

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

We are in a series that's taking us through the parables of Jesus so let's turn to Luke 10 as we look at one of the most familiar parables of them all.

Luke 10:25-37

When we hear "lawyer" we think of a Perry Mason type lawyer, prosecuting or defending cases in court. This lawyer isn't that. He's an expert on all things to do with the law of Moses. Right away we are told that his motive isn't to get the truth from Jesus, he wants to put Jesus to the test. He wants to trap him.

He does this by asking a great question: *what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* That's really the big question, isn't it? How do I enter the kingdom of God? How do I go to heaven? No bigger question. It's the question on Nicodemus' heart. It's the question the rich young ruler asks Jesus: what good thing must I do to have eternal life?

The Jews were taught by their rabbis that they had everything they needed to enter the kingdom of God: as Jews they had the right lineage: they were God's chosen people. They had the scriptures, they had the law. They had the ceremonies and the traditions. They had circumcision. These were the things that, if adhered to, qualified them to enter God's kingdom. But still there was a nagging doubt. A sense that they fell short. Their conscience accused them. Their heart accused them. They *knew* they weren't qualified. After the rich young ruler told Jesus he had kept the law from his youth, he asks, "what do I still lack?" He knew, deep inside, that he lacked something.

This is the human state. We live with a nagging sense that we don't measure up. We're not doing enough. For some this creates a sense of terror and others a mild sense of doubt, but deep inside it's in all of us. So we're leaning forward to hear Jesus' response.

Surprisingly, Jesus doesn't offer this lawyer the gospel, he asks him a question about the law: what does the Law say? You're the expert, how do you read it? Why does Jesus point him to the law instead of the gospel. We'll find out in a minute.

The lawyer nails it by quoting the two greatest commandments: love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says, "yep, do this and you will live." You want eternal life? Obey the law.

That might have been the end of the discussion, except the lawyer was upset that he hadn't tripped Jesus up the way he wanted to. He didn't make Jesus look bad. Jesus made him look bad as the expert in the law – as if he should have known the answer all the time. So he asks another question: *And who exactly is my neighbor?*

Hold up Jesus, it's not that simple. How do I define my neighborhood? How far is my love supposed to extend? Who do I have to love, and who can I not love? He's hoping to draw Jesus into a fruitless debate over words and definitions. Pull out your pencil, Jesus, and mark out the boundaries of my neighborhood.

Instead of getting into a debate over words, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. I want us to look at it on two levels. The first level is the overarching truth that Jesus uses this parable to convey. The message that answers the original question, how do I inherit eternal life? The second level is what I am calling the "go and do likewise" level – the way this parable calls us to love and action.

Level One: we can't go and do likewise

Why does Jesus point the lawyer to the law instead of the gospel? Because that's what the lawyer is trusting in. He's an expert, he's got this. If anyone is getting into the kingdom by obeying the law, he is. So Jesus holds up the mirror of the law in front of him so he can see his reflection in this parable.

A Jewish man is beaten, robbed, and left for half-dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Along comes a priest – the holiest, closest to God type person the Jew can imagine. This would be the lawyer's hero...But when he sees the half-dead man, he crosses the road to the other side and walks right by. Along comes a Levite – a Jew born in the Levite family and associated with serving the temple. Surely this guy will be the hero of Jesus' story. But he also crosses to the other side and walks by.

Then comes a Samaritan. Samaritans are despised and hated by the Jews. This isn't a neighbor, this is an enemy. But he sees the half-dead man and has compassion for him. He uses his own wine and oil to bind up the man's wounds, puts him on his donkey, meaning he has to walk, takes him to an inn, pays for all the Jewish man needs, and tells the innkeeper to put any other expenses on his tab. The Samaritan's heart is so full of love, that anyone he came into contact with, even an enemy, was his neighbor.

