

## The Real Good Samaritan

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Luke 10:25-37

D.A. Carson, New Testament scholar and co-founder of the Gospel Coalition has said, mastering God's Word is one thing; being mastered by it is something entirely different.

This morning we have a very familiar passage of scripture before us. I would dare to say that if I took a quick survey almost everyone in this room knows about the parable of the Good Samaritan. I would also dare to say that most of you think you know the punchline to this sermon already. And maybe you do since this is one of the most culturally referenced parts of Scripture. And yet, this is God's Word. We may be masters of it, but even today, as familiar as this passage is, we still need to be mastered by it.

### Prayer

My goal this morning is to look at this passage on two different layers. As I just mentioned, the first layer will be very familiar to most of us. Still, in that familiarity, I trust God will speak to us and use his word as a sharp, double edged sword. The first layer we will consider is the point and purpose of the parable in its immediate context. Following that, I would also like to look at this parable in the sweep of middle section of the book of Luke. From 9:51 to 19:44, Jesus is on this relentless journey to Jerusalem, teaching both disciples, bystanders and opponents both by lesson and by example, what going to Jerusalem really meant and why it was necessary for us all.

Before we dive in, I think it will be helpful for us all to remember a couple of things about parables. Parables, of course, are stories. They are illustrations Jesus and other teachers of that day used to hammer home a point that may not have been obvious to the immediate audience. Thus in Matthew many of Jesus' parables start with the phrase "The kingdom of heaven is like..."

One guiding principle we must keep in mind is that since parables are illustrations, they have one main point which takes us outside of the parable and into a spiritual reality. Thus, the parable of the lost sheep is not about diligent shepherding, but rather about the unstoppable love, grace and mercy of God. Additionally, since parables have one main point, they are not meant to say or communicate everything that Bible has to say on a topic.

Another reality about parables is that most were given with the intent that the audience would find themselves within the parable. I realize this is risky because by human nature we will want to place ourselves as either the hero or the villain. But, if we have ears to hear, if we really listen as the Spirit speaks God's word to us, I am confident we can see who we are in this parable.

The final item to consider is the combination of these prior elements. These aren't just stories like Age of Ultron or Cinderella or even Pilgrim's Progress. Jesus used parables both as challenging calls and stinging rebukes. He opened vistas of God's magnificent grace so that we might believe and he presented spiritual realities so that we would see the exclusivity and preeminence of his own life, death and resurrection. You see parables have one main point and we find ourselves in them so that the Spirit can move us forward in our faith.

With all of that being said, what is the stage that this parable is playing on? Look with me at Luke 10. Verse 25 sets it up for us nicely. An expert in the Jewish law is seeking to test Jesus' view on

salvation. Of course, much could be said about the scribes and Pharisees and other Jewish authorities, but what has always intrigued me is the phrasing of the question. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Do? Inherit? These words don't seem to go together, do they? An inheritance, almost by definition, is something done to you. So this question is in essence asking "what can I do to be born into Bill Gates family?"

But it also betrays where the lawyer's heart really is. Intrinsicly we go here by default, don't we? What can I do? What can I do to fix my marriage? What can I do strengthen my kids? What can I do to improve my walk with God? What can I do to prepare for the next stage of life? High School, College, First Job, marriage, Kids, empty nest, grand children, retirement, nursing home, death. And so many more. What can I do? Many of us in this room are asking this very question. It seems to be the fundatmental human question.

Notice though, how Jesus responds. Those of us who have a theological defense mechanism might have arched our backs and cut loose on the lawyer. But not Jesus. Jesus, the master teacher and superb discussion guider responds with a question of his own. Its a question right up the alley of this Jewish legal scholar. In fact, some would say its was a high arching softball pitch intended for an easy answer. So Mr legal scholar, how would the Law answer your question?

Jesus' approach here is helpful for a couple of reasons. First, it reminds us that God is never out to trick us or trap us. Even though this was the lawyer's goal, Jesus' actually wanted him to learn something, to grow in his faith, to put his trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. And, he's asking the same thing of us. He knows we all have this "I can do it myself" attitude. So he asks us, "What does the Bible say?"

But there's another, less obvious thing as well. Jesus is underscoring the reality that the Jews could know how to be saved from just their Old Testament scriptures. Think back to last week, how Steve showed us so clearly that Naaman's healing and even life circumstances point us to Christ. Remember, the Old Testament is all this guy had. Its all Nicodemus had. Its all Peter and Paul and John and James had. We are blessed with the New Testament, but the point here is that the Old Testament has always pointed to Jesus.

The lawyer responds with a classic "sabbath school" answer. He quotes two Old Testament verses Dt 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18. To pharaphrase his answer he says love God supremely and love people sacrificially. Bam. Out of the park. Home run.

