



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Jesus: The Great Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

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This Bible study owes all to Tim Keller's book **Generous Justice**, specifically the fourth chapter in which he deals masterfully with the parable of the Good Samaritan. This study is simply a restating of that material.

Luke 10:25-37 - (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."

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

One of the major themes of the Bible is that believers love their neighbors. This is part of the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:18), and this language is repeated in the New Testament by various authors, some of these include Matthew (5:43), Paul (Romans 13:9), (James) 2:8. Jesus' most clear teaching to his followers on what it means to demonstrate biblical love for their neighbor is found in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In this account an expert in the Mosaic Law stands up in public and presents a question to Jesus. From the text we learn that the purpose of his inquiry is to test Jesus, to trap him. In the mind of this religious leader his motivation may have come from the irreligious people who flocked around Jesus (Luke 15:1-2). Those who filled the crowds that listened to Jesus were those who did not diligently obey the law in every facet of their lives, as did the religious leaders and the Pharisees. His question, "What must I do to inherit

eternal life?" may have been asked because of a concern that Jesus shows little respect for obeying the law of God. He probably thought that Jesus would make a statement that showed his lack of concern for fully obeying God's word. Something like, "Oh, you only need to believe in me."

Jesus responds to the man with a question. "What is written in the law?" There was only two ways to answer this command, either to spend a significant amount of time recounting the whole body of the Mosaic regulations, or to give a summary. Wisely the man chose the latter and responds - to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. It was commonly understood that the entire Biblical moral code could be summarized in these two principal commandments.

In a masterful move Jesus responds, "Do them, and you will live." He is saying, just obey these two commands fully and you will have eternal life. This is one of the major flaws with moralism - the idea that a person can merit God's salvation on the basis of his good works and moral efforts - it is profoundly hypocritical. No one can live up to their own moral code, no matter what it is. In effect Jesus is saying: "Have you looked at the kind of righteous life that these specific laws are really after? Do you understand the kind of life God really wants? Do you meet the needs of your neighbor with all the energy, and zeal that you meet your own needs? That is the kind of life you owe to God and your fellow man. God created you and sustains your life every second. He has given you everything and therefore it is only fair that you give him everything. If you love God like that, you will certainly merit eternal life."

This was of course impossible, but that was really the point of the exercise. Jesus unveils the level of righteousness that the law requires, absolute perfection, and the futility of man to fulfill it. To use religious language, he seeks to convict the man of sin, and the impossibility of his own self-salvation project. Jesus is saying in effect: "My friend, I do take seriously the law, even more seriously than you do." This line of thinking was pressing all men and women to be humble. It is only if we truly see the love God requires in the law that we will be willing and able to receive the love God offers in his gospel of free salvation through Jesus. In this he was pressing this man to see the necessity of God's grace.

Shaken by this turn of events, he tries to "justify himself" (v29). He is not put off in his self-justification project, and in seeking to defend himself he counters with: "Who is my neighbor?" The implications are obvious. He says, "Yes, Jesus, I agree that I need to love my neighbor - but who really is my neighbor?" He is seeking to narrow the focus of this command to make it more achievable, and to keep his works-based righteousness life intact. He decides that Jesus can't possibly mean I have to love and meet the needs of everyone.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS (SESSION WEEKS) AT 8:00AM, ROOM 100 RYAN BUILDING
STAFF, LOBBYISTS & LEGISLATORS: WEDNESDAYS (NON-SESSION WEEKS) AT 1:00PM, ROOM 315 MAIN CAPITOL

Pennsylvania

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THE GOOD SAMARTIAN

Jesus responds to this evasion by telling the story of the Good Samaritan. In this story a Jewish man is riding through a mountainous, remote road where he is robbed, beaten, and left for dead. Down the same road comes a priest, then a Levite, both of whom serve at the temple. These were both people who should have stopped to give aid to their Jewish brother in the faith. These men are found passing by on the other side, quite possibly because it would have been extremely dangerous for them to stop in this remote location with one victim already lying along the road.