Jesus then says, which one was a neighbor and the lawyer is forced to answer, the one who had mercy. Jesus then says, "go and do likewise." Put it all out on the line, pour out your life, your resources, expend yourself, inconvenience yourself, sacrificially, at great personal cost for, not just your closest friends, but for your enemies.

The lawyer is beginning to see himself in the mirror of the law, and he's not so sure he's living up to it. But then he realizes, Jesus isn't saying do this once in your life. Or twice. Or once a year. Or even once a month. He's saying live in this place every moment of every day of your life. Go and do likewise. And the lawyer sees that he can never inherit eternal life by obeying the law because when he really understands what the law is demanding of him, he can't do it. He can't go and do likewise. And neither can we.

But you know who can? Jesus. The Good Samaritan is a picture of the Great Samaritan. Jesus left his neighborhood of heaven to come to our neighborhood to have compassion for us. He gave and gave, more than oil and wine, he gave his life on the cross so that his blood could heal us of our sin. So that his love could heal us of our brokenness. So that his acceptance could heal us of our enmity with God.

We live in such a broken world. We are sinners, but we are also sinned against. Our relationship with God was broken by sin, but we were created to know God and long for a relationship with our Creator. We have eternity set in our hearts, but we know we aren't qualified to inherit eternal life.

That's why Jesus came! He came to save us and redeem us and adopt us as dearly loved sons and daughters of God. If you are trusting in Jesus do you know that God loves you ferociously as a son? As a daughter?

We can never be saved by keeping the law. Legalism will always leave us with a nagging doubt and fear that we aren't qualified. Cause we can never be justified by the law – because we can't obey it the way God demands we obey it.

When we put our faith and trust in Jesus, he saves us. He forgives us. He fills our account with his righteousness, as if we were keeping the law perfectly because we have the righteousness of Christ. If you have never trusted in the Lord Jesus, please don't put it off. Believe in him today! Only Jesus can qualify you to enter heaven, but he is eager to give you eternal life as a gift if you will but believe in him.

Level two: go and do likewise

Not perfectly, and not as a way of inheriting eternal life, but out of the grace we've been given and with Jesus' love in our hearts we can begin to live a life of "going and doing likewise." Let's consider some go and do likewise lessons we learn from the parable of the Good Samaritan.

1. The Samaritan draws near to this man with compassion

The Greek word for neighbor means, "the one near". Your neighbor is the one near you. The man is lying half-dead on the road when he sees a priest coming his way, and he feels he is saved! As a Jew, surely the priest will love him as a neighbor, because they are compatriots. This is one of his own. This is his tribe, his people, he is a "near one". Same with the Levite.

But the priest and the Levite pass right by.

When this man looks and sees a Samaritan coming, his heart must have dropped because Jews and Samaritans hated each other. They had nothing but contempt and disdain for each other. They weren't neighbors, they weren't friends, they were enemies. No way, if the priest and the Levite didn't stop, that this enemy was going to stop.

But the Samaritan sees the man...and draws near to him with compassion. ...³³ *when he saw him, he had compassion.* ³⁴ *He went to him...* He went near him, became a neighbor, out of compassion.

The gospels tell us frequently that Jesus was moved with compassion. He would heal the sick out of compassion. He preached the good news out of compassion. He drew near to hurting, wounded sinners with compassion. Jesus came to save us out of compassion. Jesus says to us, *go and do likewise*.

Jesus said that the devil comes to rob and kill and destroy. There are a lot of people who are beaten and robbed and left half-dead by the devil. He uses sin which destroys either by the erosion of corruption or by the destruction of explosion where sin blows up our lives.

We all deal with our own issues that can leave us feeling pretty beaten up at times, and it's tempting to look the other way when we see someone else who's hurting. It's tempting to walk to the other side and keep going. I mean, I've got enough to deal with in my own life. But Jesus has given us love and grace and peace with God and he wants us to take the time to draw near to others in their need with compassion.

I love a story that Joni Eareckson tells about compassion. Shortly after she broke her neck in a diving accident and became a quadriplegic, she was lying in her bed wishing she could die. The idea of a life without the use of her arms or legs left her scared and depressed and angry.

