



Getting to the Heart

Luke Series #30

Luke 10:25-37

David Sunday

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God, without Your Word we are famished and become slaves again to unhealthy, ungodly passions. Your Word is life and in it we see the glory of Who You are. So we wait for Your name for it is good in the presence of the godly. We wait for You to reveal Your glory through the preaching of Your Word and we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Please shine into our hearts and show us the light and knowledge of Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ by the power of Your Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Our reading covers one of the most well-known and dearly-loved stories of the Bible. Therein lies the danger of familiarity. It is easier to discuss the parable of the good Samaritan than practice it. So as we read and as I preach, I'm going to assume two things:

1. You probably know this story.
2. This story has not penetrated any of our hearts or transformed our lives as deeply and pervasively as our Lord and Savior intends. He wants to use this story to get to our hearts afresh.

Let's look to God's Word in Luke 10:25:

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ 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. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ 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. 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.' ³⁶ 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."

This is the living Word of Christ. Thanks be to God.

Many hear this parable and think, “That is such a nice story. This is what I love about Christianity. It is about helping people in need and making this world a better place. If only more people lived like this, we might not need all the doctrine, theology and complicated stuff. When you see someone lying bloody, beaten and dying on the side of the road, pull over and help him. Be a good Samaritan.” This ethic has so permeated our cultural consciousness that we have hospitals named after this story. For example, Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove.

There is a problem with applying this ethic. When is the last time you have seen someone lying half dead and bloody on the side of the road? Most of us can go a decade or more without ever encountering anyone in such a dire situation. We may go our whole lives and never come across something this drastic or dramatic. If we are not reading this story thoughtfully and with a humble heart, we can walk away from it feeling pretty good about ourselves, thinking, “Of course, if I ever saw someone in that situation, I wouldn’t respond the way the priest and Levite did. I know I would surely pull my car over and help such a person.” We go on our merry way thinking, “I’ll file that for future reference. Next time I run across a person like that, I will be sure to help.”

When we do this, we are guilty of doing the very thing Jesus is forbidding in this parable. We are justifying ourselves and letting ourselves off the hook by restricting the definition of neighbor to a person who is in extreme need. Of course this parable is not just for the rare, once-in-a-lifetime circumstance or simply about how you treat someone you might run across once or twice in a lifetime. It is not about how you respond to the extraordinary needs you encounter. It is not just about the homeless person living in a cardboard shelter living next to the Fox River or the orphans in Africa, although it is certainly about them.

No, this parable permeates our lives and gets to our hearts. It is about having a heart of mercy to anyone who is in need and applies to the people who surround you every day. One pastor I read made it uncomfortably specific, pervasive and demanding. He said,

It is the church member whom you have not engaged in meaningful conversation for years. It is your spouse who is having a difficult day. It’s your alcoholic uncle from whom everyone else keeps their distance. It’s someone in tears down the aisle from you in church. It’s someone who has made it impossible for you to ever forgive him. It’s your teenager who needs you to interrupt your routine to give her a listening ear. It’s the neighbor who is a nuisance to everyone on the street. [Many times we don’t notice our neighbors until they disturb us.] It is the ailing patient who needs to see your eyes and feel your loving hand as she goes through the valley of the shadow of death. It’s the family who has not showed up for weeks at church or the coworker who seems to need so much. Those are the every-day people who are your neighbors.

It is the immigrant family next door, your secretary at work, your competitor in business, the cashier at the bank, the waitress in the restaurant who is obviously harried because everyone wants something from her right now. As you go to that restaurant after church, what kind of neighbor will you be to her? It's the flight attendant you greet when the plane is running two hours behind schedule. It's your care group, fellow church members and those from other religions whose theology you do not approve of and people whose lifestyles you find morally repugnant. These are your neighbors.

This parable questions whether or not you are being a true neighbor to them. Do they find in you a heart of mercy and compassion? Suppose a documentary is being made about you. Someone is following you with a secret camera, recording every encounter you have with another person throughout the course of a week and interviewing those people after you leave. What would we discover about the kind of neighbor you are? Do you only love those whom you like to love? Are you only attentive to those who don't demand too much? Do you subconsciously rank people according to whom you think is more worthy of your courtesy and compassion? How do you treat those from whom you expect to receive nothing in return? To whom are you truly a neighbor?

These are uncomfortable questions because this parable is telling us that any attempt to restrict the definition of who your neighbor is in order to let yourself off the hook is to fall right into the same trap as the lawyer—to attempt self-justification to feel good about yourself. You excuse yourself from the duty of loving your neighbor and want to narrow the scope of who your neighbor is to a small, easy-to-love group of people.

