

Series: Parables from the Master Story-Teller  
 Sermon: ***Spontaneous Love: Parable of the Good Samaritan***  
 Scripture: Luke 10:25-37  
 Speaker: Pastor Dick High  
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## **Introduction**

The encouragement to “love your neighbor” is a familiar phrase found in Scripture. That phrase is the pivot point of a discussion that Christ has with an expert in the law. The majority of Christ’s interaction includes the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the focus of today’s sermon.

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*Strange Neighbors* is the name of a children’s book written by Mary Labatt. It is the story about Sam, a sheepdog detective, belonging to 10-year-old Jennie Levinsky. As the story unfolds there are new neighbors that move in next to Jennie. When the movers drop one of the crates, toads hop out, in a line, to a nearby field. Naturally, the question arises as to who are these neighbors. Sam’s responsibility will be to help identify who are these strange new neighbors.

This morning we return to our summer series on the Parables from the Master Story-Teller. We will be in Luke 10, looking at the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is perhaps one of the more familiar parables taught by Christ. The primary question which prompts this parable is “Who is my neighbor?” The question is not asked because the individual thinks he has strange neighbors. It is rather a question that is raised in the context of a stated desire to know how to apply the Scriptural encouragement to love one’s neighbor.

I will take the time to read the portion of Scripture that contains both the parable and its context. It is Luke 10:25-37. You can follow along in your Bible or on the screen.

On one occasion an expert of the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

## **Context (25-26)**

As I look at the introductory context to this parable, what is immediately observable is the motivation that initiates the interaction. The text tells us that an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. The use of this specific word, “test,” almost always expresses distrust and often occurs where there is hostile intent. The question in

verse 25 may have been stated politely, but the motivation was significantly slanted. The desire would be to elicit an answer from Christ that would provide a basis for critique and renouncement.

Understanding that motive it would be my perception that the question posed in verse 25 is insincere. The basic question is found elsewhere in Scripture, and is often answered more directly than what Jesus does here. It is asked in response to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost; "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter's answer is "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." The Philippian jailer asks Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Their reply is "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..."

You do not find that kind of a direct answer in Luke 10. Because the question is stated from distrust and hostility, Christ will not answer it directly. Additionally, the actual wording of the expert's question raises another concern. The word order reveals an emphasis on personal effort, the "doing" that would merit him eternal life. Literally the question could be read "On having done what work shall I certainly inherit eternal life?"

Christ's answer to this question is a question. In fact He asks two questions. One question is factual; the other is interpretive or seeks application. Christ is interested in this expert's knowledge of the Law and He asks about the expert's own understanding of the Law. How quickly Christ has turned the question that He is asked back to the one who asked Him!

It is expected that an expert in the law would have a ready answer. We see that to be true in verse 27. He quickly recites two foundational passages from the Old Testament. I do want to be cautious at this point to not give this expert inappropriate credit for his answer. The first quotation that he gives is from Deuteronomy 6:5. This verse was to be repeated by Jews each morning and evening. Therefore it should have been quite familiar to this man. The second quotation that he gives can be found in Leviticus 19:18.

These two Scriptures are presented in response to the questions that Christ asks in verse 26. I believe they are offered as an answer to both Christ's first question regarding what is written and to Christ's second question. The second question, "How do you read it?" is a request regarding the expert's understanding or interpretation of the Scriptures. It is helpful to me in following this dialogue to rephrase the questions in this manner. First, Jesus inquires, "Are there any passages in Scripture that address your question?" Second, He asks "What is your understanding of those passages?" Although the man's answer does not develop his understanding, I believe that is in part because these passages are quite clear and direct. And, knowing that his original question reveals his belief that eternal life can be obtained by his effort, little more needs to be said regarding how the expert believes eternal life is to be inherited. He is to love God and he is to love his neighbor. He believes that effort will result in the certain inheritance of eternal life. (It is somewhat ironic, but I want us to notice that this man has now answered the very question that he had asked. Both his question and answer reveal things about himself. Yet at this point he has not gained any information from which he can critique or renounce Christ!)

I want to ask us a question. Is it possible to love God with all one's heart, soul, strength, and mind apart from having a regenerate heart? I also want to ask a second question. Is it possible to love your neighbor as yourself apart from having a regenerate heart? The Biblical answer to both questions is clearly "NO!" Salvation, forgiveness of sin, cleansing, renewal, and regeneration is by grace alone, through faith alone! Christ's answer in verse 28 to "Do this and you will live," is intended to confront this individual with the reality of his helplessness to do that on his own. Being knowledgeable of the Scriptures is not the same as understanding the Scriptures. The testimony of the apostle Paul, after his conversion, relates how intensely he sought to love God with his entire being. Yet he came to realize that was all rubbish "compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord."

