

Here Is Love

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 10:25-37

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Turn in your Bibles to Luke 10. We come this morning to a very well-known passage in the Gospels—the story of the Good Samaritan. One of the challenges with familiar stories is that we think we already know everything about the story. But I quickly found out this week that I don't know everything about this story. The Good Samaritan is so often taken as a proof text to show that we need to show mercy to others. And that's certainly part of it. But I think you'll find that the bigger lesson in this passage is that we need to come to see how much we're in need of mercy.

So I ask you to listen with new ears this morning.

Luke 10:25-37¹

²⁵And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷And 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." ²⁸And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

²⁹But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus 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. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴He 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. ³⁵And 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.' ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage is divided into two sections. There's the setting in verses 25-29 and a story in verses 30-37. The setting introduces the problem of this passage. The story gives us the main theological lesson in the story.

To divide my time this morning I'll start with the setting first, then look at the story, and lastly I'll end with my sermon in a sentence, which draws on other passages in Luke that throw light on this passage.

THE SETTING (25-29)

Let's start with the setting. What we learn in verses 25-29 is that we're prone to justify ourselves.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

Dressing Down

Have you ever heard the expression “he really dressed that guy down?” It comes from the nautical world. When the sails on a ship became tattered and couldn’t hold wind, you had to take them down and redress them with oil and wax so that they could hold wind again.² Today the expression means to give someone a severe talking to. It’s a way to expose someone—to show that they’re not “all that.”

Exposing Jesus

In our passage this morning an expert in Old Testament law comes to Jesus and tries to dress Jesus down. He tries to expose Jesus. We see this in verse 25. “And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”” Jesus knows this man is trying to test him. And Jesus knows that this man already has the answer to the question he’s asking.

Isn’t it annoying when someone is teaching a class and they ask a question that they already have the answer to? Someone in the class answers the question and the teacher says, “Well, kind of.” Then another person tries and the teacher says, “Not really.” Finally someone gets it right, and the teacher says, “Exactly.”

Well Jesus didn’t want to play this game with the lawyer. So instead of answering his question, he simply asks, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” The lawyer answers his own question with his ready answer. “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.” To which Jesus says, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

The lawyer couldn’t “undress” Jesus. And Jesus wasn’t willing to play his game. But the lawyer wasn’t finished. He wanted to expose Jesus badly. So in verse 29, he keeps at it. We’re told that he desired to justify himself. So he says to Jesus, “And who [exactly] is my neighbor?”

You see, not only did this man want to dress Jesus down. He also wanted to justify himself. What that means is that he wanted to prove that he had eternal life through following the law. He wanted to show that by following the rules of his religion he could be right with God.

This is a problem in every age and in every place. Many people think that if they just do enough good works, they can be right with God and “go to heaven.” That’s the way most religions work as well. But that’s not the way that Christianity works. Christianity says that “None is righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10) and “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Even people who do good, and follow all the rules, do so from a bad heart.

The lawyer’s answer that you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...and you shall love your neighbor as yourself, literally reads, you shall love the Lord your God *from your whole* heart.”³ Love for God comes *from* the heart. And if we love God from our heart, it will show itself in love for our neighbor. But unless God changes our hearts, we’ll never love him and we’ll never love our neighbor.

²“[the origin of ‘to give someone a dressing down.’](#)” Post, WordReference.com, March 27, 2009.

³ Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Luke*. The pillar New Testament commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2015.

Exposing the Lawyer

The lawyer thought *he* was good-to-go. *He'd* followed the rules of loving God and loving his neighbor. He was trying to expose Jesus. He didn't need Jesus. But Jesus knew his heart.

The lawyer wasn't about to expose Jesus, but Jesus was about to expose the lawyer. The lawyer thought he could undress Jesus, but Jesus wanted to undress him.

Jesus wanted to show him that his heart was shot through with holes, like a dilapidated sail. It needed exposed if it was going to be made whole. He wanted to humble this man. He wanted this man to understand that he didn't love his neighbor and therefore he didn't love God. And to do this, Jesus told a story.

THE STORY (30-37)

As we look at this story, I ask you to have a humble heart and see in what ways this story exposes you. What we learn in verses 30-37 is that our attitudes and actions toward our enemies exposes whether or not we're justified by God. I know that's a mouthful, but every word is critical to our understanding of this parable. So let me repeat it. Our attitudes and actions toward our enemies exposes whether or not we're justified by God.

Three guys walk into a bar.

Before I tell the story of the Good Samaritan, I want to tell a joke. The joke has nothing to do with our story, but it will help us understand the structure of Jesus' parable.

A priest, a preacher and a rabbi walk into a bar.⁴ This is where they would get together two or three times a week for drinks and to talk shop. On this particular afternoon, someone made the comment that preaching to people isn't really all that hard. A real challenge would be to preach to a bear.

One thing led to another and they decided to do an experiment. They would all go out into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and attempt to convert it. Seven days later, they came together to discuss the experience.

