

## ***“The Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-37)***

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. The so-called “parable” of the Good Samaritan is never called a parable in the Bible, but is a story that teaches at first glance what seems to be an impossible set of circumstances. Jesus’ teaching seems overwhelming and impossible for anyone with the lawyer’s mentality. The lawyer’s way of thinking was “I must do for God so that God will accept me,” but Jesus turned everything upside down and unless we see this, the story of the Good Samaritan will remain either an enigma or completely misapplied.

Most people treat it as a story about morality (our society often uses “Good Samaritan” to describe people who have performed acts of heroism or dedication to helping others; and civic awards are named after this story to recognize exceptional citizens). If we carry this way of thinking too far, however, we can easily end up denying the Gospel while insisting that to be right with God, we must *do*! Such thinking often does not consider what **God** has done; but prefers to highlight what **we** have done. We want to take pride in ourselves, but even at that, our doing is full of sin. The “I must do” approach quite simply loses the power of the Gospel.

The scene here -- beginning at Luke 10:25 -- presents this lawyer who overheard Jesus rejoicing over His disciples. He heard Jesus say that the Heavenly Father had hidden things from “the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children (His disciples, v 21).” Evidently, some were being chosen by Christ to know the Father (v 22). What about the lawyer? He was offended by Christ. Was Jesus implying that he wasn’t good enough? **How dare He!** And so, at v 25, we see that the lawyer stood up and the Bible uses language used only in one other place: the same language that described the devil himself who tested Jesus in the wilderness! The lawyer “put Him to the test,” and asked Jesus this question: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life (v 25)?”

This is the devil’s test and wanted Christ to somehow incriminate Himself, but Jesus is the greatest genius who ever lived (after-all He is God) and He turned the answer into a question right back to the lawyer: “What is written in the Law? How do you read it (v 26)?” The lawyer then quoted Scripture (from both Deuteronomy and Leviticus): “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 (v 27).” Jesus then defused the confrontation. The lawyer lost his steam, because Jesus said simply, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live (v 28).”

What the lawyer began to realize, however, was that he had entered a position of embarrassment; his pride was affected. If he had known the answer, then why did he have to ask the question in the presence of all the other people standing around listening? And for that matter, he was probably wondering why he still had so much doubt about the answer.

He knew that the standard of the Law that he had quoted for example did not mean that this love for God from our whole being and life was qualified for only *some* of the time, or even *most* of the time. Rather, our lives are to reflect this *complete* love for God 24/7! There are no breaks! This love in the Law must be *perfect* and God does not grade on the curve! So the lawyer was getting closer to what was *really* on his mind!

He didn't just have a problem with Jesus, but he had a problem with the Law of God! It didn't suit him and it doesn't suit us! It doesn't serve us in the way we want to live and every time we confirm this in our souls we are saying to God (in effect): "I don't want to do what you command me to do! Rather, I want to do what I want to do, even though this makes me a fool and completely guilty before Your righteous judgment!" Like the lawyer, we insist on doing, but because we never do it in accord with God's standards, we are dying.

But the lawyer's pride would not allow him to shut up! Again, the truth came out and he thought, "There must be something wrong with the Law!" So He asks, "And who is my neighbor?" And here again we must think about the words being used. We are too general with our basic answer. We want to give the easy answer. The easy answer is "everybody;" "everybody is our neighbor!"

Here is the danger with that answer: it puts us in the position to play games with God. We can reason: "because 'everybody' is my neighbor, I can be kind and loving to all kinds of folks and that list is indeed very impressive; that's a lot of people, because 'everybody' covers a lot of ground!" But as we play this game and keep ourselves astoundingly busy, the game of "everybody" lets us have good reason to exclude some and of course the moment we exclude *anyone*, we become sinners and liars.

"Neighbor" per biblical definition is more precise than "everybody," it is rather ***the person who is nearby and close at hand***. Your neighbor is per time and place. Your neighbor is in accord to where God puts you in a given moment in time. In that moment and time, your "neighbor" is the person right there! But my goodness, can you just imagine the implications of all of this? In a given moment in time, you might be around HIM! You might encounter HER! Or you could even wind up in the presence of THEM!

