

Text: Luke 10:25-37

Title: The Good Neighbor (Samaritan)

Truth: If you are a Christian, show mercy to others.

Date/Location: Sunday June 2, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

The whole situation arises because a scribe, a so-called expert in the law, poses a question about the Law of Moses to Jesus.

The lawyer's commitment to obedience hinges on the "technical" meaning of the word *neighbor*. He hopes to limit the love he has to demonstrate to a smaller group of people. In other words, he is not really committed to obedience at all!

I. General Approaches to the Parable

We must approach this passage carefully because it is so well-known—or it is *thought* to be well-known. We must not over-complicate it, over-liberalize it, over-humanize it, or in any other way make it say what it does not actually say.

- A. The liberal approach: it is a story about how to be nice to people. It is about moralism, particularly toward "the least of these," toward undesirable people. But this understanding of the text removes it from its context about eternal life. The lawyer's question sets the context for us: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 25).
- B. The works-based approach: this parable tells us that we need to do good to people to obtain eternal life. But this understanding of the text disconnects the parable from the larger theological context. Namely, it is *impossible* to "do this and you will live" (v. 28). Eternal life, the rest of Scripture tells us, cannot be earned by good works.
- C. The over-complicated approach: the parable is so subtle that almost no one can understand it. We must dig to find the meaning that is hidden from view. But this view makes the meaning unavailable to the regular reader, attacking the clarity of Scripture.

II. A Question: In One Way Bad, In Another Way Good

- A. The Bad: The lawyer tested the Lord. By the wording here Luke reveals to us that his attitude was very poor. It was not an honest

question. He had his idea of what the answer should be, and wanted to see if the Lord Jesus had the right answer.

Imagine a KJV-only advocate asks the question: “What Bible version is the best?” He knows what his preferred answer is; he knows what our view is because he already has a sense of what we teach here, but he does not want to be persuaded.

Or imagine someone who denies that repentance is part of the good news about Jesus. He might ask a question, “Do you believe repentance is part of the gospel?” but it is not a question really. It is a pretense to state his case.

Or imagine a person who believes that someone must earn merit with God by doing good works and who desires to attack the Bible’s teaching of salvation by faith alone. In other words, this person is not an honest inquirer, but a troublemaker. She might ask, “So do you believe a murderer sitting on death row can believe in Jesus and be saved?” Of course, I believe that because true belief in Christ *does* save even the most wretched of sinners. But she is implying that I *also* believe that works are insignificant, have no part in salvation, and that I am unjust because I believe that “good” people will go to Hell while this “bad” person goes to Heaven. The implications are inaccurate, and the person is trying to justify their own view by mischaracterizing our view and making it look bad. Paul ran into this himself, so it is no surprise that we do, and certainly no surprise that Jesus did as well.

B. The Good: The question of the lawyer was this: What shall I do to inherit eternal life? This is one of the most important questions a person can ask, and several have asked it:

1. A young rich ruler asked, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” See Matt. 19:16.
2. “How can a man be righteous before God?” Job 9:2, also 25:4.
3. “How can a man be born when he is old?” John 3:4.

III. Jesus Replies

- A. Jesus replies to the question with His own question. He asks the lawyer to confirm his own reading of the law, that is, how he understands it.
- B. The lawyer answers correctly by putting together Deuteronomy 6:5 with Lev. 19:18. Flawless love toward God and neighbor is the way that is required. On another occasion, Jesus said the same thing (Matthew 22:37-40).
- C. This answer is not immediately obvious. How is this the way to eternal life in the Old Testament? I perceive that many people think that the sacrificial system was their way of salvation. Some people may think that, but that is not how the Law of Moses presents it, and it is not how this lawyer perceived it to be. Indeed, even in this era the lawyer understood that animal sacrifices do not cause a person to inherit eternal life.
- D. It is interesting that these commands both are connected to the identity of God Himself. In Deuteronomy 6, “The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” In Lev. 19:18, “I am the LORD.”
- E. Think now about the lawyer’s answer. Love God. Love neighbor. Are you there?
- F. Jesus said in verse 28 that the lawyer answered *correctly*. “Do this and you will live.” Is it hard to accept that Jesus answered this way? This is a message that we see several times in the Old Testament: Lev. 18:5, Ezekiel 20:11, 13; Rom. 10:5, Gal. 3:12. In the sense of the Mosaic Covenant, there was a promise of extended physical life if the people were obedient. They would live long in the land (Exodus 20:12). This principle became a kind of short-hand slogan regarding the Law. This was the “righteousness of the law.”
But this was never the way of salvation. It was for physical life, but it could never be obeyed sufficiently (i.e., perfectly) to earn eternal life in heaven. That kind of righteousness only comes to a person through faith in Jesus, connecting him to the perfect sacrifice and perfectly righteous one who willingly shares that standing to those who believe.

