

Self-Justification **Luke 10:23-37**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus is again teaching publically, *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?"

It is then that Jesus tells him the parable of the Good Samaritan.

We all know the story. We've heard it before. We are just like the lawyer in the text, we know what we want to believe. "Jesus, just let me know exactly what the bottom line is, just tell me what I truly need to do as my part."

First notice something about the lawyer in our text. The man doesn't ask about how he should love God, after all, he thinks he's doing a fine job. He believes that he has kept the first table of the law - that he does love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind.

He doesn't have the same confidence concerning his love for his neighbor. So, he tries to justify himself, "And who is my neighbor?"

He's trying to justify himself, he is trying to narrow down exactly which neighbors he really needs to love, for certainly Jesus cannot mean he must love all his neighbors. We are right there with him.

So Jesus who is the neighbor I must love? I don't have to love Hertha Herplesheimer, do I? Nobody can get along with that woman. And of course, you don't mean John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt, he's the most disgusting, eccentric, smelly individual I know. And you cannot mean that I have to love my ex-spouse, after what they did to me, there is no way on God's green earth.

And so, Jesus tells the parable of the man who fell among thieves. Along came a priest, surely a professional church worker, the one who stood as the mediator between God and his people would help. But he saw the man's pitiful condition and avoided him, passing by on the other side – it was too messy of a situation to get involved in.

Then came a Levite, one of those set apart by God to serve Him in His temple, surely this man of God would have compassion and help. But alas, such was not to be, he too passed by on the other side of the road – as far away as possible.

Finally a Samaritan comes along, one who would have no good reason to help a Jew. We do not understand the hatred and animosity that existed between Jews and Samaritans, it is beyond our

understanding. Jews considered Samaritans foreigners and outsiders, even worse than that – and the attitude was returned by the Samaritans to the Jews. If the roles were reversed, just to give you an idea of how bad the animosity is, consider that if a Jew were passing by a Samaritan in such straights, he *might* just go over and kick him one, just for good measure.

Jesus tells this parable to people who know the severity of this animosity. This Jewish lawyer would never, in a million years, touch a Samaritan in kindness. But Jesus tells of this Samaritan who goes above and beyond any and all expectations. He could have bound his wounds and given him a drink of water, and that would have been unusual, but he goes beyond that.

The Samaritan cleans the wounds and puts antibiotic salve on it. Then he places him on his own animal, *while he walks* to an inn. At the inn it continues! He gives the innkeeper the monetary means to continue caring for the man till he fully recovers, promising to pay even more if the amount of money he did give him failed to cover expenses.

Dear lawyer friend, Jesus says, “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.”

Take the time to visit with Hertha Herplescheimer. Bring a meal to John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt. Pray for your most despised enemy. Forgive your ex who left you for another. When you see those who are hurting, those who are without, those who have need, love them and care for them.

The lawyer was hoping for less of a task. He was not looking for something he had to do, he just wanted self-justification. He just wanted to be able to say, “I have already done all that is asked of me.” He wanted to be able to point at himself and say, “I am a good man, a righteous man, a man justified before God by my own works.”

We like to say the same thing. You and I want to overlook our trespasses and sins. We would to justify ourselves before God. See God how much I love you?!?!?! God, I will love all that you send before me, just don’t make me love *so-and-so*.

Look at the parable again. The foreigner, the outsider, the one who does not belong, is Jesus. True God in human flesh, the Good Samaritan, should consider the worthless trash of the mankind’s sinful condition and let them wallow in their own sin and death that we all deserve.

We are like the lawyer in the text, we’d like to justify ourselves before Jesus. But to do so, we’d have to be like the lawyer, “um, specifically, which neighbor must I love?” We want eternal life, and we’d really like to obtain it on our terms.

But Jesus tells this parable to point out to the lawyer that he is completely out of his league, there is nothing you can do, your terms are not God’s terms. So are we out of our league, but we just don’t get it.

We are like the lawyer because we are, just like the lawyer, the man lying on the side of the road.

We are beaten, robbed, and left for dead by our enemies; the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

You and I cannot justify ourselves before God, we must rely upon someone else. We rely upon Him who justifies us freely by His grace. Jesus took on human flesh and had every reason to pass by on the other side. He saw us lying there in our sins - the stench of our sinfulness fouling His holy nostrils - our clothing stained with the dirt of our sinful self-justification.

But He did not pass by. Instead, Christ had compassion upon us. Christ took us and lifted us up. He took our sins upon Himself. He stripped us of our sin-stained garments and put His own robe of righteousness upon us as we were baptized into His death - cleansed of the stench of our sins and made clean to stand before Him.

Jesus took us to the inn of His church. With His Holy innocent suffering and death, He paid for our admittance and the price of our care. In the inn of His church, He chose an innkeeper to care for us - to feed us and heal us. He gave the innkeeper the means to do so with the Holy Absolution, which heals the wounds we have inflicted upon ourselves in our sinfulness. He paid with His own flesh and blood for the food which feeds us for eternal life - His Holy Supper.

You are forgiven our self-justification. You are given eternal life, the free gift from God, not of your own works. You are the one on which the Good Samaritan has had mercy, and you are justified before God by the grace of His only begotten Son.

God grant us all a firmer faith in the Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ, who by His blood and death has rescued us from certain eternal death, He has justified us before His Father, making us holy in His sight. May we live for others as He has lived *and died* for us - sacrificially - until He returns.

Dear friends in Christ, come inherit the kingdom that has been prepared for you since the foundation of the world. Amen.