

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 10:25-37

Reading: Luke 10:25-37

What Must I Do?

Sermon #46

August 25, 2019

I would speculate that people in countries with significant Christian heritage have heard the story of the Good Samaritan. The term “**Good Samaritan**” is used so freely in English language that it has taken on meanings far beyond a literal definition of the adjective noun combination which would be, “a person of Samaritan origin who has favorable characteristics.” Some dictionaries give it a very broad definition: **Oxford Dictionary**, *A charitable or helpful person.*” **The Urban Dictionary**, *“someone who selflessly helps others.*” **American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms**, *“A compassionate person who unselfishly helps others.”* **Merriam-Webster Dictionary**, *“A person who is generous in helping those in distress.”* There are also legal definitions that are part of **Good Samaritan Law** that “offer legal protection to people who give reasonable assistance to those who are or whom they believe to be, injured, ill, in peril, or otherwise incapacitated.” Most states have a Good Samaritan Law, however, New Mexico does not.

Today we will be studying the passage in Luke chapter 10, verses 25 to 37, the story that is the foundation for the idiom of the Good Samaritan and the law. I believe we will discover a lesson within this scripture passage more important or goes beyond that of being compassionate to people in trouble.

Let’s open in prayer

In a moment we will have the reading of God’s Word. Afterward, we will go back and examine verses 25 to 37 in detail. As you are turning to Luke 10:25, let me briefly remind you of the context. Chapter 9 ended with people coming to Jesus

saying they wanted to follow Him, but finding excuses for why they could not do so at that time. Chapter 10 begins with Jesus sending the 72 disciples out who were ready and willing to immediately serve Him. When the 72 returned, they were joyful that even the demons were subject to them in the name of Jesus. At that time Jesus cautioned them not to become proud about the power He gave to them to carry out their ministries but to instead rejoice that their names were recorded in heaven. Receiving God's grace in salvation is much more important than the ability to do supernatural things.

Jesus then went on to express before these disciples His own great joy that the Father had revealed the gospel to these "babes" who were common people, while hiding these great truths from the wise and intelligent of society. Jesus made clear God opposes the proud and gives his grace to the humble. The Father is revealed by the Son to whomever the Son desires. Jesus then told these disciples they were blessed because they had seen what the prophets and kings of old had desired to see and hear and had not, for his time had not yet come.

Please stand as Ivan reads God's Holy Word.

The Question

Look at verse 25, "And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" Luke calls attention to what happens next by adding an interjection to the conjunction connecting; "And behold." He wants his readers to pay attention. It is clear is Luke calls specific attention to the actions of this lawyer. There is a great contrast between this man, who as a lawyer, would have been considered wise and intelligent and the 72 disciples who were willing and humble. It becomes an example of why Jesus

praised the Father for hiding the gospel from such proud people while revealing it to the humble. This lawyer had the gospel hidden from him.

The lawyer asks the question that he already knows the answer - for he is referring to the Law of Moses. Lawyers had seats in the Sanhedrin and the function of a lawyer and a scribe were about the same, so the terms may be used interchangeably. In general, their concern was the Torah, the five books of Moses and the rest of the Scriptures were secondary. Many of the Sanhedrin took liberal views of the Scriptures and denied miracles, angels and the promised resurrection of the dead. This was in contrast to the Pharisees who were more conservative in their view of the Scriptures, but gave greater priority to Rabbinic traditions. One can observe varying approaches similar these approaches with bad doctrine in churches today. We need to learn from history and be grounded in the Scriptures alone.

Note that this particular lawyer stood up, so it appears everyone had been seated while Jesus had been teaching. He then asks a question designed to put Jesus to the test. While this question could be from an evil motive to challenge in the effort to find something by which to accuse Jesus, as both the Pharisees and Sadducees did in Matthew chapter 16 and 19, we can give this lawyer the benefit and assume that he wanted to know Jesus' answer to an key question in order to see if he should continue to listen to Jesus or not.