When you see the word, '*lawyer*' in Luke 10:25, don't think of an attorney-at-law. Think of a theologian who was an expert in the Law of God. He comes to Jesus with a monumental question. "*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" Of course this question is the most important and vital question anyone can ask regarding life or death, heaven or hell. "How can I know that when I die I will be with God in glory in heaven? What is my destiny?" It is a question we all need to face. However, if you look at the question closely, you will see the way it is worded is incoherent. "*...what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" You cannot do anything to earn an inheritance. It is something given to you by virtue of your relationship to someone else.

You might currently be investigating or exploring Christianity and want to know the answer to the lawyer's question. Jesus does not give the direct answer in this parable because He answers hearts rather than questions. This man's heart is not sincere. We read in Luke 10:25 that the lawyer asks Jesus this question to put Him to the test, hoping to trap Him. Jesus will not be trapped, so He does not directly answer the question.

But there is a direct answer to the question of how one inherits eternal life. It has to do with what we will be partaking of at this communion table and what it symbolizes. We are going to take bread which symbolizes the holy Person of Jesus—His body that was crushed, broken and nailed to a cross because of our sin. We are going to drink of the cup which symbolizes the blood of Jesus poured out as a sacrifice to atone, cover and forgive the sins of God’s people who trust in Him. This was poured out to turn away God’s wrath and lavish on us His blessing. The answer to the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” is simple. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; receive Him. Christians who have received Jesus worship around this table and partake of the cup and bread and only those who have received Jesus should partake. But anyone hearing this for the first time is also welcome to come to Jesus in faith; believe on Him and be saved.

Instead of answering the lawyer’s question directly, Jesus tests this man who was an expert in the Scriptures. He turns to Him and says, “*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*” (Luke 10:26). In verse 27, the man gives the best Biblical answer you could ever give to summarize the duty of people to the Law of God. It consists of two things:

1. “*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...*” That is a summary of the first four of the Ten Commandments.
2. “*...and your neighbor as yourself.*” That is a summary of the last six of the Ten Commandments.

When the man gives this answer to Jesus, He is pleased with the answer. He says, “*You have answered correctly; [but to the lawyer’s embarrassment, Jesus kindly tells him to go practice the answer he just preached] do this, and you will live*” (Luke 10:28). The lawyer is getting very uncomfortable. It has been said that the Law of God is a wonderful way of life but an impossible way to live for a sinful person. If our salvation and eternal life depend on our obedience to the Law of God, we are in deep trouble. The whole Bible, including Romans 3:20 makes this very clear: “*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*” When we are face-to-face with the Law of God and hear Jesus say to us, “*...do this, and you will live*” (Luke 10:28) the response of our hearts should be to fall flat on our face before Him and say, “But Lord, I have already failed miserably. I need Your mercy. If my eternal life is dependent on my obedience, I am lost.”

That is not what the lawyer does. He wants to justify himself and make himself right by his own works and actions. He does what every human heart tries to do with the Law of God—redefine the scope of God’s Law to lessen the expectation and demand—by asking Jesus an evasive question. He is trying to dodge the issue when he says to Jesus, “*And who is my neighbor?*” (verse 29). He is saying, “It is not

possible for a man to love everyone! So tell me who I have to love. Who will You be grading me on and how can I know I have passed the test?"

Jesus never answers that question either. Instead, He tells this memorable, poignant story because He is more concerned with asking us what kind of neighbors we are. Who do we love and how do we love? What kind of neighbors are we to the people whom God has placed in our lives? As we look at this story, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts. "How am I doing at loving my neighbor? What kind of neighbor am I?"

I read an article by Chris Tomlinson that was really helpful. He said there are basically four types of neighbors in this story. As we go through it, I want to identify these four types and want you to be asking God to search your heart to see where you identify yourself.

1. **The nothing-something type of neighbor** (Luke 10:30). This is a neighbor who gives nothing but takes something. "*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.*" You know the story and that this was a dangerous, bloody road. It was seventeen miles from Jerusalem to Jericho and the way contained craggy, limestone cliffs. It was notoriously flooded with marauders, robbers and gangs. You traveled that road at your own risk. So you can imagine the robbers reasoning within themselves when they see this poor, Jewish man coming. "This foolish guy should have known better. This is our country, our territory. Who does he think he is, coming onto our turf? He is only getting what's coming to him." Justifying themselves that owing this man nothing, they stripped, beat him and took off, leaving him half-dead. They don't care who their neighbor is but are all about taking, not giving.

Therein lies so much of the world's misery, for man is often man's worst enemy. This world is full of people who give nothing but take something. They are often willing to take something very precious. As we look at this nothing-something type of neighbor, we have to ask ourselves if we have ever been that kind of neighbor. Have we ever been in relationships that were all about us taking, not giving? This probes pretty deeply.

