

The Good Samaritan and His Greater Savior

Introduction

The Text

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.” (Luke 10:25–37)

Law vs. Grace

- A. We have before us this morning, really, a strong case for the tragic impotence of the law and empty religion on the one hand, and the surprising power of grace and the gospel on the other.
 - 1. On the one hand, we tend to think that if we want to refine a man, to reform a man, we need to press in more laws and rules upon him. But often, what we find is we only make him a more sophisticated sinner.
 - 2. On the other hand, we fear that grace and mercy will set a man free to be worse than he already is—if he didn’t care before, now he certainly won’t care. But what we find instead is that, when that grace and mercy is truly received, it certainly does set him free—but it is a freedom, not to go on sinning, but to finally start loving.
- B. That’s the move Jesus is trying to make in this Lawyer’s life here. That’s the move He wants to make in your life and mine. He wants to move us from legalism and self-concerned religion to grace and the profound freedom of love for God and neighbor.

A Lawyer and His Test

- A. Let me begin by making a couple brief remarks. First, you need to know that when Luke identifies this man as a “lawyer” (v. 25a) here we’re not talking about Law and Order kind of stuff, Judge Judy

kind of stuff, like courtroom lawyers. We're talking about Jews who have given their lives to the study of the law of God—the Mosaic Law in particular, the OT in general. They were experts in it.

- B. Which, presumably, is the reason for the second observation I wanted to make at the start here. Did you notice the posture in which this Lawyer approaches Jesus? We might've read so fast that you missed it, but we dare not, because it really sets the tone and trajectory for the whole exchange here: [“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test . . .”](#) (v. 25a).
 - 1. The idea is: “Why are the crowds following after You? Why such a big fuss about You? I’m the expert in the Law. Let’s see what You know. Let’s put You to the test.”
- C. So make no mistake here, though this man comes under pretense of wanting to learn (he calls Jesus [“Teacher”](#) after all), He has no intention of learning. He is testing. He comes under the soft cloak of humility with the venom of pride. He comes offering the hand of friendship with a dagger behind his back. He comes with the tongue of a saint but the heart of a devil.
 - 1. He comes, sadly, I think, like many of us have approached God at times. How many of you have said: “Okay God, I will believe in you, I will obey You, if . . . when . . .” In other words: “First You have to prove Yourself to me. First You have to pass my test.”
 - a. We talk to God as if He were an inferior, as if He were on trial, as if He needs to answer to us. When, in fact, it is precisely the other way around.
- D. But Jesus is merciful. He engages us in the midst of our madness and tries to put us right. And He’s doing that with this Lawyer here. We are not told precisely what this man was after in his testing of Jesus, but we do know that he gets way more than he bargained for.
 - 1. Jesus does three surprising things here in our text: (1) He Turns the Law Inside-Out; (2) He Turns the World Upside-Down; and (3) He Turns Our Eyes Toward Him.

(1) He Turns the Law Inside-Out

Lectures and Labs

- A. This Lawyer begins his test with a question: [“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”](#) (v. 25b).
 - 1. But, now, Jesus, aware of this man’s heart, turns the tables. He responds to his question with a question of His own: [He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”](#) (v. 26). The tester is, himself, put to the test.
- B. And it would seem on the surface of things that he passes, right? It is a very wise answer. Drawing from [Deut 6:5](#) and [Lev 19:18](#) out of the Torah, like a good Lawyer, he sums up the Law perfectly: [“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’”](#) (v. 27).

1. Jesus will give this very answer Himself in other places (Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31). So, certainly, He must concede that the man is right: “And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly . . .’” (v. 28a).
- C. But Jesus doesn’t stop the test here. There is more to this than mere knowledge. “Love God, love neighbor. Well and good. You got it right. But now here is the most important question of all: Do you do it?!” “And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live’” (v. 28).
1. The image in my mind to help you understand this is that this is like some of those classes you took in high school or college where they have the lectures and then they have the labs, right? In the lectures you get the information, you learn the principles. In the labs, you put those principles into practice. And if you can’t get the principles into practice, you don’t really know the principles.
 - a. The point of the lectures is so that you can do the stuff in the lab. The point of learning God’s Word is so that it can find its way out into your life. And where there’s a breakdown between the two, something is wrong.
- D. Well, the Lawyer at this point, no doubt, is starting to feel the heat of Jesus’ examination (and perhaps we are as well)—as He brings him from the lecture into the lab. So he quickly fires back with this question: “And who is my neighbor?” (v. 29b).
1. It is this question that sets up one of the most well-known and beloved parables in all the gospels: The Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Desiring to Justify Himself

- A. But, before we dive into the parable, let’s consider this man’s question for just a moment more. The key to understanding his question is found when we discern his motivation behind it. Did you catch it on our first read? “But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (v. 29).
1. “[D]esiring to justify himself . . .” That’s why he asks. His own self-justification is threatened by Jesus’ call to “do and live.”
 - a. He was feeling good about his knowledge, about his limited, but sufficient, application of these things, but now here he is concerned Jesus is suggesting otherwise: “Surely I am already doing it right? You are not about to say that I am in the wrong here are You? I am a Lawyer! ‘And who is my neighbor?’”
- B. The basic idea with this question is: “Who am I actually supposed to love like this? Surely not everyone. That would be impossible. Define for me who this is and I will do it, though I’m sure you’ll find I’m already fulfilling it. I’m already justified.”
1. It’s a question that is off from the start. This is the sort of thing legalism and empty religion always does. It’s always looking for lines to determine who is in and who is out, who’s right and who’s wrong. But in so doing it effectively reduces the wholesale claim of God on the heart, soul, mind, and strength of a human being.