He respectfully addresses Jesus as “[teacher](#)” and asks, “[what shall I do to inherit eternal life?](#)” This is the same question the rich young ruler would ask Jesus in Matthew 19:16 and Luke 18:18. There really is no more important question a person can ask than how to secure an eternal future. It is a question that should be at the forethought of every human, but it is a question that is usually suppressed

when it does arise. People are not comfortable thinking about death and what lies beyond it. What to eat or drink or wear? What to purchase? What to do for entertainment? What to do in the pursuit of happiness? – pursuit of happiness, for the world does not understand joy. Those are the personal questions that fill up the minds of most people most of the time. However, more important is the question of what will happen to you after you die. That is why Solomon wrote, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.” He then adds, “The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth *or pleasure.*” (Ecclesiastes 7:2 & 4)

This lawyer’s question was significant in that it was very personal in recognizing that eternal life was individual and not corporate. In John chapter 8 and in the Old Testament there was a common idea among many of the Jews that they would go to heaven because they were descendants of Abraham. This man understood that having the right genealogy was not enough to inherit eternal life. Young people, just because you are raised in a Christian home does not make you a Christian – you must believe. The lawyer apparently knew the Torah well enough to know that God judged His people and wicked Jews could expect God’s curse, not blessing, in both this world and the next. This was a common theological topic that was debated at the time, and is still debated in religious circles today - what laws had to be kept to gain God’s favor and which ones must be kept to avoid being judged and excluded from heaven. But this kind of debate presupposed that eternal life could be earned. But the truth is “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Legal Answer

Jesus answers the lawyer's question as He often did; he asks a question back to expose what the person's true motive was. The lawyer's question, "What must I do?" was more generic than the rich young ruler's question, "what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16)

Jesus points the lawyer back to the law in verse 26, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" Jesus wants to know how this lawyer understood what is taught in the Law about obtaining righteousness. Did he understand the law's condemnation and therefore the need for a person to "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart" (Deuteronomy 10:16) and seek the Lord's mercy and forgiveness as David wrote about in the whole of Psalm 51 and as verse 10 says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Was the lawyer concerned with God's gift of salvation or was he looking for a list of what to do to earn righteousness and a list of what sins to avoid to keep from being condemned. The Jews had to offer sacrifices in their system of works. Many churches practice salvation by works.

The lawyer's answer is amazing in many ways. It is apparent he has thought about this question for he summarizes the entire law in the same way that Jesus would when asked what is the greatest commandment in the Law and we use Jesus' answer here at Canyon Bible found in Mark 12:30-31. It would not have been that unusual if he only had recited from the shema (to hear) in verse 4 of Deuteronomy chapter 6, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" which precedes his answer. Jews were constantly reminded of it since it was written and scripture placed in the Mezuzah (mez·oo·zaw) meaning doorposts and the phylacteries (foo·lak·tay·ree·ies) or amulets worn on their wrist or forehead and

these were thought to save. It was at least somewhat unusual for him to add the command from Leviticus chapter 19, “[you shall love your neighbor as yourself.](#)” (Lev. 19:18) Leon Morris points out that the wording used here for neighbor implies a larger community than those who physically live next door.

Jesus commended the man for his answer, but also challenged him with it saying, “[You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.](#)” This lawyer understood the essence of the Law for all the laws ultimately came down to loving God with all that you are and other people as yourself. If you will do this, then you will also end up keeping all the other laws. However, do not think for a moment that Jesus is commending works as a means to gain righteousness. It is rather a challenge to the man to do what he correctly understands is necessary.

The lawyer’s answer indicated he understood the demand obeying these two laws made on him. Our text states he desired to justify himself, so he answered back with another question, “[who is my neighbor?](#)” A humble man would have confessed his failure to keep these laws and made a more desperate plea to know how to be made right with God. However, this man is not humble. He tries to find a way to justify himself by seeking a qualification or limitation on how far the command to love your neighbor would extend.

The first question that comes to mind in this response is why does he feel he needs to justify himself? Since he is testing Jesus by his question, it would seem unlikely that he really felt he needed to gain Jesus approval. Perhaps it was a quest driven by pride or seeking the approval of everyone present. But I think it is more of an admission of his guilt that his love for others was deficient.

My second question about his answer is why he only seeks a qualification concerning loving his neighbor? Why does he not seek some sort of qualification

for loving God? That is more difficult. But then, what qualification could there be when God's command demands **all** that you are. How would you limit the law's demand to love God with **all** your heart, soul, strength and mind?

As we look at Jesus' response to this question, it must be kept in mind that it is an answer that is really part of the larger question of how can a human be made right with God, so as to, gain eternal life with Him and avoid the death of eternal condemnation. Keep in mind as well that Jesus could have taken the lawyer to task concerning loving God. Instead, He exposes the man's failure to keep the easier command to love other people.

