

Who is my neighbor?

Luke 10:29-37

But the lawyer, 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."

There is something in me that resonates with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Back in 2015, I preached a sermon that walked through this parable. Then in 2017, I came back to it to show that Jesus is the real Good Samaritan. Now, I'm coming back again to challenge us with this singular question: Who is my neighbor?

Before we dive in, I want to offer a few disclaimers. First, God has been pressing me more and more in the area of putting feet to the gospel. As such you may see my passion leak out from time to time this morning. Second, the question of "who is my neighbor" is really broad. So, although I will only look at one facet of that question this morning, I am not minimizing or ignoring the other facets. We simply don't have the time to look at every possible angle or aspect of that question today. Third, I never want to lose sight of the gospel. Even when I may be advocating for changes in our thoughts or behaviors, we must always remember that it is God who works in us to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So, are you ready? Let's go!

Here's how I would like to approach our time together this morning. First we're going to do a brief review of the parable itself, to see what Jesus is calling us to and to see that every call to action flows out of the gospel, not out of any attempt to earn God's favor or to pay him back.

Next, I want us to consider the pro-life issue and to see how we can be like the Good Samaritan to the variety of people who are impacted by unplanned or unwanted pregnancies. This will not be a one size fits all list of to dos or action steps. Rather I've been praying that this will be a time of true reflection and of seeking God's direction, empowerment and, if necessary, forgiveness.

Finally, we will wrap things up by looking to Jesus and his gospel for wisdom and strength. We all need the Spirit to help us answer the question: "who is my neighbor". And each of us needs the love of Christ overflowing in us as we seek to serve as his ambassadors to a lost and dying world.

Look with me again, if you will, at Lk 10. Jesus has been in a dialogue with a lawyer, a Jewish legal expert who was seeking to challenge Jesus' approach to the Old Testament law. He asks Jesus about the requirements for eternal life. Jesus' turns the question back to lawyer, who responds with direct quotations from the Old Testament: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus compliments this answer and then gives this enigmatic statement: "Do this and you will live".

We should all pause at this point, as the lawyer should have. Seriously ask yourself: Can you really love God with 100% of your heart, soul, mind and strength? All the time? Without fail? And, can you really love your neighbor as much as you love yourself? All the time? Without

fail? Here is the beauty of the law. We should want to do both of these, but we know we cannot. How then do we proceed? We should go the only one who is able to do both perfectly and set us on the path of beginning to do both more than we've done before.

However, that is not where the lawyer goes. In his mind he wants to achieve the objective, to climb the hill, to earn God's favor. As such, he asks a very natural clarifying question: "who then is my neighbor?" We should note he asks this is to limit or mitigate the command from Lev 19:18. Is my neighbor next door, across the street, from the same socio-economic group, the same skin color, the same gender, the same religious affiliation? Just draw the box for me Jesus.

Of course, Jesus will have none of that. He blows up any conception the lawyer might have of limiting the definition of neighbor. A straight up reading of the parable is that whoever is in need, they are your neighbor. Jesus did similar things with anger, lust and greed in the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout his ministry, Jesus continually turns our perspective upside down to show us how broken our world is and how desperately we all need a Savior who came not to destroy this broken world but to redeem it, to reshape it and ultimately to make all things new.

So the dialog at the very end of the parable is crucial. Jesus asks, "Who was the neighbor to the man?" The lawyer replied, "The one who showed mercy." Then Jesus commanded, "Go and do likewise" In other words: be like Christ to least and the lost. Give sacrificially of your time, your resources, even your reputation to those who cannot pay you back and may not even know what you did. And that is where most sermons on this parable end.

But today I want challenge us on what it might look like to actually be the Good Samaritan. Or to say it another way, can we ask Jesus "who is neighbor" not in a limiting way but rather in a Spirit-led, grace-filled way? Maybe, just maybe, God is preparing for us gospel encounters, where we can show the love of Christ to the world around us.

