

THE GOOD SAMARITAN
LUKE 10:25-37

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

We live in a needy world. A day does not go by when we can't pick up a newspaper or listen to a news broadcast and learn about a famine in Africa or a hurricane in Florida or a mass shooting in North Carolina or an officer killed in Las Vegas. Then there are people in our family and in our circle of friends and in our church and in our work who have needs. Most everyone is being negatively impacted by inflation. We are all concerned about the increasing number of victims of crime.

This week I was in two emergency rooms and a surgery center with my wife. Fortunately we now have a little better idea about what is going on in her digestive system. Our situation pales in comparison to one of our praise team members who has gone to care for her daughter in Texas who has been put on hospice care. At times the neediness of the world around us can seem overwhelming. Where is a person to begin? What responsibility do we have before God in such a needy world?

Jesus gave us an important insight into this responsibility in the parable before us this morning. Last week we saw what He had to say on the subject of forgiveness. Today we shall see what He has to say about loving our neighbor. This is the famous "Parable of the Good Samaritan."

I.

Consider first THE BACKGROUND OF THE PARABLE (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE BACKGROUND OF THE PARABLE) as it is described in vv. 25-29 of Luke #10 (p. 869). Luke is the only gospel writer who records the story of the Good Samaritan, and he gives us only a few of the details about the circumstances that prompted the story. We don't know exactly when Jesus told the story or where He was when He told it. We do know something about the question that prompted it.

According to v. 25, "**And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'**" This man is a specialist in the law. He is a rabbi who is an authority on the Old Testament Law. He has studied what other rabbis have said about it. He has formed his own opinions. Now he wants to test Jesus' knowledge and understanding of the law. It is not clear from the text exactly what this rabbi's attitude is toward Jesus. But keep in mind that most of the rabbis were critical of Him. Jesus disagrees with many of the traditions of the rabbis, most of whom belonged to the religious party known as the Pharisees. Many of the rabbis were jealous of the following that Jesus had.

Remember that Jesus was from Galilee, from the sticks up north. He may have been to Galilee State, but these rabbis who were checking out Jesus had been to Harvard and Yale. What could this guy have to teach them?

Still the man's question was reasonable. If I met a pastor whose denominational connection was a little suspect or whose seminary background was known to be theologically liberal, I might ask a similar question. I might ask, "Well, pastor, how is it that people get to heaven?"

Jesus answers the rabbi's question with another question, "**What is written in the Law? How do you read it?**" It was common for a rabbi to respond in such a way to the question of another about the interpretation of the law. It was typical for rabbis in this way to compare their conclusions with each other.

This rabbi gives Jesus a good answer. According to v. 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.'**" On another occasion a rich young ruler asked Jesus about the greatest commandment in the law, and Jesus responded with the same answer that this rabbi gives. He said that the greatest commandment is to love God. The second greatest commandment is to love one's neighbor.

The first part of the answer is a direct quotation from Deuteronomy #6 v. 5. This is a part of the most famous prayer in Judaism, known as the "Shema." The reference to loving one's neighbor comes from Leviticus #19.

Jesus responds to the rabbi in v. 28, saying, "**You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.**" It would be interesting to know what was the physical response of the rabbi to Jesus. For Jesus didn't just say, "I agree with your view." He said, "You are correct. That is the right answer." Then he went on to pronounce that if the rabbi did this, he would live. Jesus was putting Himself in a position superior to that of this man who was respected as a teacher of the law. That was a rather arrogant thing for a self-taught rabbi from the sticks of Galilee to do to a real authority on the law, unless, of course, Jesus was more than just a Gallilean rabbi.

The man's original question was "How can one have eternal life?" Jesus asked the rabbi what the Law said, and he responded with the command to love God with all of your being and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, "That's right. You do that, and you will have eternal life." But that answer seemingly caused the rabbi some discomfort. For in v. 29 we read, "**But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'**"

The rabbi knew that the Hebrew Bible had a lot to say about sin. There was a whole sacrificial system built around the fact that people break God's laws and that some kind of payment has to be made to deal with that wrongdoing. To love God with all of one's being is an incredibly high standard. How can one know that he is loving God with all of

one's being? And can one do that all of the time? And can one love his neighbor just like himself--- all of the time?

And just who is my neighbor? This expert in the Law wants to know exactly what Jesus thinks. Our translation calls him a lawyer. Lawyers and experts in the law want to know the rules. They want to know the boundaries. They want a definition of "neighbor."

In the predominant Jewish thinking of the early first century good Jews were first responsible to their immediate family, then to their extended family, then to their community, then to fellow Jews and then to Gentile converts to Judaism. Everybody outside of those boundaries was unclean. They were to be avoided. Good Jews were not even to eat with Gentiles. This lawyer is trying to understand Jesus' religious system, and probably he is looking for some flaw in the thinking of this Gallilean rabbi and some reason to reject him as a fraud.