The Answer Illustrated: The Good Samaritan

Jesus begins the story, **"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho."** The first thing to note about this story is that despite this being commonly known as the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus presents it as narrative. In other words, this may well be a true story which Jesus tells to illustrate what it means to love your neighbor and not a made-up story, but it also could have been a story that actually did not happen. A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was not unusual since the main road from Jerusalem to the Jordan valley and points north or east went through Jericho. The distance from the temple mount to Jericho was just over 20 miles, so it was also a full day's journey by foot. The road is steep and winding descending about 3,300 feet from nearly 2,500 feet elevation in Jerusalem to 846 feet below sea level in Jericho. There are many caves and side canyons along that road that provided places for robbers to hide, so it was not uncommon for those traveling alone to be robbed. In this case, they also physically assaulted the man, stripped him of his clothing and left him half dead. The man is in a very desperate situation. He was in need of medical care and to get to a safe place where

he could recover. Having been robbed, he has no means to pay anyone to help him. Because his clothes were stolen, there is no way to quickly identify either his nationality or position in society which could either attract or repel help depending on who happened to come by. He appeared simply as an unknown and unidentifiable man who had been robbed and badly beaten. He was at the mercy of the elements and the compassion of anyone that found him.

The Priest's Role

The story continues in verse 31, “**Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.**” That should have been just what was needed since priests were to be mediators between God and man. Priests were familiar with God's laws and they were to carry them out as living examples of righteousness. This would include not only loving their neighbor, but also showing compassion to even strangers and sinners.

Deuteronomy chapter 14 records that a special tithe was to be collected to help those in need so that the blessings of God would be upon them. Priests, were well respected and easily identified, they of all people would be able to access such help. Who could have been better than a priest to help and see to the care of this man? Unfortunately, in this case, almost anyone.

The text does not tell us why, but when the priest saw the man, not only did not help the man, he went to the opposite side of the road as he passed by. Since the man was half dead, perhaps the priest could not tell from a distance if he was alive or not and he did not want to risk ceremonial defilement by touching a dead body, which is defined in Leviticus 21. This is not that hard to understand as we have read that Jesus had already had several conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees over healing on the Sabbath because they placed more value on their

religious traditions than on compassion which is just the opposite of the requirements of the Lord listed in Micah 6:8, “**what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?**”

Perhaps he was afraid the robbers were still around and would attack him if he did not hurry on his way or perhaps he thought he was too busy doing God’s work to take the time to help a desperate man. Whatever his reasons, the priest proved to be a poor example of a representative of God. He showed no compassion and left the man in his desperate condition without even checking to find out if he was alive.

The Levite’s Role

Reading verse 32, “**a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.**” The Levites were a tribe dedicated to serving the Lord and assisting the priests. In addition, they were dependent upon the tithe I already mentioned, so a Levite would know how to access what had already been collected to help those in need. Surely the man would be helped by this Levite, this man of God. Instead he set aside his calling and his duty and walked on.

The text does not tell us why, but the Levite did the same thing as the Priest and perhaps for the same reasons. When he came to the place where the man was lying half dead and saw him, he also went to the other side of the road and passed on. He also proved himself to be without compassionate and he brought shame to his privileged position as a Levite. He also proved to fear God or the living out of Scripture or loving God was less important than his position because he did not keep God’s command to show love for his neighbor.

The Samaritan's Role

The story continues in verse 33 with a traveling Samaritan, “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.”

Since Jews and Samaritans held disdain for each other going back centuries and this Samaritan was in Jewish territory he could assume the wounded man was Jewish. In John we read, “The Samaritan woman at the well said to Jesus, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?’ (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans)” and the Samaritans treated Jews in the same manner. (John 4:9) The history behind this conflict was that the Samaritans were a mixed race descended from Gentiles brought into Israel after the Assyria captivity and the Jews that had remained in the land. They had developed a hybrid religion of Judaism. Jewish and Samaritan traditions competed against each other in claims of lineage and the proper place of worship as one discovers in John chapter 4.