- a. God is not drawing lines and saying: “Love me a little here and your neighbor a little there.” No! He is saying: “Love Me with all you have and love your neighbor in the overflow of that!”
- C. Here’s the tragic irony in all of this: Even in all this talk about neighbor love, this Lawyer can’t get over himself. Did you catch that? “You want to talk about neighbors? Okay, let’s talk about me, and how I’m doing it right.”
 - 1. Don’t you see? So long as you think it’s on you to justify yourself before God and others, to prove you are right and worthy and good enough, you actually will never be able to really get over yourself. Even your loving others will, in some way, still be to serve you. “I need to love my neighbor if I want to secure something for myself, or feel good about myself . . . to justify myself.”
 - a. And this is what starts to come out here in the Lawyer’s question: “[And who is my neighbor?](#)”
- D. The law is so limited. It’s always concerned with lines. Only the love of God, as we shall see has the power to break us free from this concern for boundaries so we can truly start to dream!

The Priest and Levite

- A. That’s what Jesus wants for this man and us, so He goes on to tell this parable: “[30 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](#)” (vv. 30-32).
 - 1. Now stop, the point here is that those who should’ve been most equipped and prepared to serve this robbed and half dead man failed to do so. These men, like the Lawyer, knew the law and gave themselves to a meticulous study of it and keeping of it. And yet, they don’t.
- B. Priests and Levites would serve God in His temple there in Jerusalem. And whether these men are traveling toward the temple for duty or traveling back home from the temple after serving there (which is perhaps the more likely inference from the Greek), it really makes no difference. The tragedy, even outrage, of this whole scene is the same.
 - 1. Surely, we are right to think that a man who has given his life to serve God in the temple would be most ready and willing to serve a wounded traveler on the roadside (PNTC). And yet both the Priest and the Levite “[pass . . . by on the other side](#)” (vv. 31b, 32b). It is meant to be jarring.
- C. No doubt they justified themselves in their own mind. Perhaps they convinced themselves that it was more important for them to get home to their families or to the temple for their duties. Perhaps they were concerned for the ceremonial uncleanness they could incur if this man were in fact dead (cf. [Lev 21](#)).

1. But no reason they could come up with would be suitable for a God who calls them to love Him with all that they are and their neighbor as themselves.
 - a. You can have all of the knowledge and none of the life. You can have all of the law and none of the love.

The Good Samaritan

A. But the parable doesn't end here. Down the road walks a Samaritan—a half-breed, sell-out, low-life as far as the Jews would be concerned. Samaritans have been intermarrying with Gentiles since the exile. They have their own version of the OT and their own temple on Mount Gerizim. They are the last ones a Jew would ever be willing to see as exemplary.

1. And yet Jesus puts a Samaritan forward as the protagonist of this parable—as the one we all desperately need to learn from: “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’” (vv. 33-35).

B. Notice, there is no calculation, no boundary-line in this man's love. By all earthly measures this is a devastating loss for him, right?

1. He gives up his security—By approaching a man who'd just been robbed. Who knows if the robbers are still around?
2. He gives up his comfort—Did you notice that? He puts this brother on his own animal, which means he's now walking.
3. He gives up his money—He drops “two denarii” (two days' wages), which might sound like a little bit to us, but this would potentially be enough for a month's stay at this place or more. But beyond that, when he comes back, if the man had required more, he was prepared to give that as well.
4. He gives up his time—It seem he has a previous engagement, and all of this, no doubt would have set him behind schedule.
5. Perhaps he even gives up his reputation—For, though we are not explicitly told the ethnicity of the man jumped by robbers, I think it is a safe to assume him to be a Jew. Well, then, this Samaritan surely would have considered him something of an enemy, just as the Jew would've him. To be seen caring for him would've cost him a great deal from other Samaritans passing by.

- a. But, nonetheless, he is compelled by “compassion” (v. 33).

Reframing the Question

A. And then Jesus comes out of this parable with a question for the Lawyer (and for us): “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” (v. 36).