The words of Ephesians 2:8-9 are likely familiar to many here today. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” If we “do” anything to receive salvation it is simply to believe; but that too is a gift from God!

Not understanding the principle of salvation through faith, the expert in the law presses further into the conversation with an attempt to justify himself. He is intent on establishing his righteousness on the basis of his efforts. He will seek clarification or definition regarding the identification of his neighbor. He does so, likely on the assumption that his actions have already accomplished what is requested in the law regarding the love of one’s neighbor. Just imagine this internal conversation. “Last week I helped the neighbor to my right cut down a tree in his back yard. And the neighbor on my left; I trim the edges of their lawn because they don’t have time to do that. And the neighbor across the street; well I don’t see them often but I pray for them regularly. I certainly do love my neighbors!”

It is here that we encounter the actual parable of the Good Samaritan. It is presented in response to the question “And who is my neighbor?” I do not intend to go into a detailed study. But we will take enough time to identify three primary details.

First, this parable presents a situation of need. The journey from Jerusalem to Jericho was about fifteen miles. The terrain is both mountainous and desert. There were few inhabited places along the way. And there obviously would be no street lights or highway patrol. An individual traveling alone would have legitimate concerns about safety. As Jesus relates the parable a man is attacked, robbed, and severely beaten somewhere along this road. He is in need.

Second, note that all three individuals who come down that road are aware of the man’s situation. It is stated that each of them “saw” the man. The word describes the experience of one who is an eyewitness. None of these individuals could claim that they had not or did not notice; this is not a report that they watch on the six o’clock news. (Just as an aside, we cannot always choose who would cross or lie in our path. The actual statement in verse 31 is that this was a coincidence – “The priest happened to be going down the same road...” Neither can we choose the level of need of those who cross or lie in our path.)

Third, one of these individuals makes the choice to care for the man in need. It is not the priest. All priests were of the tribe of Levi. A priest had responsibilities of service in the temple, including offering prayers and sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. You would expect this individual to be one who cares; but he does not stop. The Levite also does not stop. Not all Levites were priests. Those who were not priests had the responsibility to take care of the temple. Again, you would expect this individual to be one who cares, but he does not stop. It is the Samaritan who makes the choice to care for the man in need.

At this point some additional background information is important. As Jewish exposition and commentary developed over the centuries of the Old Testament, some applications of the Scriptures were constricted. Of particular interest in this situation is how the command to love your neighbor became limited in its scope. The application was narrowed so that the command applied only in relation to fellow Israelites and full proselytes. Samaritans, foreigners, and resident aliens who did not join the community of Israel within twelve months are excluded. In practice that would mean that if the one injured in the parable had been a Samaritan, it would be within the bounds of their application of Scripture to just walk on by.

But in the parable it is the Samaritan who stops. Had the Samaritan been the one in need, the Jews had crafted their theology to allow them to ignore his need. Yet, he stopped! And it is the Jews who do not stop, even though the one in need is a fellow Jew. In essence this parable of Christ turns the accepted theology of the day upside down!

Having presented this parable, Christ asks a question of application. It is found in verse 36. “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” Please read the question carefully? And compare it with the question asked by the expert in the law in verse 29. The question offered in verse 29 is “And who is my neighbor?” These two questions are significantly different. The question asked in verse 29 is externally focused. It is asking about people “out there?” The question in verse 36 turns the focus internally. It seeks examination of the motivation of the one who cared for the man in need.

Let’s look at these two questions from another perspective. If you answer the expert’s question posed in verse 29 (“who is my neighbor”), the answer is the man who was beaten and left half dead. That’s his neighbor. Answering that question, however, does not bring the focus to his heart. But if you answer the question Christ gives in verse 36, you will focus on the one who responded to the man in need. And the door is open to look inward, with reflection, and consider what is needed from me to be a neighbor.

In verse 33 we’re told that when the Samaritan “saw,” the man in need he “took pity” on him. This is a word that focuses on what happens within; literally in one’s “inward parts.” Beyond its use in parables, there is no instance of this word being used to describe the actions of men. It is always used elsewhere to describe the attitude of Jesus. And when used of Christ, it describes His mercy in the strongest of terms. It highlights the depth of God’s mercy.

What is being taught here is my need of Christ’s heart when viewing people and responding to them. Do I have that? Do you have that? Do I see people in and through the eyes of Christ? Am I a neighbor to people in my world?

In response to this final question by Christ, the expert gives a correct reply. The individual who was the neighbor to the man in need was “the one who had mercy on him.” The neighbor was the one who was concerned with the welfare of another and evidenced grace and kindness to them. When this term is used in reference to God, it refers to His gracious faithfulness.

