

WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT THE SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25-37

7/3/16

Introduction:

- A. Have you heard of Good Samaritan laws? Every state has them. Other countries, too. This is what I read: *“The good Samaritan doctrine, as it is legally known, is a legal principle that prevents a rescuer who has voluntarily helped a victim in distress from being successfully sued for ‘wrongdoing.’”* They protect people who help someone in crisis. The whole business got its start when an expert in the law tested Jesus’ legal acumen. Turn to **Luke 10:25**...
- B. In a moment we’re going to get into the story Jesus told and you might get so interested in the story that you forget what the issue is here, so let’s lock that down. What was the question? ***What must I do to inherit eternal life?*** What was it? ***What must I do to inherit eternal life?***
- C. This “expert in the law” was an expert in God’s law—the Torah—the law that God gave to Israel on Mt. Sinai. *Our* laws do not tell you anywhere how to inherit eternal life but God’s law does. So Jesus and the legal expert have this exchange in **vv.26-28**... If you love God wholeheartedly and you love your neighbor as yourself the law of God says you deserve to inherit eternal life.

I guess Jesus passed his test but then the lawyer’s heart shows. **V.29**... *“He wanted to justify himself.”* What was there in Jesus’ reply, in his look, that put that lawyer on the defensive? What in Jesus’ way whispered, ***“Do you love the Lord? Do you really love your neighbor as yourself?”*** **But the lawyer wanted to show that he was righteous enough to deserve eternal life.** He wanted to justify himself—to show that he **qualified** to inherit eternal life. But this word, *neighbor*, needed to be clarified.

- D. Maybe we should pause for a moment and read the law ourselves. Turn to **Lev. 19** where the command, *“love your neighbor as yourself”* is found. Both Jesus and the lawyer were thinking about this context. They knew these laws by heart.

There are several laws in Lev. 19 that pertain to one's neighbor. Let me highlight them for you: **V.13:** “Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him.” **V.15:** “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” **V.16:** “Do nothing that endangers your neighbor's life.” **V.17:** “Do not hate your brother in your heart.” **V.18:** “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.” There it is, the summary of all the others. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Do you notice anything about those laws? One thing is that it **generally pertained to other Jews**—“your brother” and “one of your people.” The other thing is that these laws generally seem to say that **to love your neighbor means do him no harm.** Don't defraud, don't pervert justice, don't endanger his life, don't hate him in your heart, don't seek revenge or bear a grudge. **Do him no harm.**

So when the lawyer posed the question, “Who is my neighbor,” he was asking a question for which he already knew the answer (which is what good lawyers always do.)

- E. But I suspect that there was more going on here. Jesus was known to visit Samaritan towns, healing their sick, casting out demons, and telling those Samaritans that the kingdom of heaven was near—as near as Jesus himself. And I don't think this lawyer liked that. He didn't believe there was a place in God's kingdom for Samaritans, and he certainly didn't approve of Jesus' visiting them.
- F. You probably know that Jews despised Samaritans. It's often characterized as racial bigotry. But there was more to it than that. Samaritans were Lawbreakers with a capital L. They were half-breed Jews who claimed to worship the Lord God but who blatantly ignored some of the Lord's most important laws—like where and how to worship and what it meant to live holy lives. Samaritans were like a cult, a whole nation of spiritual outlaws, the kind of people godly Jews steered clear of. They had a dark history of betrayal and compromise with Israel's enemies. They certainly did not seem to be the neighbors Leviticus had in

mind! But as Jesus traveled from north to south he had been healing them, preaching to them, and inviting them to God's kingdom. I think the point of the lawyer's question was, "Let's talk about who my neighbor is. I know who *my neighbor is* and I know how to treat him but Jesus, you obviously don't."

