

The Real Good Samaritan - Reprise

Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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 he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 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. 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 place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 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.' 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." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

I have a pre-test of sorts for you this morning before we dive in. The first of my two questions is this: who is the hero in the passage we just read? Is it the lawyer? The priest or Levite? The traveler? Or, the Samaritan? The next question is this: where do you see yourself in this story? As you read it, which character do you identify with the most?

I ask these questions because they are the questions I try to ask myself as I read scripture. We need to be aware of the lenses we bring to the Bible. And, as always, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us read the Word as God would have us read it.

As some of you may remember, I preached on this passage two years ago this weekend. So, I will not be spending as much time as I did on the context or the general understanding of this parable. Instead, what I would like to do is consider a few things surrounding this parable. First, what question is Jesus really trying to answer? Following that, I would like to consider the true actors in this drama and how that should affect our walk with Jesus.

Before we get started, 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. Consider when Jesus told the parable of the vineyard. The Pharisees were upset with Jesus because he knew the parable was about them. And, I realize this is risky because by human nature we will typically want to place ourselves as the hero of the story. 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.

So, why did Jesus tell this parable? What aspect of our spiritual lives is Jesus trying to help us see? Of course, it's natural to think that the parable is the answer to the question posed in verse 29: "And, who is my neighbor?" In fact, many of us would ask similar questions. How much should I give? How far can I go? How often should I pray? We're all just like the lawyer; I'm just like the lawyer. I want to know God's "cut line" in giving, witnessing, serving, praying, gathering with the saints and so much more.

But the lawyer's question betrays where his heart really is. And exposes our hearts as well. I say this because mere moments earlier, the lawyer quoted what Jesus elsewhere calls the greatest commandments: Luke 10:27 **"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.** He quotes two Old Testament verses Dt 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18. To paraphrase his answer he says the summation of the Law is to love God supremely and to love people sacrificially. Bam. Out of the park. Home run.

But there is something off in this picture. You see, the lawyer came to Jesus with a "do" question. "What must I do to inherit eternal life". But he answered Jesus with a "be" answer. As we're learning, loving God and loving each other is not in the first instance about doing, it's about being. And yet the lawyer had no problem quoting these verses. It seems the lawyer's profession did quite match up with his beliefs.

What about us? Do we have aspects of our theology that we profess, but don't really believe? For instance, do we really believe that God has forgiven us of every sin, past, present and future? Do we really believe that the person sitting next to us is a beloved son or daughter of the King? Do we really believe that Jesus is leading us toward a kingdom that will never end and will literally be heaven on earth?

You see, this man's questions betray his heart. But we should praise God that Jesus didn't leave this man in his legalism and pretensions. Instead, Jesus presses into his heart and tells this very challenging parable.

Remember the lawyer's original response to Jesus: Love God supremely and love people sacrificially. What does that look like, exactly? How would you explain that concept to someone? Yet, in six verses, Jesus paints a picture that shows us the indelible fabric of both vertical and horizontal love. Jesus is saying what the apostle John would say later in **1 John 4:20 For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.**

So Jesus is using this parable to answer this question: what does it look like to love God supremely and love people sacrificially?

Now, I need to press you a little. When you hear this parable, this very familiar story, where do you see yourself? Which character are you? Are you the lawyer, smug and pretentious? Are you the

priest or the Levite, too concerned about religious performance to help someone beaten and left for dead. Are you the traveler, an innocent victim, who was simply minding his own business when the world fell apart around him? Or are you the altruistic Samaritan, who willingly gives his time and his resources to make sure the traveler is cared for?

Can I venture a guess on how you answered? My gut tells me it's not the first three, but either of the last two. And since this is a safe place, I will volunteer my answer. I very easily can see myself as the Samaritan. Surely I would stop and help if someone was bloody and beaten. Surely I would do whatever I could for them, even if they were of a different religion or ethnicity. Surely the love of Christ would compel me.

However, I think I'm self deluded.

Let me say this as gently and as lovingly as possible. For most of us, we are self deluded. By and large, we are not the good Samaritans we think we are. And, we are not the innocent victims we pretend to be. Yes, I realize things happen to us that are beyond our control, but oh brothers and sisters, we are legalists to the core. Yes we are redeemed! Praise God! But the tendrils of legalism remain. Why else do we ask how much do should I give? Why else would I want to know how often should I forgive?

But here's the good news: there's another layer to this parable. To be sure, we are called to love God supremely and to love others sacrificially. But how? Where will the strength and power come from? If Jesus is actually expecting us to live like this, how is it even possible

The answer is to see that the entire encounter between Jesus and the lawyer doesn't occur in a vacuum. 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 Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem followed by Jesus' going into the temple in Luke 19:44. Along the way, it's Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost, to redeem a people for God, to fulfill all of the Old Testament promises. 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? Even now, if this were the one litmus test of our lives, how would we be doing? So often, God is there to serve me and people are simply in the way. And so, we have the same dilemma that 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 on our own, 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.

If we consider the parable from this perspective, who is the victim? Who is the one who has no resources? Who is the one who was spiritually dead? Who is the one who was avoided or scorned in the name of religion? Who was left naked and alone? Who was without hope?

Brothers and sisters, we are the victim in this story. 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.

And, if I could spend one more minute on this and press a little into the parable, I would like to point out the victim does nothing to receive, contribute or payback the Samaritan. This parable models pure, unblemished mercy and grace.

Now, 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.

I think we know this to be true, if we pause long enough to consider it. Fixing your spouse hasn't worked, fixing your kids hasn't worked, getting a new job hasn't worked, getting a new house or car hasn't worked, going on vacation hasn't worked, going to the gym hasn't worked. None of these things or the hundreds I haven't mentioned can or will save us, because they all make lousy gods. And, if you think about it, isn't that the point of the book of Ecclesiastes? In the end, seeking salvation "under the sun" is like chasing after the wind.

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 shows mercy when none is required. 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!

Consider these realities: Jesus came to you when you were unable to come to him. Jesus provided for you things that you desperately needed, but couldn't provide for yourself. Jesus broke down every barrier (gender, racial, national, religious) in order to redeem us. Jesus cares for us on an ongoing basis without any obligation from us to repay even a portion of the cost. Jesus has made an open ended commitment to make sure we are properly cared for. Any one of these realities should make us weep with joy. All of them together, piled up like wood for a huge bonfire, should cause us to worship God in Christ more than ever.

So, who is the real hero of this parable? It's Jesus!

Let me bottom line this for you. We are all on a spectrum of this 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 are perhaps 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 remember, 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 dependence, 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 for joy and stand dumbfounded. 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