One night after the nurse had gone off duty, she saw a figure crawling toward her in the shadows. She felt scared and helpless lying there not knowing who was slinking around in the dark. It turned out to be her high school friend Jackie. Jackie climbed into bed with her, took her hand and raised it in the air so Joni could see it. Then she began to sing very softly,

*Man of sorrows, what a name! For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

That moment expressed the love of Jesus to Joni and went a long way towards healing her heart. Compassion has us draw near.

2. The Samaritan interrupts his journey to care for this man

There's no doubt the priest and the Levite had traveling for some reason – they had plans, appointments, deadlines to meet. Maybe they were on the journey in the service of the Lord. How easy to rationalize, “I can't take the time to help this man, I've got the Lord's work to do!”

By pretending not to see the need and crossing to the other side of the road, their journey is uninterrupted and they arrive at their destination right on schedule. They might have congratulated themselves on not messing up their schedule with that pesky victim. They avoided getting blood on them, avoided paying out all those expenses at the inn. And he was probably going to die anyway, so it's a win/win. They avoided a major inconvenience AND stayed focused on the Lord's work! Win/win.

Jesus is saying they missed the heart of God and an opportunity to be His hands and feet in that situation. Sometimes God's opportunities come disguised as an interruption and we need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. What looks like an interruption to our plan might actually *be* God's plan. Sometimes it's the interruptions in life that are what life is all about!

ILL: It was Saturday night, Thanksgiving weekend, 1942. Dr. Vincent Senna was just beginning to enjoy a dinner in the popular Coconut Grove restaurant, when he was paged because one of his patients had gone into labor. Grumbling and complaining all the way, Senna rushed to the hospital in time to deliver a baby. And, as it turned out, in time to save his life! Because after he left the restaurant, for unknown reasons, the Coconut Grove burst into flames and over 450 people died in the smoke and flames.

The interruption that ruined his evening also saved his life!

Years ago, the phone rang at midnight. I picked it up to find a young man named Brian on the other line. He had never made a profession of faith but for a while he was coming regularly to church and then he stopped coming. I heard that he was going down a bad road, and many of us were praying for him. Now he's on the other line and he sounds pretty hopeless and depressed and realizes something needs to change. I told him I'd call him in the morning and we'd get together, and hung up. I mean, it's midnight. He interrupted my sleep and I wanted to get back to it as soon as possible. Janice said, you can't wait. He needs help now, you need to go now. He had called me from a fire department, so I called a bunch of them until I found him, and I drove over and at 2am in the morning he prayed to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior. I had the joy of baptizing him a couple months later. Interruptions in life can sometimes be what life is all about!

Let's not get so busy with our schedules and plans (even good, church plans) that we look the other way when a need threatens to interrupt our plans. Sometimes the interruption *is* God's plan!

3. The Samaritan does all this for his enemy

Remember, the Samaritan isn't doing this for a friend, he's doing it for an enemy. In the ordinary course of events, these two men are enemies, but by the Samaritan's act of love, they end up friends. That's what Jesus did for us. He loved us while we were still his enemies and called us friends. And he calls us to do the same.

When the lawyer asks Jesus, who is my neighbor, he's really asking, where are the boundaries? I want to know who I have to love, so I can know who I don't have to love. In this parable Jesus doesn't redraw the boundary lines, he erases them. If we are to love our enemies, then there is no one we are not to love. No boundaries.

And Jesus reverses the question. The lawyer asked, “who is my neighbor?” Jesus reframes the question to be, “whose neighbor am I?” The onus is on us. The responsibility is on us to be their neighbor, not on them to be our neighbor.

We can't go and do likewise perfectly. We can't meet every need. But by the grace of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can be His instruments of compassion to many people as we make this journey of life. So with our hope and confidence firmly planted in what Jesus the Great Samaritan has done, let's make it our aim to “go and do likewise”.