Father Michael, who has his arm in a sling, is on crutches, and has various bandages, goes first. "Well," he says, "I went into the woods to find me a bear. And when I found him I began to read to him from the Catechism. Well, that bear wanted nothing to do with me and began to slap me around. So I quickly grabbed my holy water, sprinkled him and, Holy Mary Mother of God, he became as gentle as a lamb. The bishop is coming out next week to give him first communion and confirmation."

Reverend Billy Bob spoke next. He was in a wheelchair, with an arm and both legs in casts. In his best fire and brimstone oratory he claimed, "WELL brothers, you KNOW that we don't sprinkle! I went out and I FOUND me a bear. And then I began to read to my bear from God's WORD! But that bear wanted nothing to do with me. So I took HOLD of him and we began to wrestle. We wrestled down one hill, UP another and DOWN another until we came to a creek. So I quickly DUNKED him and BAPTIZED his hairy soul. And just like you said, he became as gentle as a lamb. We spent the rest of the day praising Jesus."

⁴ ["Finish this joke: 'A Rabbi, a Priest, and a Minister Walk Into a Bar...!'"](#) Post, Ask MetaFilter, May 7, 2006.

They both looked down at the rabbi, who was lying in a hospital bed. He was in a body cast with IVs and monitors running in and out of him. He was in bad shape. The rabbi looks up and says, "Looking back on it, circumcision may not have been the best way to start."

Obviously this joke has nothing to do with Jesus' parable. But the parable Jesus used was structurally just like a three-guys-walk-into-a-bar joke. It was common in the ancient world to use stories like this. When Jesus started telling this story, people would have known that there would be three guys and the lesson would come at the end, with a twist.⁵ So how does this three-guys parable work?

The Priest and the Levite

Let's start with the first two guys. Look at verses 30-32. "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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a long and treacherous road. Some of you have travelled with Jim Martin in the Holy Land. He says that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was fifteen miles long and descended 3400 feet.⁶ The road is rocky and there are many caves along the way, which made for good hiding spots for bandits and robbers. So it's no surprise that the story starts out with a man who's been robbed and beaten.

Priests and Levites would often commute from their home town to Jerusalem for temple service. The priest and the Levite in this passage were likely going home after serving at the temple. And they come upon this man in the ditch, but they don't do anything for him!

They've done their religious duty. They've justified themselves. But they do not love their neighbor in the ditch. And their lack of love for their neighbor reveals that they don't love God.

Of all the people in this parable, the lawyer would've related to the priest and the Levite the most. Jesus is beginning to dress the lawyer down. But the undressing ceremony has only begun.

The Samaritan

In a three-guys-walk-into-a-bar joke the punch line comes at the end. The turning point in this story comes with the third guy as well. The three-guys stories in ancient Israel usually involved a priest, a Levite, and a common layman. Everybody expects the third guy here to be a layman who "shows up" the religious establishment.⁷ And the third guy does show up the religious establishment. But not only does Jesus put the knife in, he also twists it. For the third man is not just a layman; he's a Samaritan.

Jews hated Samaritans. Samaritans were half-breeds. They were Jews who had intermarried with pagans. But that's not all. They also worshipped at Mt. Gerizim, instead of at Jerusalem. So they were engaged in false worship. There was constant animosity between Jews and Samaritans for racial and religious reasons. Jews and Samaritans were definitely enemies.

⁵ Edwards

⁶ Martin, James C., John A. Beck and David G. Hansen. *A Visual Guide to Gospel Events: Fascinating Insights into Where They Happened and Why*. Grand Rapids: Mich., Baker Books, 2010, 76-77.

⁷ Edwards

So when a *Samaritan* is the one who stops to help the man in the ditch, it would have totally thrown the lawyer off. But, it gave him an answer to his question in verse 29; “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus is showing the lawyer that his *enemy* is his neighbor. And to love your neighbor is to love your enemy. That’s exactly what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Plain. “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27-28).

The mere mention of a Samaritan puts the lawyer is in his skivvies. But what the Samaritan actually *does* will render the lawyer buck-naked.

Actually, in the first instance, it’s not what the Samaritan *does* that exposes the lawyer. It’s what he *feels*. We’re told in verse 33, that when the Samaritan saw the man in the ditch, *he had compassion*. Compassion is something that comes from the heart. And the heart is where the lawyer was sorely tattered and needed redressed.

The Samaritan’s heart of mercy leads him to show mercy. His attitude affects his actions. And what does he do? First of all, he puts himself in danger. Stepping off the road to help this man that was attacked by robbers exposed him to being attacked as well. But in spite of danger, he administers first aid to this half-dead man. Then he puts him on his animal and took him to a motel and took care of him. The next day, he gave the innkeeper two days’ worth of wages to help take care of him. But this wasn’t like leaving a credit card number with him. He said I’ll take care of any additional bill *when I return*. This shows that he wasn’t done with this man. He wasn’t just throwing money at him. He was relationally invested and he would be back.

After Jesus finishes the story, he asks the lawyer, “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”

The lawyer knows he’s been undressed. He’s been exposed. He can’t give a comeback. He has nothing left in the chamber. He simply says, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus replies, “You go, and do likewise.”

