind of neighbor are you? Are you stopping to help needy people, or are you making all kinds of excuses for passing them by?

2. The One Who Passed the Test (10:33-35)

And second, notice the one who passed the test.

The lawyer was not at all prepared for the next person in Jesus' parable. He might have anticipated that the hero would

⁴ Source: Associated Press, “Police: Shoppers Stepped Over Victim,” *Houston Chronicle* (7-4-2007).

be a pious layman. Instead Jesus said, **“But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 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. 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.’”**

Samaritans and Jews hated each other. The Samaritans were racially mixed. In centuries past some Jews had married Assyrians. Therefore they became ostracized from the “pure” Jews. In Jesus’ day there was a severe animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews.

Notice then that the last person expected to help the Jew was a Samaritan. But who does in fact help the wounded Jew? It is the Samaritan. He took care of the wounded man, personally tending to his wounds. He then took him to an inn and paid for his stay there. Presumably he could not stay longer and so he promised the innkeeper to charge to his account all costs associated with the man’s recovery.

The Samaritan demonstrated his compassion by practical deeds of mercy. A good neighbor is willing to stop and help, even if it is inconvenient. As Bishop J. C. Ryle said, “The kindness of a Christian towards others. . . should be a practical love, a love which entails on him self-sacrifice and self-denial, both in money, and time, and trouble. His charity should be seen not merely in his talking, but in his acting – not merely in his profession, but in his practice.”⁵

III. The Observation from the Parable (10:36-37)

And third, notice the observation from the parable.

⁵ Ryle, *Luke*, 1:378.

Jesus ended the parable of the Good Samaritan with practical application. He asked the lawyer, **“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”** (10:36).

Notice how the lawyer could not bring himself to say “Samaritan.” He simply said, **“The one who showed him mercy”** And Jesus said to him, **“You go, and do likewise”** (10:37).

Really, the question is not, “Who is my neighbor?” but rather, “Whose neighbor am I?”

Geography, ethnicity, or any such qualifier, does not define a neighbor. Rather, according to Jesus, a neighbor is something we are. As one commentator observes, “One cannot define one’s neighbor; one can only be a neighbor.”⁶ Or again, “Neighbor is not a concept to be debated or defined, but a flesh-and-blood person in the ditch waiting to be served. You can’t define your neighbor in advance; you can only be a neighbor when the moment of mercy arrives.”⁷ And the way in which we love others – particularly those in need – is a practical demonstration of our love for God.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, we should demonstrate our love for God by loving others – especially our enemies.

Jesus really wanted the lawyer – and us – to see that we are not able to keep this law. We are not capable of loving our neighbor, and especially if we are to love our enemies, as we love ourselves.

⁶ Heinrich Greeven, quoted in Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 99.

⁷ William M. Cwirla, “What Must I Do? A Question of the Law,” *Modern Reformation* (Nov./Dec. 2002): 6.

But Jesus is like the Good Samaritan. He has come and rescued us in our wounded, sinful state. He has demonstrated supreme love in caring for us when we desperately needed help. As David Gooding says, "We were not his neighbors nor he ours. But he chose by incarnation to come where we were; and in spite of the fact that human beings hounded him to a cross, he rescued us at his own expense. And has paid in advance the cost of completing our redemption and of perfecting us for unimaginable glory."⁸

Now, Jesus says to us, "You go, and do likewise." If we have received mercy from Christ, we are to go and demonstrate mercy to others as a demonstration of our love for God. Let us attend to the needs that God brings across our paths. Let us be merciful to others, even as we have received mercy from Christ. Amen.

⁸ David Gooding, *According to Luke: A New Exposition of the Third Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 205.

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develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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