

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

I was reminded last week of how faithful God is to take a text that many people have heard over and over and help them see it with fresh eyes. I remember that I had looked at the FedEx logo for years and years and had never seen the arrow created by the negative space between the E and the X. And there's something similar in play when we come to the word. That's why we keep coming back to it! I had a few folks come up to me after the service last week and say, "When I saw it was going to be the prodigal son, I thought I knew it but then I learned something." And so we're going to continue today in our little mini-series on the parables with another one of the most famous parables in the Bible the Good Samaritan. Just about everybody has heard about this one. Like, even if you're an unbeliever today you've heard this one.

Now the parable of the good Samaritan is a little but unique in that the entire parable is an answer to a question that a lawyer asks Jesus. And to help us understand the parable, we need to make sure we understand the setup which takes place in vs. 25-28. **PRAY!**

Vs. 25 we read that a lawyer put him to the test and asked him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Now asking how to go to heaven, is a perfectly legitimate question, but we know based on vs. 29 that this man is under the impression that people inherit eternal life because of the things that they do. Now if you've been at New Century for any amount of time, you know that the essence of salvation is not about us and what we do but about God and what he has done. And Jesus knows this, and he's so wise here. He doesn't answer him directly. He's going to point this guy's error out by asking him a question in return. Instead, he puts the question back on this guy and asks him what he thinks? How do you read the law? And in vs. 27 the lawyer says, "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." And in vs. 28 Jesus responds "you have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." Now, in light of what we just said about the Gospel not being about what we do, Jesus's answer may shock you here. This guy is asking how to get saved, and there's nothing about repenting of sin and trusting in Christ. In fact, at a surface level, it sounds like Jesus is teaching a works-based salvation. Like if you do your best to love God and people then you go to heaven. But that's not the case and if we look carefully at his response we'll see that.

Notice, he doesn't say try to do those things, "He says, "Do this" and you will live." And the truth is, if every moment of your life, you loved God with all your heart soul mind strength and your neighbor and yourself—you would in fact be a perfect sinless person. Perfect complete love for God—perfect complete love for neighbor every moment of life. If you actually do that, Jesus says you will inherit eternal life. But here's rub not a single person in here that's done that or can do that. There's not a person in here who has loved God and neighbor with a legitimately perfect and pure love for one moment.

And so notice here that far from giving this guy an answer that encourages to earn his salvation Jesus is giving an answer showing him how impossible that is! This guy is asking how to earn salvation and Jesus's answer is "Be perfect. Sinless." But the lawyer isn't picking up on that. If he did, he would have responded, "Well that's an impossibility high standard" "Yes...It's extremely unrealistic for you, but not for me...I came to live a sinless life and die a sacrificial death so that you could get credited with my perfection before God." But that's not where the conversation goes. This guys' not picking up on what Jesus is trying to

teach him, and he's fine with Jesus's answers he thinks he can do it...vs 29 makes it clear when it says that he was **desiring to justify himself**—"I can make myself righteous" I just need to nail down the details and so he asks Jesus a follow up for clarification, "And who is my neighbor?" and Jesus answers with this question, "Who is my neighbor" with this parable...

And he talks about a man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. This was a 17 mile down hill stretch, pretty barren not a lot of vegetation and plenty of hiding spots for bandits and criminals. So this was a notoriously dangerous road, and unfortunately this guy gets attacked. Vs 30 says he fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him, and departed, leaving him "half-dead". Dude was in bad shape.

But, someone came along who could help. Vs. 31, **"Now by chance, a priest as going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side."** Vs. 32 **"So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."** Now a priest was a Jew, a descendant of Aaron, who served in various capacities in the Jerusalem temple. And Levites served as their assistants. So the Jewish religious men are 0/2 in helping this guy in need. Now remember Jesus's audience here is Jewish which makes the next sentence so hard for them to hear....and you would have felt the temperature rise in the audience when he says these 4 words in vs 33...but then a Samaritan—now hold on.

Now we when we use the word Samaritan it's usually in such a positive light—like yJews loathed Samaritans bc they were like half-breeds. They were bi-racial. When the Assyrians captured Israel in 722B.C. the Israelites and Assyrians intermingled and the Samaritans were their descendants. So here's this half-breed and unlike the Jewish religious elite, who pass by on the other side, this guy takes care of the man. Watch this, vs. **33 says that when he saw him, he had compassion. 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."