I was thinking of areas where we take and do not give. One of these areas is the sin of fornication which is about taking something but giving nothing. It is about robbing someone of something very precious while promising nothing in return. I also thought about the sin of dishonoring one's parents—thinking about what you can get from them and not about what

you owe them in terms of honor and obedience. I thought about relationships at work between employees and employers. This can go both ways. A manager can think of the people working for him as slaves who are to give constantly while he takes constantly and ignores his opportunity to build them up. Or an employee can think of his place of work in terms of getting what he wants, not about what he can give. Whenever we think, “What’s in it for me?” without giving attention to what we can contribute, we are failing to act in love to our neighbor. We are being a robber and thief.

2. **The nothing-nothing type of neighbor** (Luke 10:31, 32). This type of neighbor is much more common, pervasive and subtle. They give nothing and take nothing. The priest and Levite are examples of this type of neighbor. Of course they have their excuses. Nobody can see a bleeding, dying man and walk to the other side of the street without making some kind of excuse. We can only imagine what those excuses might have been.

I wonder if they were in a hurry to leave the area before the sun went down. You wouldn’t want to be in a place like that after dark. Maybe the priest had just spent an exhausting month doing service in the temple in Jerusalem. He has been busy worshipping God and now wants to get home to enjoy rest. (Sometimes we just want to go out after church and have a nice meal without thinking about anyone else.) If he didn’t get home on time, his wife and children would be on the rooftop waiting for him anxiously. He couldn’t send them a text message saying, “I’m running late.”

I can imagine him thinking, “I can’t do any good for this guy. I can’t do surgery, bind his wounds or save his life. Just looking at blood makes me sick to my stomach. If I try to bind up that wound, I’ll probably do it incorrectly and make matters even worse. If my wife were here with me, she could do it. If I had a first-aid kit with me, I could help this poor man. Besides, he will be dead in an hour or two. It’s a lost cause. I don’t want to be found on a dark, dangerous road standing beside a half-dead, bloody man. Someone might think I did it and throw me in prison. Those thieves could be hanging around the corner waiting for someone to stop to help and I could end up dead as well. I’m also a holy man and cannot touch a dead body. So what will I do? I’ll pray for God to bless and take care of him then walk across the street, turn a blind eye and deaf ear and pretend I didn’t see him.”

The priest and Levite gave nothing and took nothing. They ignored the obvious need. Jesus says this is an inexcusable failure of love. It is not being the kind of neighbor God calls us to be. Am I the sort of neighbor who takes nothing but gives nothing, someone who has studied how to stay at arm's length from those around me so I don't get too close to any real needs? Such religion is worthless.

3. **The something-for-something type of neighbor** (Luke 10:35). This type of neighbor gives something in return for something. The innkeeper is this type of neighbor. He cares for the wounded man and nurses him back to health. I imagine there is some true compassion and mercy in that. But he does it because he is being paid to do it. Do you see yourself in that innkeeper?

Much of our neighbor-love falls into this category and even much of what passes for love in the church. We say, "I'll love to a point as long as it is not inconvenient, too expensive, too risky or demands too much personal sacrifice. I will love those whom I think deserve it—those who find themselves in trouble for no fault of their own and who show promise of giving a favorable return for my love. Maybe they will make a positive contribution to our church or society or will become my friend." We love those from whom we expect to receive something in return.

Such love is certainly better than the first two. If I had to choose between these three types of neighbor-love, I would want someone living next door who is at least willing to help. I might have to bake them banana bread afterwards or do something in return but at least they are considerate and willing to help. We need to ask ourselves: Is this the love God's Law requires of us? Is this the kind of love that can inherit eternal life, rescue us from our misery and woe?

If this was the only kind of love in the world, that helpless traveler would have died on the side of the road. Praise God there is a different kind of neighbor. In a world full of people who give nothing and take something, in communities where almost everyone is determined to stay out of each other's way—to take nothing and give nothing—and where the best thing you can hope for is to find a neighbor who will barter some love for something in return, praise God that there is a better kind of neighbor.

4. **The something-for-nothing type of neighbor** (Luke 10:33-35). The man in this story was an unlikely candidate for this type of neighbor. You can imagine a good Jewish lawyer as he hears Jesus tell the story of the priest and Levite who failed. He probably thought, “Oh, those hypocritical religious leaders. They don’t practice what they preach.” He is waiting for a good Jewish common man to come do what the religious leaders failed to do. Yet it is not a Jewish man but a Samaritan. I can see the lawyer’s face getting red and see him shake as he hears about the Samaritan.

At this particular time in the ^{first} century, the Samaritans were the arch enemies of the Jews. The rivalry was tense; the Jews hated the Samaritans and had no dealings with them. The Samaritan might have thought, “If I were in this man’s shoes, he would not have helped me but instead kicked me like an animal, cursed me and left me to die. Why then should I help him?”