Even with this history the Samaritan's reaction was in stark contrast to that of the Priest and Levite. First, he felt compassion when he saw the man. There is no indication the Priest or Levite had any feelings of sympathy or pity for the man, and their actions showed the opposite. Second, the Samaritan acted upon his feelings of compassion. He was on a journey, but he stops and goes to the man. The opposite of the Priest and Levite who distanced themselves from him. He then began to give him first aid treatment for his injuries. He used wine and oil to treat the wounds and then he bound or bandaged them up. Although he may not have known how they worked, the alcohol in the wine would serve as an antiseptic to

cleanse the wounds. The oil would seal the wound from the air which would both ease the pain and help reduce infection. Oil and wine were commonly used among both the Jews and Greeks in this manner, and both were commonly carried when traveling as indicated in Genesis 28:18 and Joshua 9:3.

This Samaritan went much further than just giving the man first aid. The man was in bad shape. He could not walk and was in need of extended care, so the Samaritan put the man on his own beast – probably a donkey – and brought the man to an inn and took care of him. Whatever plans the Samaritan had originally for traveling were put on hold while he cared for this injured man. The next day he paid the innkeeper two denarii to care for the man with a promise to pay more if needed when he came back. A denarius was the average wage for a day's labor by a workman. Depending on the inn's daily rate, this would be enough for a couple of weeks or more of lodging. More important was the Samaritan's promise to return and pay more if needed. That not only expressed his compassionate generosity, but inns were not safe places in those days, and the promise to return meant he would keep the innkeeper accountable for the welfare of the wounded man. The Samaritan voluntarily took on the responsibility to provide for the care of this injured stranger.

This Samaritan's acts of compassionate kindness to a stranger was in stark contrast to the callous indifference of the Priest and Levite. Since the man's clothes were stolen, none of these men would have been able to discern the man's ethnicity and especially whether he was a Jew or a Samaritan. That left the question open of whether he was a neighbor or even of the same ethnicity. Both the priest and the Levite lacked compassion even for someone that could easily have been and most likely was a fellow countryman.

The True Answer

Jesus concludes by asking the lawyer the obvious question to make sure he understood its point, “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” The lawyer easily recognizes the obvious truth that it was “The one who showed him mercy.” It is interesting that the lawyer identifies the man by his actions instead of the name “Samaritan” that Jesus used to identify him. It is almost like it was too much for him to say, the Samaritan.

The priest and Levite are the sinners in the story. The point was to show this lawyer the true meaning of the Lord’s command in Leviticus chapter 19, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lev. 19:18) which the lawyer had already said was necessary for gaining eternal life. The contrast between the actions of the priest and the Levite with that of the Samaritan toward an unidentifiable stranger in severe distress showed that **anyone** can be your neighbor. The priest and Levite may have been very careful to fulfill aspects of the Mosaic Law, but they were in fact law breakers since they did not love their neighbor, they showed no compassion on a stranger, they did not love justice or love kindness or walk humbly with God as we saw in Micah 6:8 earlier. The lawyer could not avoid the application of the law in his own life by manipulating the law to limit the definition of neighbor. Attempts to redefine Scripture is common in our day also.

Jesus’ command to the lawyer was “You go, and do likewise”, to be clear this was condemning and not a commendation of earning salvation by the law. The lawyer stood guilty of violating God’s standards and unless he humbly sought God’s mercy to forgive him for his sin, he would remain as condemned as the priest and Levite in the story. There is no indication in the text that he did so. His bondage to the Law kept the gospel hidden from him.

This passage gives a wonderful example of what it means to love your neighbor, but that is not the main point of the passage. The point of the passage is that there is nothing you can do in your own power to inherit eternal life. The law's standards are too high for man to be able to keep. This lawyer recognized that to inherit eternal life he would have to love the Lord God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and love his neighbor as himself. He was not able to do the latter and he certainly was not able to do the former. As the Psalmist wrote, "there is none who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3) and the prophet Isaiah added, "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6) before a holy and righteous God.

The law and sacrificial system were developed to show man that the cost of sin is death and that people's sin is continual. The only hope in the sacrifice was for God to accept it as a substitute, but the hope was in God and not the sacrifice for it would never be sufficient as both Psalm 51:6 and Hebrews 10:4 state. In the Old Testament godly people were saved by faith that God would provide the needed perfect sacrifice in the future, the Messiah. In the New Testament godly people are saved by faith in God for providing the perfect sacrifice in Jesus Christ and believing in him as the Messiah. As Paul wrote, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Romans 1:17) Examine yourself – what are your motives? It is a heart issue – salvation by grace and the faith given by God - or - works that we control. Jesus commands us, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31) simple, straight forward and impossible without God's gift of his Spirit. Amen!