1. Now, did you catch what Jesus did there? Just like with this Lawyer's first question, he takes it and kind of throws it back at him. Only in this second instance, if you noticed, he reframed the question entirely. He put a different spin on it.
 - a. The question at first was: "[W]ho is my neighbor?" As in: "Jesus, define for me that little group I am supposed to love as myself, and I'll do it so I can be justified." But here at the end the question Jesus is trying to get Him to ask is not: "Who is my neighbor?", but "Am I a neighbor?" He flips it on him.
- B. Do you see the difference here? The former asks: "How much do I have to do?" The latter asks: "How much can I do?" Sit on that. Listen to it again. Let it search you.
 1. If you are asking the first question, you're already off the track. You're still trying to justify yourself. In the end, it's still just about you. "How much do I have to do?"
 2. But if you're asking the second question, it means the grace of God is starting to take hold. It means you get something of the gospel and the justification that is yours in Christ. You are no longer looking for boundary lines and wondering if you measure up. You know that Jesus has measured up for you, so you are free to move out in concern for others. You are unleashed to dream! "How much can I do?"

(2) He Turns the World Upside-Down

A Standing Invitation

- A. Now Jesus is not only turning the law inside-out here, He's also turning this brother's world upside-down.
- B. Clear evidence of this is found even in the way this guy answers Jesus' question. The answer is clear, which of these three "proved to be a neighbor . . .?" The Samaritan, of course.
 1. But that's not how the man answers. Did you catch that? What does he say? "The one who showed him mercy" (v. 37a).
 - a. Technically that is correct, right? But the idea is that, though he is inclined to agree with Jesus as to who the true neighbor really is in this parable, still he cannot bring himself to identify the man as Jesus identified him, namely, as a Samaritan. The word gets caught in his throat, as it were. To identify this man as a Samaritan would be too much, too painful. And so it is when you have been justifying yourself over and against others for so long.
- C. Jesus has just turned this man's self-righteous world upside-down. And in so doing throws him open to new possibilities.
 1. Don't you see? Jesus is not turning his world upside-down to shame him, or mock him, or condemn him. He does it so He can invite him—invite him out of a world of legalism and into a world of grace.

- a. The point in this parable is not that Samaritans are better than Jews. The point is that the grace of God can do anything with anyone. Your ethnicity, your religious background, your past or present, your good or your bad deeds—these things mean nothing in this discussion of neighbor love, fulfilling the law, and inheriting eternal life.
 - i. It is the grace of God that is the decisive thing. That is what this Samaritan has. That is what this Lawyer needs.

(3) He Turns Our Eyes Toward Him

The Good Samaritan and His Greater Savior

- A. And here is where I think Jesus at the end is really turning all of our eyes toward Him. The accent here is not meant to be on the goodness of the Samaritan. The accent is meant to be on the greatness of our Savior. That's why I titled this sermon what I did: The Good Samaritan and His Greater Savior.
 - 1. It is only when a person is brought to experience the grace of Christ that this whole legalistic, self-justification thing can be broken. The only way we are ever truly going to love our neighbor as ourselves is if we experience the love of God for us.
 - a. John puts the matter simply: ["We love because he first loved us" \(1 John 4:19\)](#).
- B. So at the close of this parable, it is not the Samaritan that we ought to see, but the Savior. The Samaritan is good at every point, but the Samaritan's Savior is greater still.
 - 1. Think of it . . . In our sin, devil-ravaged and robbed, we are the man left for dead. And though we be at odds with Jesus, in compassion, He draws near:
 - a. And He doesn't just bind up our wounds, He bears them.
 - b. He doesn't just pour out oil and wine, He pours out His blood—that's how we are justified freely before God!—["Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" \(Rom 5:9\)](#).
 - c. He doesn't just set us on His animal's back, He carries us on His own.
 - d. He doesn't just take us to an inn, He's taking us to His Father's house.
 - e. And He doesn't just give us a couple day's wages, He shares with us His very inheritance in glory—He gives us everything!
- C. Technically speaking, Jesus was the furthest thing from a neighbor to us—if all neighbor means is someone within the sphere of a certain vicinity, or ethnicity, or whatever.
 - 1. He was with His Father in glory, one in essence with the divine, and yet He enters into humanity, walks into our grimy neighborhoods, and sets up residence next door. He becomes a neighbor.

- a. He makes neighbor a verb. It's the love of God on the move for sinful men and women.
- D. This is what drops dynamite into empty religion. This is what finally shatters our self-righteousness. This is what turns the law inside-out and the world upside-down. This is how we learn to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is how we “go and do likewise” (v. 37). This is how we “inherit eternal life” (v.25b)! It's not ultimately what we have done, but what He has done for us!
1. Grace! Grace that freely justifies, grace that powerfully transforms.
- E. So the place to start in becoming a good neighbor is to let Jesus come and neighbor up with you.
1. Confess your selfishness, your self-righteousness, your judgmentalism, your fear, your anxiety, your love for the world. Own it.
 2. And let Him come and love you on that street, in that neighborhood, in that cul-de-sac. Let Him love you even in the midst of your unloveliness, and you will grow in your love for God and neighbor.