Jesus must have shocked the lawyer, because He makes the Samaritan the hero in His story. Quite simply: Jews hated Samaritans. They thought that if a Jew ate with a Samaritan,

that they might just as well eat the flesh of swine. They were mixed-breeds, half-bloods, defilers of what was sacred and therefore enemies of God! These were people to be avoided; and yet in this story the lawyer would have to look up to and admire the Samaritan. The lawyer had not bargained for this.

Those who were considered holy by the Jews, the priest and the Levite passed by the man who had been robbed, stripped, beaten and left for dead. They had no compassion. They had no conviction that this man was their neighbor; that God had called them to serve and to love this dying man. Their hearts were far from God and they rested on their own standards of religion.

But then the Samaritan came and his service was amazing. What he did was the epitome of love, sacrificial service (not merely affection or liking), but dedicated hard work in order to help another who is suffering and in need. The Samaritan was making the dying man's burdens his very own. This was what the Samaritan did. Even when he arrived to the inn and paid two denarii he paid the innkeeper enough money to cover expenses for two, whole *months!* Compassion poured out from the Samaritan and he seemingly acted this way upon a Jew (whom society said had to be his sworn enemy), because the text described the one who was beaten and left for dead as "going down to Jerusalem," a clue that this beaten and dying man was a Jew. But it didn't matter. The Samaritan took God's Law seriously: his neighbor was the one who had been immediately presented to him period.

Who can live with such a standard? It is the holy, good, and pure standard of God! We most assuredly ought to tremble in fear, and this is precisely the point. You and I cannot live like the lawyer. We can't insist that it is all about our doing. If we do, we will qualify and twist the Word of God. It doesn't work and will lead to utter and complete disaster for ourselves. Such a religion leads one straight into a bottomless pit in which our doing is never enough...you are called to take a different view altogether.

If by the Holy Spirit you see your true nature so that the Holy Spirit working through the Word of Christ would strike down your pride; if the Holy Spirit would be merciful to you and make you feel as though you've just been stripped of all your stubbornness, as though your ego had been severely beaten; and if the Holy Spirit would lead you to know your old self -- your old Adam, flesh and sinful nature -- to be that which must be killed, then you would begin to see dear Christian that you cannot be like the proud lawyer anymore, but instead you must be the man robbed, stripped, beaten and left for dead. We are the one in sin dying on the road, helpless to do, helpless to do, helpless to do...*anything*.

Who will save us? Will it be anyone concerned about themselves who doesn't want to get too involved, who wants to mind their own business and say "live and let live," who really just wants to be polite, but not get too messy in their involvement?

Who is willing to have compassion on you, a poor sinner left on the side of the road to die? There is only One: **The** Good Samaritan. He is the only One who takes compassion to save you; to bind up your wounds, to pour out the oil of His healing and the wine of His Holy Communion to save you and forgive you; who bears you up at His own expense; who carries you to shelter and safety; who pays your debt; who does everything to save you. This is not about your doing; it is about **His** doing; it is not about your giving; it is about **His** giving; and it is not about your saving yourself; it is about **His** saving you!

Jesus is the Good Samaritan. Jesus is the One who has found you lying on the road; Jesus is the One who saves you when you were left for dead by sin, the world and the devil; Jesus is the One who picks you up and carries you to safety. What this love, this true love does for you is life-changing.

It gives you a new life, so that the matter of your neighbor is no longer about the Law; it is now a matter of love and the Gospel which drives all love. In our forgiveness and new life through the blood of the Lamb and His glorious victory over the grave, we are now free to share this love that is now ours in Christ!

Everything has changed for you now Christian. We do not lose sight of who the Good Samaritan is, even as we confess that He is in us and we are in Him; and it is no longer about civic awards or proving ourselves or comparing ourselves...those things are dead. We are simply now born again with new minds and hearts. And if Jesus could come to you, even while you were His enemy and save you, then what is it for you to share His love with the person who is nearby and close at hand?!

As Kingdom people we abandon the "everybody" theory, and instead look for the neighbor standing right in front of us and we recount the Gospel: I was standing in front of Jesus: a sinner, the worst of sinners, His enemy, and yet the Lord did not hesitate: He poured out His forgiveness, His mercy, His love and carried me to the Father's house! You dear Christian are no longer lying for dead with no hope. You are now saved by the Good Samaritan! Let us now live in His love!