Now, if I could step into the story at this point I would. The lawyer had just dialoged with Jesus and even if he did not regard him as the Messiah, most people saw him as a teacher worthy of respect. Even Nicodemus, "Israel's teacher", approached Jesus with deference. To engage in a conversation with Jesus and receive such a positive reponse was incredible. So if I could, I would step in say to the lawyer "stop talking", "just leave it alone", "don't say another word".

Fortunatey for this lawyer and fortunately for the rest of us, I was not there and God allowed the lawyer to speak out of the overflow of his heart. You see he did what we so often do. He had recited a creed, but this creed had never become a confession. He knew that God's word said in his head, but what it meant never really made it down into his heart. Think about it. Even without Luke's commentary, the question "And who is my neighbor?" betrays the real god of this man's heart.

How often do we fall into the same pit? How much to I have to give? How often to I have to go?

How long do I have to serve? We seem to have this insatiable need to put limits and caps on God's call in our lives. Why? Because, as Tim Keller would say, "We need to protect what is most important to us." You see, where we draw the lines, where we set up the limits, that demonstrates where our true allegiance lies.

Now, before we move into the parable itself, let me hit the pause button for just a few seconds. This is the moment where we all need to be careful. At the risk of sounding over dramatic, I believe we are on dangerous ground. We are treading on the ground of familiarity. In fact for this parable it could actually be called the ground of over familiarity. I am not going to ask you to forget what you know and I won't ask you to pretend like 2 millenia of cultural baggage doesn't affect how we read this parable. But, I will ask and have been praying that you read and listen with fresh, attentive minds and hearts. By doing this, I am trusting that God may bless us and allow his word to master us.

One thing we need to capture is how this parable probably unfolded to the original audience. You see we know (or think we know) the punch line. In fact, we, not scripture have titled the Samaritan "good", as if the parable is about him. By contrast, most of us view the priest and levite as "bad". I would dare say, those first two guys were normal and doing what was culturally expected. And the Samaritan? He would have been viewed as the least likely to help and certainly the least likely to be the hero of this story.

Now consider with me what Jesus is saying in this parable as it plays out in verses 30-36. An unknown man is robbed and left for dead. Two religious men pass by on the other side of the road, doing their duty to the Law, but not to the man. A third traveler, one who would be least likely to help and probably would not have been helped by the man who was robbed if the situation was reversed not only helps but goes above and beyond the immediate need. In this little story are at least three things we are meant to see.

First, loving God supremely and loving people sacrificially requires more than religious obedience. Remember the conversation that triggered this parable. Jesus and the lawyer agreed that to have eternal life one must love God supremely and love people sacrificially. But the lawyer wanted to know the limits on this mandate. In essence he wanted to make it a religious system. The parable does the exact opposite; blasting open even the preconceived limits the lawyer already had. This is demonstrated in the first two travelers. As I said, they were doing their religious duty. They were obeying the Law. They were keeping themselves pure for service to God. And yet, Jesus' implication is that they didn't do what was most honoring to God nor what was most loving to the man. Would there have been a sacrifice in crossing the road? Absolutely. Seven days to become ritually clean again. But what is that compared to saving someone's life?

And we can do this too, can't we? Choosing something good over something better. Helping ourselves rather than helping others. Using our religious structures and traditions to limit the scope and call of Holy Spirit in our lives. Here is one simple example: I have been meeting for years with a couple other guys for breakfast once a week. Most weeks we have some pre arranged material to kick start our conversation. But I also desire to pray for our time before we meet. Sometimes, however, when I get to the prayer time I realize I am unprepared for material. At the point I typically abandon the prayer for the prep, even though I know that it is God, through prayer, that really makes our time effective.

A second thing to see in this parable is what we most often connect with, that loving God supremely and loving people sacrificially cannot be limited by our social constructs. The Jewish /

Samaritan divide was what was in view here, but in reality Jesus has any such barrier in view. Male / female, rich / poor, strong / weak, white / black, straight / gay, American / foreign, Christian / secular. And on and on.

To be candid, the more I've reflected on this, the more God has pressed me. If the extent of my love for God is measured by the scope of my love for people who are different from me then perhaps my love for him isn't as deep or broad or wide or deep as I thought. Thankfully, God's love for me is not contingent on my love for him, but yet the upward call of Christ keeps pressing and pulling and urging and calling us deeper in. And, just to add some fuel to this fire, none of this exempts from serving and caring and loving those who are closest to us.

The third thing that Jesus is pointing out to the lawyer and to us about loving God supremely and loving people sacrificially is in regard to the expanse and extent of this love. Notice the Samaritan doesn't just stop with checking on the traveler or cleaning up his wounds. He also took him to a place where he could recover and he provided for the expense of not only his stay but also his care. And, he promised to pay for any extra costs that might be incurred. To steal a line from a older strong, "His love was extravagant"

So there it is. To love God supremely and to love others sacrificially requires us to put our religiosity away, that we go beyond our social constructs, and that we allow the boundless love that we have received from God through Jesus to flow freely to those around us.