Now there’s much to learn in this story about how to love our neighbor. And we’d do well to live the lessons found here. But that’s probably not the main point. The point is to expose our hearts. Do we in fact love God? Do we have eternal life? Are we justified? That’ll be seen in whether or not we love our enemy. And this will be seen in both our attitudes and our actions.

Application

So what about you? All of us come upon people in need from time to time. What’s our attitude toward them? How does our attitude affect our actions toward them?

More specifically, what is your attitude toward people who are very different from you—different racially, different religiously? The mention of a Samaritan in this story would have caused a visceral reaction in Jewish ears. Who are the people you encounter that cause a visceral reaction in you?

When Curt was in Central Asia, he was amazed that the Han Chinese Christians wanted nothing to do with the Uyghur Muslims living in China. The Uyghurs were in desperate need of the gospel. And there were Chinese Christians who knew the gospel. But very few of them would share the gospel with the Uyghurs because there was so much animosity between the two groups.

We are amazed by this. But don't we do the same thing? Who are the people in your life that are different from you culturally or religiously? Maybe it's people who are different politically. Maybe it's people who are different ethnically. Or people who come from a different socio-economic background.

The Samaritan had compassion on the Jew. What about you? Your attitude will be seen in your actions. If you love your neighbor (even your enemy) it will be seen in how you live. What are you doing with those who are on the side of the road?

My friend Jon Gordon is a pastor to the homeless at City Life Church. After service today, he'll take to the streets until Thursday night and live among the homeless. He wants to walk a mile in their shoes so he can know how to better minister to them. He's not just throwing money at them. He's not just sharing the gospel with them. He's putting himself at risk and spending time with them to build relationships with them on their turf.

I'm not saying that we need to do the same. And I'm certainly not saying that homeless ministry is the only application from our passage! But his example is instructive. What are we doing to try to understand those who are different from us? What are we doing to cultivate a relationship with the poor and the needy? Are we taking risks to love our neighbor?

Your answers to these questions expose your heart. If you don't have a heart of compassion for those in need—that expresses itself in action—it says something about your heart. If you don't love your enemy it says something about your love for God.

So, I want you to do some examination this week. Who are the people you're encountering along the road, literally and figuratively? What's your attitude toward them? What are your actions toward them? Are you sharing the gospel with the lost out of a heart of mercy? Are you seeking to show compassion to the poor and justice to the oppressed?

Our Statement of Faith says that "God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed...always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed."

What this means is that if we're justified by God it will show itself in works of compassion and justice, and it will show itself in gospel proclamation.

None of these things justify us or give us eternal life, or earn God's love. But they do indicate that we are justified, that we have eternal life, and that we love God. Or they expose us.

Which is it with you?

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE

Before we finish this morning, I want to explore an important question that's not asked or answered in this passage, but is central to Luke's purposes in his gospel. What enables us to show mercy like the Good Samaritan? The answer to this question comes from the context of Luke. To love our enemies, we first have to receive God's love in humility.

In the Gospel of Luke there are some of groups of people who are considered low-lives in the eyes of the Jewish establishment, but are exalted by Jesus: women, children, tax-collectors, and Samaritans.

In the passage last week, we learned that the Father doesn't reveal the things of eternal life to the "wise and understanding." Instead, he reveals them to "little children" (Luke 10:21). Jesus says, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Luke 18:17).

This all fits perfectly with what Mary said in her overture of Luke's gospel in Luke 1. "His mercy is for those who fear him...he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate."

The lawyer in our passage was "wise and understanding." He was "mighty" in Israel. But he needed to become like a child. He needed to have a humble heart. This contrast is seen most clearly later in Luke 18:9-14, in a story very similar to ours. It's the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee is like the lawyer in our story. And I want to argue that the Samaritan was probably like the tax collector.

Luke 18:9-14

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

How are we able to love our neighbors? How are we able to show mercy to our enemies? It's only when we come to realize that we ourselves are sinners in need of mercy. Those who seek to justify themselves do not understand the mercy of God, because they think they're good enough; they don't see their need for Jesus. They're like the Emperor in his "new clothes," who thinks he's wearing something fancy, but who's really naked. Those who seek to justify themselves think their good works cover them, but they're really exposed before God.

Those who are justified by God see their deep need for mercy. They know they're sinners in need of grace. They need to be covered by the righteousness of Christ. It's only to the humble that God reveals his kingdom and gives eternal life. It's only these people that God justifies. Granted, even a humble heart is a gift from God, not a work that justifies. Nevertheless, only those who are humbled will be lifted up. And it's only those who have received God's mercy who will show mercy to others.

We need Jesus—the Good Samaritan—to take care of our deepest needs. Jesus comes to his enemies, lost in sin. On the cross, he binds up our wounds and he pays the bill for our spiritual needs. It's only through faith in his perfect life and sacrificial death that we can be declared right in God's eyes.

Don't trust in your own works. Put your trust in the work of God in Christ. That's the only way to be justified by God.

At the cross, we see the love of God, vast as the ocean. Until we receive his love, we'll never love him *from* our heart. And we'll never love our neighbor as ourselves.