What Jesus was trying to do, among other things, was to teach the impossibility of living up to such a high standard. Religious people then and religious people today are always looking for things that they can do to get them to heaven. The rabbi wanted to know what he could **DO** that would get him to heaven. The truth then and the truth now is that man is incapable of living up to God's law. Nobody can love God perfectly all of the time.

The Old Testament was designed to show sinful people how they could relate to a holy God. But it was also designed to show them their sinfulness and inability to reach God in their own strength. Yet within the Old Testament there was also the simple explanation about the means of eternal life.

(PROJECTOR ON--- GENESIS 15:6) In Genesis #15 v. 6 we are told, "**And he [Abraham] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**" The means of receiving eternal life in the Old Testament was the same then as it is today. It is faith, believing, trusting. The object, or content, of that faith has changed somewhat down through the centuries. Believers in the Old Testament had no clear conception of the coming God-man who would die and rise from the dead for their sins. But they did have some understanding of the God who revealed Himself to Moses and the prophets and the kings of Israel. They were responsible to put their faith in this God, as Abraham did. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Living after the time of Jesus, we have a responsibility to trust in this God-man who died for us on the cross and rose again. So in order to have eternal life today we need to believe. The object of that belief must be Jesus Christ who came from God the Father and paid the penalty for our sins.

II.

We come then in vv. 30-37 to THE PARABLE ABOUT NEIGHBORLINESS.

(PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE PARABLE ABOUT NEIGHBORLINESS) The simple

question to which Jesus is responding is “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus gives His answer in the form of a story.

In v. 30 we read, **“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.’”** (JERUSALEM TO JERICHO) Jericho is about 16 or 17 miles to the northeast of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is at about the same altitude as Boulder City--- 2500 feet. The Dead Sea and Jordan River valley are 1300 feet below sea level. Jericho is a little higher than that. It is 850 feet below sea level, making it the lowest city in the world. So there is a 3400 feet difference in elevation between Jericho and Jerusalem.

(WADI QELT 1A) For most of history there has been one route between Jerusalem and Jericho. It is a wadi, or what we might call a wash. This scene is viewed from the east with Jericho in the foreground. You can see that the wadi passes through desert territory.

What in v. 31 is called a road is what we might call a path. (WADI QELT 1) The path here is on the right above the wadi. There is an ancient aqueduct on the left. (WADI QELT 2) I had an opportunity to walk on about three miles of this path twenty years ago. (WADI QELT 6) This path is the setting for the parable that Jesus tells. (WADE QELT 10)

Down through much of history the road had a reputation for being a dangerous path infested with bandits. The Jewish historian Josephus says that back in the days just before Jesus was born King Herod laid off 40,000 men who had been working on the temple in Jerusalem. Some of them, according to Josephus, became robbers, and some of these robbers set up their business along this road. (WADI QELT 8)

Somewhere along this road Jesus pictures a man, presumably Jewish, who was ambushed by robbers, beaten, robbed, and left half dead. Jesus says in v. 31, **“Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.”** (JERICHO AERIAL) Jericho, at the end of the road, was known to be a city where many priests lived. A couple of times each year they were supposed to go up to Jerusalem to serve in the temple. Perhaps religious leaders like priests and Levites were a little less likely to be attacked by robbers because even some criminals would be fearful about attacking representatives of God. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Anyway this priest was alone. Jesus says that he was going down the road. So he was returning to Jericho from Jerusalem where he probably had been fulfilling his Biblical responsibilities in the temple. Somewhere along the way he spotted this fellow Jew laying beside the path. But the priest simply passed him by. Why would he not have stopped? He might have been afraid that it was a trap. He might have been afraid that the robbers were still around. He might have been in a hurry to get home before dark. Maybe he just didn't want to get involved.

My suspicion is that there was another issue that might have confronted this priest. In the Old Testament (LEVITICUS 21:1) Leviticus # 21 v. 1 says, **“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people...’”** The guy beside the road is described as being half dead. If the priest went over to him, rolled him over and found that he was indeed dead, then he would be defiled, and that would violate this command in Leviticus. A priest was not supposed to touch a corpse. That prohibition probably assumed that there were other people around who could deal with corpses. There was no one else around in this situation, and was the guy really dead?

This authority on the Law should also have been familiar with Deuteronomy #22 v. 4 (DEUTERONOMY 22:4), which said, **“You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again.”** This was not the countryman's animal. This was the priest's countryman. But this priest took the easy way out. He chose not to get involved. He passed by on the other side of the road.

