

The Good Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37

Introduction

1. Last week we looked at the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:
 - a. As I noted in our study, the passage is often interpreted and used to teach that Jesus will hold the Church accountable for whether we take care of the poor, needy and downtrodden in society
 - b. Others go as far as to claim that Jesus' primary message and the Gospel itself is all about helping the poor and needy (we refer to this as the social gospel)
 - c. However, as I tried to demonstrate, when Jesus referred to how the sheep and the goats treated "**the least of these, my Brothers**", this phrase was a reference to His disciples, both those in His immediate presence and future disciples
 - d. As such, He was teaching that the world will ultimately be judged by how they respond to Him as demonstrated by how they respond to us, the Body of Christ and the message we preach, the Gospel
2. Some might object to interpreting the parable of the sheep and goats in this way, in part because they assume it means doing so excuses the Church from caring for the poor or needy
3. However, I would argue there are plenty of other passages that suggest God does expect us as followers of Christ to be compassionate and help those in need
4. This includes our passage today which is the final parable in our study: the parable of the Good Samaritan

A. The Context

1. Throughout Jesus earthly ministry He was opposed by the religious leaders of the day which included the Sadducees and Pharisees and the priests, scribes and elders
2. They routinely tried to test and trap Him by asking Him questions, hoping He would answer in a way that would either discredit Him or get Him into trouble; We see three such attempts in Matthew 22:
 - a. The Pharisees tried to trap Him by asking whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Ceasar; they were hoping if He said yes it would discredit him among the people, but if He said no it would get Him in trouble with Rome
 - b. Later the Sadducees tried to trap Him with a question about resurrection, something they didn't believe in; in essence, they were trying to get Him to pick sides
 - c. Still later, a lawyer (scholar in the OT Law) tested Him by asking Him which of God's commandments was the greatest; considering that there are over 600 of them in the OT, and the Pharisees and Sadducees often liked to rank them, this lawyer was likely hoping to draw Jesus into a contentious debate and discredit Him

3. Today we have a similar situation when another scholar in the Law decided to put Jesus to the test (READ Luke 10:25-29):
 - a. The man began with a question about how he could inherit eternal life, but we know it's not an honest question because the text tells us his intent was to test Jesus
 - b. Instead of answering him directly, Jesus responded with a question of his own:
 - 1) This man was an expert in the Law so Jesus asked him, **"What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"** (26)
 - 2) In other words, Jesus asked him for his understanding or interpretation of what the Old Testament taught about inheriting eternal life
 - c. The man responded with an excellent answer:
 - 1) He cited Deuteronomy 5 and Leviticus 19 which sum up all 600+ commands of God from the Old Testament (27): **"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"**
 - 2) This is the same answer Jesus gave in Matthew 22 when asked what the greatest of God's commands is, and He said these two sum up all of God's commands
 - 3) To love God and others in this way is the equivalent of genuine saving faith which is why Jesus responded, **"You have answered correctly; do this and you will live"** (28)
 - 4) The one who genuinely loves God will love the One He sent—Jesus—and consequently will love others (more on this in a bit)

4. Now, if you're like me you might be wondering why Jesus didn't add something like, "Believe in me and you will be saved":
 - a. After all, He did this on many other occasions:
 - 1) John 5:24: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."**
 - 2) John 3:36: **"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**
 - 3) John 11:25-26: **"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'"**
 - b. It's not clear why He didn't respond this way here, but it's likely because the man's real objective was to justify himself as it says in v. 29:
 - 1) What this means is that the man was seeking to prove he was living in obedience to the two commandments he just cited and therefore worthy of inheriting eternal life
 - 2) However, Jesus knew better because He knew how the religious leaders twisted God's commands, including the one about loving one's neighbor as himself
 - 3) Do you remember what He said in the sermon on the mount? **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to**

you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43-44)

- a) This first part—love your neighbor but hate your enemy—is what the religious leaders like this man taught
 - b) They would debate and define exactly who fit into the category of neighbor, deliberately limiting who it applied to, in order to justify themselves
 - c) After all, if you could define neighbor the way you wanted, and love only them, you could claim you were still fulfilling the Law
- 4) This is precisely why the man asked Jesus, **“and who is my neighbor?”**:
- a) This wasn’t an honest question
 - b) It was an attempt to draw Jesus into the debate over the word neighbor
 - c) He was a religious legalist who thought he could justify the premise that he was only obligated to love some but not others, all by parsing the word neighbor to his liking
5. This interaction, and specifically this question, is what led to Jesus telling the parable of the Good Samaritan

B. The parable (READ Luke 10:30-35)

1. This parable involves four main characters and it begins with a man who was traveling along a fairly dangerous stretch of road:
 - a. We don’t know anything about this man, but most assume he was Jewish and that’s a fair assumption, in part because it sets up the tension in the parable
 - b. He was traveling on the road **“from Jerusalem to Jericho”** which was used by trading caravans, the military, and Jewish pilgrims traveling from Galilee in the North to Jerusalem in the southern
 - c. This stretch of road was about 18 miles long and it was not only difficult, but treacherous and dangerous:
 - 1) It was mostly mountainous, dessert terrain with narrow pathways, and high drop offs
 - 2) It was also a popular place for bandits and robbers looking for easy prey
 - d. Along the way, this man **“fell among”** some of these nefarious outlaws who robbed him, beat him, stripped him naked, and left him **“half dead”**
2. At some point, a priest just happened to be traveling along the same road, but offered the injured man zero help:
 - a. In fact, note this: he didn’t just ignore him or pass by, he literally moved to the other side of the road (31)
 - b. This was a deliberate act to avoid having to help the man
 - c. Some have argued that the priest may have been concerned about defiling himself by coming into contact with a dead body, but the man wasn’t dead