As I mentioned in the beginning there are a multitude of ways we can approach this question. We could look into the world of sex trafficking. We could look into poverty and plight of the homeless. We could look to the elderly and multitudes that are slowly aging and dying alone. Any one of these and probably a thousand other slices of the pie would be worthy of a deep dive. But today, the Spirit has laid upon me the issue of life.

Flowing from the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan, my goal is to frame the question of "who is my neighbor" in light of the intrinsic gift of life given by God alone. This will not be an apologetic message to defend that all life is created by God and worthy of love and care and protection. God's word proclaims that truth from cover to cover and I will gladly meet with you offline to discuss that issue. Today I want to focus on how we can be neighbors to those most deeply impacted by reality of abortion.

The way I would suggest we approach this by viewing the groups impacted by abortion as a series of concentric circles or ripples from a rock dropped in a pond. This is not to assign greater or lesser value to the inside ring versus the outside ring but simply a way to consider who is impacted the most. By doing this God may reveal to us who is most in need of a neighbor.

At the inner circle, at the heart of it all, are the pre-born babies. I know this probably feels like a redundant statement. Of course the pre-born babies are the ones most impacted by abortions and of course they are the most helpless and defenseless and innocent in this whole situation. But sometimes we need to say the obvious to shake us out of our doldrums. I have to admit that I have been tangentially pro-life for all of my walk with Christ, but a few years ago I heard a sermon by Matt Chandler that shook me up. He stated this obvious fact and it was a slap to my face: "People, we are killing our own babies! We are no different than the worshipers of Molech. What will we say at the judgement seat of Christ when we are asked 'why did you do nothing?'"

But how can we be a neighbor to a pre-born baby? Perhaps he's in another city. Maybe she's in another state? They are too far removed from me. Besides the issue's too big, the pattern is

too entrenched. I share these counter-arguments because they are mine. But the Spirit's response is this: "your view of God is too small." Think of Mt 19:26 "With man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible". Or Gen 18:14 "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" So the number one remedy for all who are impacted by abortions, but especially the pre-born babies, is prayer.

But I want to continue to be personal and confessional. It is easy for me to pray for the babies, for their protection and for their healthy delivery. Very safe and antiseptic prayers. It's another thing for me to weep over innocent children who are dying. Where is my grief? Jesus wept over Jerusalem and the death of Lazarus. Shouldn't I be emulating my master?

But we can have an additional impact for these babies. We can step out. We can support and join ministries that are seeking help babies and their moms. We can give money and resources and time as the Lord provides. We can open our homes for foster care and / or adoption. Even if we are beyond the parenting years, perhaps we can partner with a young couple who is lead to adopt to ease their own transition and walk with them together on this journey of trusting the Lord.

While pre-born babies are clearly the people most impacted by abortions, there is another group of people who are also dramatically affected. It is desperate moms. I will be honest with you. I have never been in a situation like many of these young women are facing. Most of us have never felt the isolation, the desperation, the rejection these women are going through. So the last thing we should do is look down on them and condemn them.

Yet, if the Good Samaritan is a pattern of sorts, what would Jesus ask of us? Would it be too much to step into the world of young women who feel the only option they have left is to kill their own child? Would it be too much to hear her story, how her world has collapsed around her and she cannot see another way out? Would we listen to Paul when asks us weep with those who weep?

There are ministries both locally and nationally that do this very thing. Could the Spirit be calling you get involved? What's the inertia that's preventing us from stepping into the fray? What fear is holding us back?

As we think about moms that are desperate we need to acknowledge the very real possibility that someone here or listening to this online may have gone through the abortion process. Here is one young woman's story:

Early in her musical career Rozonda Thomas, started a relationship with her manager. When she became pregnant, he insisted she abort the baby and paid for the cost of the procedure. Nine years later, these are her words:

"I didn't have the support and I was so scared and I didn't know what to do and chose to not have it," she explained. "One of the biggest mistakes. I didn't want to do that. I'm 20. My career hadn't even really started, you know? So how do I... how do I do all that? How can I be a mommy?"