The scholars think that it was sometime after the days of Jesus when the following statement (MISHNAH QUOTATION) was included in the Jewish religious manual called the Mishnah: **“Even a high priest should attend a neglected corpse.”** (Mishnah Nazir 7.1) The priest in our story apparently did not accept this principle. It was not yet part of accepted Jewish tradition.

Jesus continues in v. 32 of our story, **“So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”** (PROJECTOR OFF) Levites were descendants of Levi, one of the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Priests were also descendants of Levi, but they were descendants of one particular family of the Levites, those descended from Aaron. The Levites had responsibilities in the temple also. They were responsible to maintain the temple compound, to serve as singers and musicians, and to act as gatekeepers.

Perhaps this particular Levite was also concerned about being defiled by a corpse. The Old Testament Law said that any Jew who touched a dead body became ceremonially unclean. That meant that he had to go through a certain ritual to become clean again. It was a pain. Perhaps from a distance he saw the priest pass by and reasoned, “If the priest didn't stop to help this man, then there certainly can't be anything wrong if I pass by, too.” So he also chose not to get involved.

At this point many of Jesus' listeners might have anticipated that the next person to walk by would be a Jewish layman who would stop and help. Thus Jesus would attack the religious leaders of the people for their hypocrisy and lack of compassion. But Jesus went much further than this. The first word in v. 33 in the original Greek manuscripts is “Samaritan”--- emphatic position. **“But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion...”**

Jews and Samaritans tended not to get along very well with each other. In John 8:48 (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 8:48) the Jewish leaders think of the most derogatory thing to call Jesus and say to Him, **“Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon.”** In other Jewish literature we find out that Jews cursed Samaritans. They prayed that Samaritans would have no part in the resurrection. There was even a prohibition that Jews should not accept works of mercy from a Samaritan.

(MISHNAH SEVIT QUOTATION) The Mishnah (Shevi'it 8.10) contained this admonition to Jews; **“Whoever eats bread [baked] by Samaritans is like one who eats the flesh of a pig.”** That was as bad as you could get with a religious Jew.

(SAMARIA MAP) Some 750 years earlier when Assyria conquered the northern ten tribes of Israel, most of these Jews were taken away to other parts of the Assyrian Empire. Those who were left were forced to intermarry with people who were brought to Samaria from other parts of Assyria. The result was a half-Jewish race of people who had their own religious faith that was an offshoot of the Old Testament. By the time of Jesus the Samaritans occupied territory between Galilee and Judea. They had their own temple on Mt. Gerezim. In 128 BC a group of Jews burned it down.

The Samaritans understandably were not fond of the Jews either. Josephus says that there was more than one case of Samaritans killing Gallilean Jews who were passing through their territory on the way to Jerusalem. During one Jewish festival a couple of years before the birth of Jesus a Samaritan sneaked into the temple and scattered human bones all around, thus defiling it. Then also when the full moon appeared signaling the beginning of Passover, the Jews would light a series of signal fires to notify Jews living in remote areas, including Galilee, that the Passover was beginning. The Samaritans liked to mess things up and light signal fires in their territory a day or two early. At the end of the chapter before our passage the gospel writer notes that Samaritans refused to offer hospitality when Jesus was passing through their territory. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So as this Samaritan traveler came across this Jewish man beside the road, he would have known that if he was the victim of robbers, he would be left to die. But v. 33 says that this half Jew felt compassion for the Jew who was half dead. He had compassion. Elsewhere in the New Testament that word was used only of the love that Jesus felt toward others. The compassion of the Samaritan overcame prejudice to become love in action.

In vv. 34 & 35 we read, **“He [the Samaritan] 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.’”**

(PROJECTOR ON--- INN OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN) The Good Samaritan Inn is a modern tourist stop in the middle of the way between Jerusalem and Jericho. The place

has been the site of a way station for a long time. This is what (GOOD SAMARITAN INN) it looked like over 100 years ago. Archaeologists have discovered remains of a church nearby that go back at least 1400 years. There is an early church leader by the name of Jeremy who wrote in 404 AD that he visited the Inn of the Good Samaritan. So there may have been an ancient inn in this area in the time of Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Who is my neighbor? Jesus says that it is anyone who has a need that I can meet. The focus of the scribe's question was the object of one's love. Jesus really is turning that question around and saying that love should not be limited by its object. Rather the quality and extent of our love for our fellow man--- for our neighborliness--- are dependent upon us, the givers of compassion. We are responsible to love all those who have needs that we can meet.

In vv. 36 & 37 Luke records the probing question of Jesus and the rabbi's response: **"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.'"** The scribe is forced to acknowledge the neighborliness of the Samaritan. Yet even in his answer he refuses to use the word "Samaritan." The man lying beside the road was neighbor to each of the three men who passed by, but only one of them proved to be neighborly. The disciple of Christ is characterized by love for his neighbor.