G. So the expert in the law threw this loaded question at Jesus never expecting it would boomerang back to him.

I. "WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?" – WHO AM I OBLIGATED TO LOVE?

A. **Vv.30-32...** We shake our head over their heartlessness but remember, this is just a story. It didn't really happen. This is Jesus' hypothetical legal case study on the application of the love-your-neighbor law. And if you remember the verses from Leviticus, it *could* be argued that *legally* neither this priest nor the Levite broke any laws.

Illus.: I appeal to the final episode of the Seinfeld show. Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer had been arrested for not coming to the aid of a guy whose car was being stolen. They watched, joked about it, and Kramer even filmed it. Then they were arrested. They hired a Johnny Cochrane-type lawyer and when he stood before the jury he argued, "Have you ever heard of a guilty bystander. Bystanders are by definition innocent. That is the nature of bystanding. But they want to create a whole new animal here—the **guilty** bystander. Don't you let 'em do it." So is that what Jesus was doing—creating a new legal category, the "guilty bystander"?

In fact, on a website about Good Samaritan laws, I read this by **Saul Schwartz**, who I assume to be a Jewish lawyer: "As a general principle, common law does not require a bystander to help someone in peril - the priest and the Levite would not be liable for failing to assist the stranger."

"Well, that may be true legally," we're thinking—and Jesus' listeners were thinking—"but there's something wrong about not helping that poor guy. I mean, what if that were me laying there?!"

- B. Jesus has already created a legal difficulty for the expert. Now he really throws a monkey wrench into this hypothetical case: **vv.33-37...** Hypothetically, here are two esteemed Jews—a priest and a Levite—who do *not* break the law—and a born lawbreaker—the Samaritan—who shows expansive and expensive mercy that he was not required to show, and he does it for someone who *legally* was not even his neighbor. So who is the neighbor here?
- C. Jesus, as you noticed, changed the question. It began as, “*Who is my neighbor?*” and it ended as “*Which of these was a neighbor?*” **The question isn’t who *must* I love but rather, do I have an unrestrained heart of mercy?**
- D. The lawyer knows the answer: “*The one who had mercy on him.*” **In God’s eyes the measure of a neighbor is mercy.** In God’s kingdom the law of the land is mercy.
- E. So who is my neighbor? Apparently it is anyone whom you come upon who is trouble—anyone who needs mercy. Often when this story is modernized we’re challenged to think if we would’ve helped the beggar on the church steps or stopped to help the motorist whose car is broken down in a bad part of town. Those things are worth weighing, I suppose, but they’re not really the hard ones. That’s not really where mercy is tested.
- F. The lawyer probably didn’t know that Jesus had preached a whole sermon on this. Listen to what Jesus said in **Luke 6:32-36...** This means your neighbor is that boss or bully who makes your life miserable, the mom or dad who frustrates the life out of you, the woman who constantly needles you, the guy who ridicules you. Our neighbor (as Joe Stowell put it) is “*anyone who traffics across the turf of your life,*” whether they’re kind or cruel, deserving or undeserving, whether they’re your kind of people or not.
- G. Remember that Jesus and the lawyer agreed that there were two requirements for inheriting eternal life. The first is to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.*” This lawyer assumed he had the first command nailed, but Jesus’ test story showed that he really didn’t

love either the Lord or his neighbor. Anyone who loves the Lord heart, soul, strength and mind will have a heart like Christ's, an unrestrained heart of mercy.

- H. When Jesus told this man, "Go and do likewise"—Go and be like the Samaritan—do you think he did? Me neither because he didn't have it in him. He didn't have mercy in him. He didn't love the Lord after all.

There's a curious thing about this story of the Good Samaritan. It isn't expressly Christian. You could tell this story in a Buddhist temple or the Unitarian Church or a public school classroom (if you don't mention who told it in the first place!). It's a morality tale. We attended a play recently where one of the characters was Charles Dickens. In this play he mentions the story of the Good Samaritan and says the point is, "*Always be kind to everyone.*" That's what people think, I suppose. But that's a lot easier said than done. In fact, it's *not* done. Ask this lawyer!