But this thought never occurred to the Samaritan. He saw the man bleeding and asked no questions, put away any fears in his heart and showed great tenderness and care. It was not like casting a bone to a dog. He treated the man with dignity and honor as a fellow heir made in God’s image. He probably had to rip some of his own clothes in order to bandage this man’s wounds. He poured on oil to heal and cleanse the wound and wine to disinfect it. He loaded the man onto his own mule which meant he would have to walk the rest of the way to the inn. He brought the man there and stayed all night to care for him. The next day he left two denarii for the man to stay there during his recovery. (Two denarii is about two days wages—enough to keep the man there for 24 days.) He said to the innkeeper, “*Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back*” (Luke 10:35).

The idea of a good Samaritan seemed like an oxymoron to a Jew. He did all he could to love his neighbor. No one is watching; he doesn’t know his neighbor and his neighbor can never repay him. But in this story Jesus gives us a beautiful illustration of the mercy and compassion that fills the heart of God. It does not look at those in distress and stay at a distance. Instead, mercy stops in the middle of activity without minding the interruption and stoops down into the dirt and mess. This kind of mercy will cause you to get dirty and will cost you something. It stops, stoops and spends—giving whatever it takes to minister to the need.

Jesus makes the point of His parable by asking a different question from the lawyer's. He does not ask, "Who is my neighbor" for your neighbor is anyone in need. The question Jesus asks is "*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*" He said, [he couldn't get the word 'Samaritan' out of his mouth] *'The one who showed him mercy'* [the one who stopped, stooped, spent and gave while expecting nothing in return]. *And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise"'* (Luke 10:36-37).

This is the standard of God's Law and the two-edged sword of God's Word. Give wherever there is a need, no matter what the inconvenience, freely, expecting no return. That is the life of love that should characterize God's people. That is the kind of neighbor God is calling us to be. It is beautiful, isn't it? If you were the one beaten, bloodied and left on the side of the road, what kind of neighbor would you want? You would want a neighbor who is willing to stop, stoop and spend, expecting nothing in return. If you were in misery, you would need mercy.

So where are you in this story? With whom do you most identify? If you read it with an honest and humble heart, you will find (like me) that you are all over the place. Have I ever been like the robbers and thieves, wanting something for nothing? Yes, I have. Have I ever been like the priest and Levite, so caught up in my religion that I walk through this world giving and taking nothing—not noticing the people all around who have needs? Yes, I have. Have I ever been a neighbor who gives something but wants something in return? Yes, I have. Have I ever been, by the grace of God, like the good Samaritan who gave expecting nothing in return? Maybe by the grace of God I have. But here is the question: If your salvation depended on loving perfectly all the time, if that is the kind of love that inherits eternal life, how many of us would want to stake our eternal salvation on how well we have loved our neighbors? Not I.

Out of all the characters in this story, the one I believe Jesus wants us most to identify ourselves with is the wounded, bleeding traveler who is left for dead on the side of the road. We are all like that traveler only we are in worse condition. There is a thief who has mugged us all. Satan has come to steal, kill and destroy us. We are not just dying. The Bible says we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Our hearts are hostile to the only One Who can help us. He was not our neighbor. He is the Creator of the universe but He came down. He stopped and stooped. He was moved with compassion at our plight.

He left his Father's throne above
so free, so infinite his grace!

(from And Can It Be that I Should Gain by Charles Wesley)

At this point in Luke's Gospel, what is Jesus doing? He is traveling on a road. He has set His face resolutely to go to Jerusalem and is on a journey where He will not only risk His life to save us but at the cross, He will confront the thief called Satan and the robber of sin and death and lay down His life. He

will pay a debt that we can never repay to Him. He will defeat death and the devil. And by His wounds we will be healed. He is more than a good Samaritan; He is the ultimate Great Samaritan. Look at the good Samaritan and see in him a reflection of the Great Samaritan Who radically loved us, pitied us and showed compassion on us when we were His enemies. Phil Ryken says, “He traveled a much greater distance to help people in much greater need at much greater cost.”

Jesus has already paid in advance whatever it cost to complete our redemption. He says He will come back into this world where you are healing from your sin by the grace of His salvation and take you to be with Him. He will lavish on you forever such glory and riches. You will never be able to repay Him but only to say through all eternity: “*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain*” (Revelation 5:12).

Only Jesus has fully and completely loved His neighbor as Himself, fully obeyed that Law and inherited eternal life for all who trust in Him. Because He did this, we who believe can now live. Because we now live in Him, we are empowered by His Spirit to be that kind of neighbor in a dark world. Thank You, Jesus!

What a difference the order of these words makes. “Do this and live” is an impossible burden for a sinful person. But praise God that in Christ the order of these words is reversed. “Live and you will do this. Live by His Spirit and you will become this kind of neighbor.”

Let Him work His way into your heart. As He does, your works will start to reflect His heart. Jesus loves you and in mercy gave Himself up for you. Hear Him say, “*You go, and do likewise*” (Luke 10:37). Love as you have been loved.

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