- d. Besides, a priest of all people would have known that the Law is filled with commands and principles related to helping those in need
3. A short time later, another man, a Levite, also happened to be traveling along the road, but he too refused to help the injured man (32):
 - a. Just like the priest, when he saw the man he high tailed it to the other side of the road!
 - b. This, too, was a deliberate act to avoid helping someone in need
 4. It wasn't until a third man came along, a Samaritan, that the injured man received help (34-35):
 - a. Unlike the priest and the Levite who moved to the other side of the road and refused to help their fellow Israelite, when the Samaritan saw the man **"he felt compassion"**
 - b. Now, note this—and this is critical—he not only felt compassion on the man, but went way above and beyond to help him:
 - 1) He **"came to him"** (contrast this with the priest and the Levite who moved to the other side of the road)
 - 2) He used his own supplies to bandage up his wounds, treating them with wine and oil
 - 3) He put the man on his own animal and presumably walked the rest of the way himself on foot
 - 4) He brought the injured man to an inn and continued to care for him through the night
 - 5) Then to top it all off, when he had to leave the next day to finish his journey, he handed the innkeeper two denarii—which was the equivalent of two month's wages—told him to take care of the man until he returned, and promised to repay him for any additional costs associated with caring for the injured man!

C. The Lesson (Luke 10:36-37)

1. If you didn't catch it, there's a bit of shock and awe in this parable:
 - a. As I noted already, it is presumed that the man who was robbed, beaten and left for dead was an Israelite, yet the two who should have helped him the most—fellow Jews and religious leaders who were dedicated to serving God—refused to lift a finger
 - b. In a shocking contrast, it was a Samaritan who helped him:
 - 1) Samaritans were despised by the Jews because they considered them ethnically and religiously unclean:
 - 2) They were descendants of the Northern 10 tribes that taken off into captivity in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians
 - 3) When the Assyrians conquered Israel, they took many of the Israelites away into exile and then populated the northern part of Israel with pagans from other nations

- 4) Those that weren't carried off into exile ultimately intermarried with these pagans, and then after the exile ended those Jews who returned to the land soon followed suit
 - 5) The Samaritans were the descendants of these mixed marriages, and while they retained some of the Jewish religious traditions and a belief in the Torah, they rejected other parts of the O.T. and adopted many of the pagan religious traditions
- c. This is what makes the contrast between the behavior of the priest and Levite, and that of the Samaritan, so drastic—the Samaritan and the injured man were not only from two different worlds, but would have been considered enemies!
2. Now, look at vs. 36-37 (READ) where the lesson of the parable becomes clear:
- a. If you remember, the scholar's question revolved around how to define who his neighbor was, but Jesus turned it around and asked him, "**Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?**"
 - 1) You see, the scholar's question shouldn't have been, "**Who's my neighbor?**" but rather, "**How can I prove to be a neighbor to others?**"
 - 2) His question was an attempt to justify himself by diminishing God's command and limiting who he was obligated to love
 - 3) He was only interested in fulfilling the letter of the Law (e.g. what does neighbor mean?)
 - b. However, the Samaritan lived out the **SPIRIT** of God's command to love others:
 - 1) He proved himself to be a neighbor to the injured man
 - 2) His love was demonstrated through compassion, mercy and personal sacrifice
 - 3) He not only treated him as he himself would have wanted to be treated, but ultimately treated him how God treats us
 - 4) And this leads to our takeaways

D. The Takeaway

1. This parable actually defines what it means to love others as ourselves:
 - a. The scholar interpreted this to mean he was only obligated to love those who he narrowly defined as his neighbor
 - b. However, Jesus' example of the Samaritan reveals something very different: loving our neighbor as ourselves also means showing compassion and mercy to someone...anyone...in need
 - c. That's the standard Jesus established and then commanded the scholar to go and do likewise
2. Takeaways:
 - a. First, Jesus expects us to show compassion and mercy to others

- b. Second, our compassion and mercy shouldn't be limited to only our "neighbors"—those who are like us or only those we like or thing deserve it—it should extend to those we don't consider neighbors, even those we might consider our enemies
- c. Third, we cannot say we love God if we don't love others:
 - 1) If you don't believe me, take a look at what John wrote in 1 John 4:19-21 (READ)
 - 2) We love because God first loved us, and God expects us to love others like He loves us
 - 3) And how did He love us? He died for us while we were His enemies, showing us compassion and mercy, and at great cost to Himself (just like the Samaritan)
 - 4) How can we claim to love God when we don't show this same love, this same compassion and mercy, to others when they are in need?