The interaction concludes with Christ challenging the expert in the law to “Go and do likewise.” The conversation that began almost as an interrogation concludes with a pointed request for application of God’s Word. That is what I would like for us to consider now, some of the practical applications of this passage of Scripture for us.

In any interaction with the Scriptures it is important to ask the right questions. That is especially true if the question relates to how one can come to possess eternal life. The focus of the expert’s question in Luke 10:25 is on himself and his effort. While Scripture reveals that others ask the same basic question, the context of their question reflects their awareness of need for forgiveness, for repentance, for God’s intervention of grace and mercy. The expert in the law believed that his effort, his “work,” could merit or earn eternal life for him. Please consider the words of Christ recorded in John 5:39-40. “You diligently study the Scriptures **because you think** that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, **yet you refuse to come to me to have life.**” Eternal life is not obtained through what we do, or through our knowledge of the Scriptures. It is obtained only through a relationship of faith in Christ. However phrased, the right question asks “Where can I find the answer to my need for forgiveness, grace, and mercy?” The answer to that question lies outside oneself. The answer to that question is given only in and through Jesus Christ. If you are asking that question today I would invite you to visit with me at the end of today’s service.

The second application returns our attention to the question Christ asked in verse 36. It is important that we clearly hear the answer that Christ gives. His interest is that we consider what is in our heart that impacts how we are a neighbor to others. The answer is not to the question of who is my neighbor. That is not an unimportant

question. But it is more important to first answer the question of who I am; of where, how, when, and why am I being a neighbor to others. The focus needs to be first and foremost on personal application.

Before moving to additional points of application, there are two issues that I believe need to be addressed. First, I believe it is important to restate and reinforce that it is God's desire that as the believer grows in their relationship with Christ, we reflect more and more of Christ's character. The more that we possess the character of Christ and demonstrate that in our relationships with others, the more we will be a neighbor to others around us. Being a neighbor is thus not a matter of position, finances, geography, personality, or time availability. It is a matter of the heart. I believe we sometimes struggle with the application of Christ's teaching of this parable because we've been hesitant to absorb His heart. Second, we need God's wisdom and direction in being a neighbor to others. I say that knowing there are more needs, far more people in need than any of us can realistically respond to adequately. So the question we need to ask God is where, when, or how we are a neighbor to others. At times we are tempted to either try to meet every need we see or withdraw and not move to meet any need; we're just overwhelmed by the number or variety or depth of needs we see. Neither response is appropriate. And neither response reflects Christ. He did not meet the need of every individual during His earthly ministry. But neither did He disengage from overload. His heart was always that of a neighbor, but God guided His response. I see that most clearly in Matthew 9:36-38. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"

I want to move now to a third application from the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is wise for a church to have an established benevolence policy to guide its fulfillment of Christ's desire that we be a neighbor to those in need. Just like any of us as individuals, a church faces more needs than we are able to meet. Those needs run the gamut of the drop-in request for assistance with utilities, groceries, or gas to ongoing situations of health or unemployment within our church family. We do have guidelines and operational procedures to assist us in our response. Our response to needs is designed to be more than simply financial. Our intent is that we live in obedience to Christ's challenge to be a neighbor that is moved by mercy and grace to truly help in ways that assist in health and recovery. The fact that we treat all requests and our responses with confidentiality means that we do not give a public reporting of our benevolence activity. However, it is important to know that there is appropriate accountability within our procedures. I also want to thank you for your generosity each communion Sunday when our ushers are at the worship center exits receiving your contributions specifically for use in our benevolence funds. That generosity has allowed us to receive and distribute around \$20,000 to date this year for benevolence needs.

There is one final application that I desire to address. Sharing Christ with others is a loving demonstration of being the kind of neighbor that God desires us to be. As we live in obedience to the urging of Scripture to be witnesses to Christ we demonstrate that we see people as God does, in spiritual need, and act in ways that move to address that need.

In recent weeks we have begun to communicate that this fall, on November 17, 18 and 19 we have the opportunity to be a neighbor to our friends, work associates, family members, and actual neighbors. On those days we host Andre Kole. The primary intent of all the effort that is being invested in those events is to provide an opportunity to introduce people to the person of Jesus Christ. As we move into the fall each of us will be asked to identify a prayer list of five individuals that we can personally invite to one of the evening events. Our mission, should we choose to accept it, will be to pray that God would allow us the privilege of being a neighbor to these individuals.

Another expression of this final application is the various mission trips that individuals and teams from this church participate in each summer. Because most of these trips involve travel some distance from Wichita, we

may not think of them in the context of being neighbors. Yet, in principle, they express another way in which we fulfill God's desire that we be a neighbor to all who are without Christ.

As we conclude today, we have allowed time in the service for individuals who participated on two of these trips to share some highlights of their trips. We will hear from those individuals shortly. But first I would ask that we bow in prayer.