What was the question that started all this?

II. "WHAT MUST I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?"

- A. **Vv.26-28:** "*What is written in the Law?*" he replied. "*How do you read it?*" He answered, "*'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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*" "*You have answered correctly,*" Jesus replied. "*Do this and you will live.*" So will he live? Will he inherit eternal life? Will you? What's the verdict?
- B. One way to inherit eternal life is to love God with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself—with your neighbor being anyone in your path—with the mercy of God—even your enemies. All the time. Never fail. Then you will deserve eternal life. But it can't be done. Not even an expert in God's law can keep God's law.
- C. The tone of this encounter suggests to me that the expert in the law went away shaking his head and muttering. He'd been had; bested by Jesus in a legal argument. But wouldn't it have been wonderful if that man had stood there and looked into his own heart? If he'd looked at Jesus, with tears in his eyes, and just said, "*You know what? I can't. I*

can't keep God's law, neither of them, and I won't inherit eternal life. O God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

And do you know what would've happened? Jesus would most certainly have taken pity on him. He would have gone to him and bandaged his bleeding heart. Jesus would have taken him in to his care. Jesus would die for him, cleansing that proud and merciless man from all his unrighteousness. He would have written God's law on his heart and breathed into him the life of God's Spirit.

And do you know what else would have happened then. That man, whose heart was now child-sized, would actually have begun to love the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength and with all his mind. And he would really have *loved his neighbors as he loved himself*, no matter who they were. He would have become **a minister of mercy instead of a miser**. He would be a child of the Most High, kind even to the ungrateful and wicked, merciful because his Father in heaven is merciful. And he would have inherited eternal life.

- D. Luke tells us in Acts about a time when a jailer, desperate for his life, asked Paul and Silas this same question: *"What must I do to be saved."* And they replied, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."* Because no one can inherit eternal life by deserving it.

Conclusion

Only those of us who have been rescued and restored by the mercy of Jesus have the capacity to begin to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Only the forgiven and born again have the God-given capacity to bring God's mercy to the people in our path.

And here's the wonder: we will meet Jesus there in the ditch by broken people. We are never so near to the heart of God as when we give mercy to the broken and waylaid, mercy even to enemies and those who hate us. Whether they respond or not, Jesus will be there with us.

Illus.: Ralph Neighbour, pastor of Houston's West Memorial Baptist Church tells this story:

Jack had been president of a large corporation, and when he got cancer, they ruthlessly dumped him. He went through his insurance, used his life savings, and had practically nothing left. I visited him with one of my deacons, who said, “Jack, you speak so openly about the brief life you have left. I wonder if you've prepared for your life after death?”

Jack stood up, livid with rage. “You -- ---- Christians. All you ever think about is what's going to happen to me after I die. If your God is so great, why doesn't he do something about the real problems of life?” He went on to tell us he was leaving his wife penniless and his daughter without money for college. Then he ordered us out.

Later my deacon insisted we go back. We did. “Jack, I know I offended you,” he said. “I humbly apologize. But I want you to know I've been working since then. Your first problem is where your family will live after you die. A realtor in our church has agreed to sell your house and give your wife his commission. I guarantee you that, if you'll permit us, some other men and I will make the house payments until it's sold. Then, I've contacted the owner of an apartment house down the street. He's offered your wife a three bedroom apartment plus free utilities and an \$850-a-month salary in return for her collecting rents and supervising plumbing and electrical repairs. The income from your house should pay for your daughter's college. I just wanted you to know your family will be cared for.”

Jack cried like a baby. He died shortly thereafter, so wrapped in pain he never accepted Christ. But he experienced God's love even while rejecting him. And his widow, touched by the caring Christians, responded to the gospel message. *(Death and the Caring Community, by Larry Richards and Paul Johnson; in PreachingToday.com)*

Jesus asked, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”