I imagine that people heard this principle of the law. Then they coupled it to their prideful desire to control their own destiny and morphed the promise of physical life into a promise of eternal life. “If I DO, I will LIVE. I can DO that!” Exodus 19:8 seems to indicate that the people, serious and well-intentioned though they were, were focused on the “doing” of the Law. It was not so much relational or dependent on God as it was performance.

The problem is that you CANNOT DO that. The law was designed to show humanity their sin. A genuine person would recognize that despite all their efforts, they cannot “do” to live. They can do “some” but if they offended in one point, they are guilty of all the law. They would know the sinful darkness of their heart. We, like they would know their attitude does not match what the law called for—we do not love holiness like God; we do not hate wickedness like God; we do not love our neighbor like God; we do not maintain inner purity like God; we are not of the same heart as God. We stand in need of something beyond mere obedience to a law code.

- F. I am fascinated with how the lawyer knew to answer with content this good. His answer was more relational and caring than mere law obedience. Still, it appears that he conceived of eternal life as something earned. He thought that if you love God enough, and love your neighbor enough, and can demonstrate somehow that you are genuine, then you will be saved. Instead, he should recognize that he cannot do that, and call out to the Lord for mercy. Ask God for help; present himself before the Sovereign of the universe and humble himself before God. Instead, he was testing the Lord with his question.
- G. Thankfully, God will save anyone who calls out to him in the name of Jesus Christ.

IV. The Lawyer Digs a Hole

- A. The lawyer would have done well to stop at this point and think about whether he was doing what he professed. But in verse 29, he continued. Luke reports that he wanted to justify himself—that is, to underscore that he is right. He doesn’t want his test of the Lord to fall short of revealing something negative about Jesus. He

did not want to leave his conscience in a state where he thought he might be falling short of eternal life.

- B. The lawyer believes the assertion about loving God and neighbor—but only when it fits certain criteria. So, he asks, “And who is my neighbor?” The implication is that he can rightly *hate* certain people, not love them, because they are not “good enough” to be his neighbor. Now it is true that there is a righteous hatred for evil and evildoers. But that must be coupled with compassion for the lost. A malicious, ugly, spite-filled feeling of personal animus toward a sinner is not what righteous anger against sin is. To be like God, you must temper your fleshly tendency toward unbalanced hatred of people and replace it with love and mercy. Remember, judgement is without mercy to those who show no mercy.

V. The Parable

The story the Lord tells is simple yet has a profound lesson.

- A. The narrative is easy to understand. An all-too common occurrence befell an unfortunate traveler from Jerusalem down to Jericho. The trip was 17 miles long, a descent of almost 2/3 mile in elevation. This was a trip through the bad part of town. The man was robbed by highwaymen who took everything and nearly took his life too. They are the epitome of those who lack care for humanity.
- B. A priest and a Levite, who are *supposed* to be the embodiment of godliness and compassion, ignored the man as if he were roadkill. These symbols of virtue are *not* good neighbors.
- C. An unlikely neighbor comes along—a Samaritan. He is the last person that a Jewish person would expect. *He* fulfills the requirement to love one’s neighbor? Indeed he does—he cared, he bandaged, he poured oil and wine on his wounds, put him on his animal, brought him to a hotel, cared for him more, gave money for two whole days wages to help the man, and promised to make the innkeeper whole if there was more need. This guy not only cared for the injured man, but he also went above and beyond.

VI. The Lesson of the Parable

- A. Jesus did not directly answer the man's question. He did not say that the priest was the lawyer's neighbor, nor was the Levite the lawyer's neighbor. He did not even say that the good Samaritan was the lawyer's neighbor. He did not say that the traveler was the lawyer's neighbor. He was saying that the Samaritan was neighbor to the injured man.
- B. The Lord Jesus asked the lawyer which man was good to the stricken traveler? The lawyer gave the obvious answer. Jesus told him to go and do likewise. The lawyer was not supposed to be like a priest or Levite. If he were to have the love of God for neighbors, he was to be like a good Samaritan!
- C. That is, Jesus turned the question around and pointed it directly at the lawyer. Do not redirect from your own character to that of other people. Circle right back around to yourself. Are *you* going to be a loving neighbor? Do *you* care about other people? Where in the law does it say that *neighbor* is limited to your preferred group of people? The question is not what kind of neighbor is worthy of your exalted majesty, but what kind of neighbor are *you*? Do you really love God and other people, or do you love people who love you, or people who are beautiful, or people who are pleasant, or people who can give you something in return? Or do you treat all humans as they truly are, created in the image of God?

Conclusion

To whom should you be neighbor? To all kinds of people. To those who are downtrodden, despised, rejected, marginalized, and hated. To the poor and addicts. To those victimized by sin and confused by all the immoral messages that are shouted from the rooftops. To those who need some extra cash, to those who are depressed, to those who are grumpy, to your family members! To homeless and abused children and people walking down the sidewalk. To Jews. To foreigners, refugees, illegal immigrants. To people of the political movement that you despise. But the focus is not ultimately on *them*. It is on *you*. Are *you* a love-your-neighbor type? Or do you pick and choose who your neighbors are? MAP