As awesome and as challenging as it is to see the depth of Christ's call in this parable, there is another layer of the parable of the Good Samaritan that we need to consider. You see, just like the parable itself doesn't occur in a vacuum and is in fact an answer to a question, the entire encounter between Jesus and the lawyer doesn't occur in a vacuum either. Jesus is on a somewhat circuitous journey that starts in Luke 9:51 where Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. This journey culminates with the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem followed by Jesus' entry into the temple in Luke 19:44. Along the way Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost, to redeem a people for God, to fulfill all of the Old Testament promises continued to gather steam. Each stop along the way was like a tributary flowing into the river of his mission and purpose.

With this perspective in view, let's consider again the encounter between Jesus and the lawyer. The lawyer's own answer to his original question was that eternal life is bound up with loving God supremely and loving people sacrificially. As true as this is, how many of us could have claimed to do this before we were Christians? Personally, God was there to serve me and people were simply in the way. And so, here we have the same dilemma we have throughout the Bible: we are stuck in a deep hole with only a shovel to get us out.

So, is Jesus' response to the lawyer meant to cause us to despair? Is there no way I can love God supremely and love people sacrificially? Since we can't do this perfectly, since no one can do this completely, are we to give up and simply languish in our sin? Or, is this actually meant to give us hope? We are correct to realize we cannot live out the affirmation of the lawyer, but we dare not stop there. We need find the one man who can.

In this sense, when the lawyer asks, who is my neighbor, we need to read the question backward. Not just who is my neighbor to love sacrificially, but who is my neighbor who loved me with the ultimate sacrifice? If we see the parable at this 2nd level then the characters and the parable itself take on an added dimension.

First, who is the victim? In the immediate context we saw the victim was anyone we are called to love sacrificially irregardless of whatever differences we may have with them. But now we can see that at a spiritual level, at the level of Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem, we are the victim. We are the one who was bereft of resources. We are the one who was been left for dead. We are the one people avoided in the name of religion. We are the one who was naked and alone. We are the one who was without hope.

What about the first two travelers? We could play some games and say one is legalism and one license or one is religion and one is worldly wisdom. While those would be cute, the real point is that there is nothing, no system, no individual, no power, no possession that is able or even willing to save us. I think this is important to note and remember. The first two travelers didn't try to save the beaten, bloody victim and fail. They went to the other side of the road so as to even avoid the attempt. The same is true with anything you can dream up that might rescue us from our desperate condition. Nothing can save us and nothing is even willing to try.

That leaves us with the third traveler. He is the one who binds our wounds. He is the one who treats us as a friend, even though we would likely consider him our enemy. He is the one who took us out of the domain of our trouble. He the one who clothed us with clothes we couldn't afford. He is the one who provided a safe place for us. And, he is the one who promised that if any expense is incurred for our care, he would pay for it.

Does this sound familiar to anyone? I would hope so. It is Jesus!

Let me botton line this for you. As Andrew made clear a couple of weeks ago, we are all on this spectrum of a spiritual journey. Because of that there are different aspects of this parable that may press upon you differently depending on where you are and what God is moving you toward.

For those who are here that have never trusted in Christ for your salvation, who when you hear all that Jesus has accomplished for his children and say "I wish that were true of me", let me say this: It can be. Today is the day of salvation. Don't wait another day or hour or even minute. Stop your striving, stop your performing, stop your attempts at self salvation and rest in Christ. Trust that God is willing and able to save and rescue and redeem and that he has done so through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Now, for those of us who perhaps are stuck in neutral in our Christian life, who hear Jesus describe what it looks like to really love God supremely and love others sacrificially and sigh and say: that's not me, what do we take from this passage? First is this: know that Jesus is the real Good Samaritan. Since Jesus loved God supremely and others sacrificially, we as his brothers and sisters inherit that obedience. By this we are freed and empowered to begin loving God supremely and loving others sacrificially. Remember, as Matt Chandler is fond of saying, God's not looking for perfection, but progress. And second, beware of putting limits on God's claim on your life. We all do this, to some degree, but Jesus, via this parable, is saying since I withheld nothing to save you, you should withhold nothing to serve those I bring across your path.

And for those who see the mandate of this parable and are seeking by the power of the Spirit to live it out, I would say praise God! You are where God wants you to be. Keep up the good work that God was prepared in advance for you to do. But you also need to remeber, along with all of us, that there is no arrival. We must always be growing and we need to continue to grow. Grow in faith, grow in dependance, grow in praise, grow in knowledge of God, grow in reliance on the Spirit, grow in communion with God.

Finally for all of us who consider ourselves followers of Jesus. We need to praise God for what he has done, what he continues to do and what he will ultimately do. We are caught up in the entire sweep of redemptive history from the promise in Gen 3 to the triumphant wedding feast in Rev 19 and this reality alone should cause us to simultaneously weep and shout and stand dumb founded. And, one day we will realize that God has actually given us way more than we could possibly ask or imagine. May that realization begin today.

To God Alone Be The Glory