Then along comes a Samaritan down the same road. The Jewish and Samaritans were the bitterest of enemies. Samaritans were seen as "half-breeds" and religious heretics, and so there was great hostility between them. Yet this Samaritan, when he came upon the badly beaten Jew had compassion on him and stopped. He braved the dangers, took care of his wounds, and transported him to an inn. He paid the innkeeper and charged him to take care of the man until he was fully recuperated, which would have carried with it a heavy financial burden.

In this account Jesus was giving a radical definition of what it means to love your neighbor. Jesus shows a man meeting the material, physical, and economic needs through deeds and great risk to himself. He refused to allow the teacher of the law to limit the implication due this command to love. He was teaching in the most emphatic terms that love meant being sacrificially involved with the vulnerable as demonstrated by the Samaritan's example. Not only did Jesus not allow us to limit how we love, but also who we love. We instinctively tend to limit those for whom we exert ourselves. We do it for the people like us, and for people whom we like. Jesus will have none of that. By depicting a Samaritan helping a Jew, he is saying, while not everyone is your brother or sister in the faith, everyone is your neighbor, and you are expected to love your neighbor.

OBJECTION TO JESUS

The implications of this parable can often raise numerous questions and objections. In 1733 Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon titled "The Duties of Charity to the Poor." The word neighbor is found in the sermon nearly sixty times, and the discourse stands as one of the most thorough applications of the parable of the Good Samaritan to a body of believers. One objection was "Though they be needy, yet they are not in extremity. (They are not destitute.)" Edwards says that this hardhearted response was not in line with the command to love your neighbor as yourself. We do not wait until we are in "extremity" before doing something about our condition. Also the Christian spirit will make us apt to sympathize with our neighbor when we see him in any difficulty. We should have such a spirit of love for him that we should be afflicted with him in his affliction. Christ literally walked in our shoes and entered into our affliction. Those who will

not help others until they are destitute reveal that Christ's love has not turned them into the sympathetic persons the gospel should make us.

Another objection occurs when people say they "have nothing to spare." But the main lesson of the Good Samaritan is that real love entails risk and sacrifice. Edwards responds that when one says, "I cannot help anyone," one usually means, "I cannot help anyone without burdening myself, cutting into how I live my life." Two other objections are that the poor person "is of very ill temper; he is of an ungrateful spirit" and "he has brought himself to his (poverty) by his own fault." We all want to help kind-hearted, upright people, whose poverty came upon them through no foolishness or contribution of their own, and who will respond to our aid with gratitude and joy. However, almost no one like that exists. Edwards makes short work of the objection by again appealing to the gospel. "Christ loved us, and was kind to us, and was willing to relieve us, though we were very hateful persons, of an evil disposition, not deserving of any good...so we should be willing to be kind to those who are...very undeserving."

THE GREAT SAMARITAN

The placement of the Jewish man as the victim in this story was a remarkable twist. How would the teacher of the law have responded to the story if a Samaritan was in the road? Possibly, he would have said, "This is utter nonsense! No self-respecting Jew would ever do such a thing. This is just as I suspected, you make unrealistic demands on people." But in placing the Jew in this situation he asks the reader to imagine how he would have wanted the Samaritan to respond. Would you have wanted the Samaritan to cross all the racial and religious barriers and show you compassion? Of course you would! Jesus concludes by asking "Who was the neighbor to the man on the road?" The case was air-tight, at least to the man's heart, and he responds; "the one who showed him mercy." You neighbor is anyone in need, and Jesus commands all to "go and do likewise."

Is this not the heart of the Christian message, and the life that Jesus demonstrated by going to the cross. Spiritually we are all like this man, "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:5). But Jesus came into our dangerous world, he came down our road, and though we were his enemies, he was moved by compassion by our plight (Romans 5:10). He came to save us not merely at the risk of his life, but at the cost of his life. On the cross he paid a debt we could never have paid for ourselves. Jesus is the Great Samaritan to whom the Good Samaritan points. Before you can give neighbor-love, you need to receive it. Only if you see how graciously you have been saved by someone who owes you the opposite will you be compelled to go into the world looking to help absolutely anyone in need. In receiving the neighbor-love of Jesus, we can start to be the neighbors the Bible reveals.