"It messed me up," she said through tears. "I don't know; It just, it broke my spirit. [...] I feel like I became kind of like not my strong self anymore. I felt like I gave in and I broke to what someone else wanted. And I would break down and I would just cry because I wasn't a mommy. I've cried almost every day for almost nine years"

Hear me, I do not, I cannot know your pain, or grief, or regret. But Jesus does. If you are in Christ today sister, you are loved by God and forgiven and cleansed by Jesus. Please, please don't carry the weight that Jesus willingly carried for you. And know this: our arms are open to you. To paraphrase Tim Keller "the church is not a museum for the saints to be preserved, but a hospital for sinners to be made well."

If pre-born babies are our neighbors most impacted by abortion and the moms who are facing this gut wrenching decision or have already gone through an abortion are close behind, what

about the connected families? Aren't the fathers affected as well? And the grandparents? Sisters? Brothers? Confidants? Too often I think this group of people is forgotten in the entire abortion conversation.

Not too long ago, a relative of ours struggled with a baby who was born extremely premature. As we prayed for the little boy and his parents, I saw the ache and care and concern in his mom, but his dad? It broke him. He was a self sufficient man in many ways. Man who could deal with most of life's issues. Now his son was struggling for life and this man, this father had no power, no control, no way to make things right.

It is no different with abortion. Maybe the father is pushing the issue. Maybe he's arguing against it. Maybe its coming from the grandparents or others. But whoever it may be, they know they've lost control. There is a sickness in their soul and either they see abortion as the answer or it is the cause.

Friends, we can speak truth into these lives as well. The loss of control? That is control that was never really there. But Jesus, the author of life, the upholder of the universe, he has always had control. Can he use this desperate situation? Absolutely. Will it be easy or clean? Probably not. But Jesus can carry us through. In fact as we move through the gospel of John, we will run across these words of Jesus from John 16:33 "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

There is one final group of neighbors that I would like to challenge us to reach out to, to pray with, to listen to and shower with the love of Jesus: it is those who advocate for abortion. My point here this morning is not for a pro-life apologetics beat down. Instead I would urge us as sons and daughters of the King to extend the grace we have received from Jesus to those with whom we disagree.

Think back to the parable. What philosophic or religious commonality existed between the Samaritan and the man dying on the side of the road? Did they see eye to eye on anything? They probably didn't even cheer for the same football team. And yet the Samaritan, by the grace of God and in the power of the Spirit, reached out in faith to shower his enemy with the love and mercy of Jesus.

We may not have the opportunity to directly engage with folks who promote abortion, but most of us do live online. Think of your reaction when you hear of a state allowing abortions up to the point of birth. How do you respond? Anger? Tears? Pleading with God that he might soften peoples hearts and they might see the impact of what they're advocating? How often do we we ask God for opportunities to bring the light of the gospel into this dark part of the world?

Heavy stuff, I know. But the gospel is good news! I want us leave here not beaten down, guilt ridden, feeling like this is a works righteousness sermon. So in light of the reality that Jesus did call us to go and do what the Samaritan did, hear these wonderful truths:

- Jesus is the ultimate Good Samaritan and rescued us from our dying nakedness and has restored us to a new life
- God is sovereign over all things. Even though there is real evil in the world, God can work through that evil for his good purposes
- There is forgiveness in Christ even for heinous sins. Paul was a murderer. David an adulterer. Moses a control freak. Each are with Jesus in paradise. There is no sin of yours that is beyond the mercy and grace of Jesus
- The tomb is empty and the same power that rose Jesus from the dead is ours: to conquer sin, to reach out to our neighbors, to make radical life choices that foster and promote a culture of life rather than a culture of death
- Jesus calls to live on mission. We are not a museum for the preservation of the saints, we are a hospital for the healing of sinners.

Let me close with these words from Paul. They are my own prayer but also my prayer and my hope for each of us:

Romans 12:9-18

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

By the grace and mercy of Jesus. Amen