III.

Let's consider finally the question WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR? (PROJECTOR ON--- III. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?) Closely related to that, what should love of one's neighbor mean for us today? It seems to me that the lesson for us that comes from the Parable of the Good Samaritan is that we should display compassion toward those who have needs that we can meet. The man beside the road had a physical need. Being neighborly means looking out for the physical needs of others. It may also mean looking out for financial needs and emotional needs and spiritual needs of others.

Sometimes it is the difficult experiences in life that equip us to meet the needs of others. I was forced out of a church early in my ministry career. A couple of times I have been able to use that experience to be of some encouragement to other pastors. A seminary and college friend of mine was forced out of a church some years ago. When I found out about it, I took the initiative to call him up and listen to him.

Years ago I was in a pastors' group where one of the pastors shared that he was in a situation where he was being pressured to leave his church. The guy was twenty years older than I was, and I didn't know him very well. But I called him up and took him to lunch. I don't know that I had any great wisdom or advice to share. I mostly just listened and shared my own experience. But he seemed to appreciate it.

Most of us have had difficult experiences in life--- deaths of loved ones, firings, financial reversals, divorce, cancer. Those difficult experiences can be used to support and encourage our neighbor whose need we may be equipped to meet.

Our Board of Deacons often tries to determine who our neighbor is whose need we should meet. Our church congregation is our first priority. We can't meet every need that comes across our path. We have been reminded this morning that our Deacons' Fund is pretty low. Usually we restrict our financial help to those in our congregation. But sometimes we come across neighbors outside of the church.

One of our deacons years ago came across someone across the street who had a car problem. It turned out that the person was actually from out of state. But he was out of money, and he needed help. So we got involved and helped him buy a part from Auto zone. There we met the store manager who turned out to be this character named Jay. We had a conversation with him. We invited him to visit us, and he did. Now Jay is one of our elders

Eight years ago Emily Pickers decided to explore the territory around her home in rural Georgia. The problem was that she was only fifteen months old. She headed toward the state highway near her home. Cars whizzed by. No one stopped until Bryant Colleens came along. He was an auto repairman. Bryan had spent ten years in a federal penitentiary for manufacturing cocaine. He picked up the child, put her in his car, and called 9-1-1.

(BRYANT COLLINS) For the next two hours, he comforted the child while the police tried to figure out who she was and where her family was. When the baby began crying, Collins resorted to what he used when he was upset. He played gospel music on his cell phone. Finally the family of the little girl was found.

Five years later the Georgia TV station which initially interviewed Bryant Collins caught up with him to find out what he was doing. (11alive.com, 8/21/2019) He explained that a couple of weekends out of every month he and his family pop up in different neighborhoods and cook burgers and hot dogs for free. He says, **"It's not about the meal. The meal is inexpensive. It's about the time. Time is the most valuable thing you got. You can make money all day, but you can't ever get that time back."**
(PROJECTOR OFF)

How true that is. Financial cost can sometimes keep us from being neighborly. But often the biggest obstacle is time. It takes time to check up on our neighbors. It takes time to find out how people are doing. In the parable the Samaritan took time out of his life to attend to the wounded man's injuries. It took time to bring him to an inn. It took time to check up on him later. It takes time to be neighborly. But Jesus clearly indicates that He is pleased when we take time to help someone whose need we can meet.

The greatest needs that people have are ultimately spiritual. People need to be related to the God who is there. They need to have their sins forgiven. They need to have

eternal life. They need to know the meaning of life. So the greatest neighborliness that we can exercise is pointing people toward faith in Jesus. Helping out with our Fall Festival is one way to do that.

The primary and obvious message of the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” is that we ought to love our neighbors, to show compassion toward those who have a need that we can meet. But perhaps Jesus was hinting at something else in this parable. The priests and the Levites and the religious establishment of Jesus’ day hated the Samaritans. The priests and the Levites and the religious establishment also didn’t like Jesus very much. In fact we saw earlier that they called Him a Samaritan.

The religious establishment of Jesus’ day also didn’t show a lot of compassion to common people. When religious pilgrims came to the temple, they charged exorbitant prices for them to buy sacrifices and exchange money. They fleeced the poor to line their own pockets. They taught that there were ways for people to get around their Biblical responsibility to care for their parents in their old age. They taught that people with physical handicaps were in that situation because either they or their parents had sinned. Jesus, whom they labeled a Samaritan, came along and cared for the needs of the outcasts of society. In the end He died on the cross so that they, and we, might go to heaven. He is the real Good Samaritan.

Are you connected to Him? I hope that you are. If you trust Him as your Savior, He will meet your deepest needs and take you to heaven some day.

Who is my neighbor? It is the individual whose need I can meet.