Now we need to notice something here: Jesus was asked "who is my neighbor" And his response is not to give him some description of who counts as a neighbor. His answer reveals something wrong about his question. And if I'm being completely honest this morning his answer reveals something wrong my heart and I would be willing to be many of our hearts when it comes to they way we approach other people in their pain and hurt and baggage. You see this guy isn't asking who is my neighbor because he's genuinely interested in caring for the hurting broken people around him. He loves himself and he wants to narrow down the candidate pool so that he can go about his comfortable life with as little inconvenience as possible. He wants some specific criteria so that that the scope of his exertion for others is no bigger than it has to be. You see so many folks get caught up with the priest and the Levite being the bad guys—they didn't stop and help, don't be like them—but just as often we are the lawyer—not merely inactive, but indifferent. And when we look at the suffering around—the orphans, abused, battered, and broken in our city we ask with the lawyer...Is that really my problem? And the answer in parable and the answer all over the Scripture is, "Yes" it is your problem. You lived so much of my life with the attitude that if I wasn't part of the problem, I'm freed from having to be part of the solution. As long as I didn't something to you, I'm under no obligation to do something for you. But friends it's not true. Am I responsible for the problems and hurt represented in our city? No, I just moved here. Am I'm called into enter into that

brokenness with the grace and mercy of initiative of Jesus Christ? Yes. I am. You say “What brokenness are you talking about? I mean, there aren’t naked dying people on the road. And you’re right—I’ve not seen any of those. But the reality is that as we drive down roads in our city there are a variety of hurts and needs that you may not even be aware of. I give you an example.

Harvard University did a massive study in 2015 on upward economic mobility—that is the ability people have to move beyond the circumstances they were born into. And for 20 years, it tracked millions of children from 2478 localities in the United States trying to gather data about poverty and upward economic mobility. One of those 2478 localities, was Roanoke City. And when it came to moving upward out of poverty, Roanoke ranked in the bottom 10 in the nation. Not bottom 10 percent. The bottom ten localities out of the 2478 studied. One Roanoke Times author commenting on this research said, “Said another way, a child born poor in Roanoke could move to almost any other place in the United States and expect to end up better off economically.” If you’re a child born into a poor family who wants to get out of poverty, statistically, there is almost no worse place in the United States than Roanoke. The Harvard study discovered a variety of factors that limit upward economic mobility, one of them was the percentage of single mothers with children in a city. And I was stunned to read, that compared to the other 2478 localities across the United States, Roanoke ranked in the 98th percentile for number per capita amount of single-parent mothers. Roanoke has more single parent mothers per capita than 97% of other cities in this country. Which means on the other side of that coin that per capita we have more children growing up without fathers in the home than 97% of the country. 20 % of people in poverty 30 % of children. Friends, did we cause this brokenness? Not that I know of. But can we see this—and pass by on the other side of the road because we have a life to get on with? No we cannot. I’m so cautioned here by James 4:17, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” Like helping the weak, and powerless, and least of these in our community political issue, it’s an expression of the gospel issue. And yet so often when we think about these things—if we think about these things—we excuse ourselves so quickly from the obligation to help because we’re busy chasing our dreams—we have something else that we’re on our way to Jericho to take care of. But folks this is our mindset then it reveals that we’ve forgotten something about our own story.

Request to shoot a dog. It wasn’t until I remembered what had been done for me that I felt compelled to do that for her. Don’t miss this, I didn’t say yes, because I felt guilty. I’m going to be honest, I didn’t say yes primarily because I felt sorry for her. I said yes because there was something inside of me that moved me to be for her what someone else had been for me.

And when it comes to helping the least of these, it’s the same way. Like don’t get me wrong, there’s a way to talk about suffering, and statistics, and put graphic pictures up on the screen and just try to make everyone feel horrible about themselves—make everyone walk out under a cloud of shame. And while there’s certainly a sense in which I think we need some fresh conviction and awareness of the circumstance around us. for me to sit up here and do that, would be to completely miss the reason we love others all together. We don’t love our community out of a sense of guilt. We love others because Christ has loved us.

Don’t miss this. The parable of the Good Samaritan is designed to point us to the Great Samaritan—Jesus. And you have to step out of this passage to see it, but Luke throughout his gospel is presenting Jesus in his life and death as the good Samaritan par excellence. Read this carefully, **Vs. 33-35**. D.A. Carson points out that by giving the innkeeper money, he’s making sure that this Jew would have enough to meet all of his

needs and not get sold into slavery which is exactly what would have happened if he were to run out of money and be unable to pay.

So watch what's happening here, a man sees someone who is his enemy dying on the road and in need of rescue, and he has compassion on him, and at great personal sacrifice—be it his wine, oil, or money, he rescues him from death, secures his freedom from slavery, gives him everything he needs, and promises to come back for him.

Friends this is exactly what you and I have in Jesus. We are the man on the road enemies of God, dead in our sins, and Christ has come to us—even though we didn't want him—and had compassion on us. He sought us out, he rescued us at great cost to himself, he delivered us from slavery, gave us all that we need in him, and has promised to come back for us. And it's in this light that Jesus says, go and do likewise. It's out of a deep gratitude and joy about the rescue we've experienced, that empowers us and compels us to extend that rescue to others. It's not out of guilt! You say "Man how many poor people do I have to help for God to love me?" Answer: None. You don't have to help any poor people, for God to love you. But if your heart has been rescued by the love of God, caring for those in need will inescapably be the fruit of a changed heart. God's grace and mercy has come *to* us in Christ, and when we're saved, it flows *through* us to our neighbors.

You see, when you realize that loving your neighbor isn't what causes God to love you, then you're free from asking the question who's my neighbor like this lawyer—"What people exactly do I have to love like myself? I want to make sure I get eternal life." When you understand that God has rescued you by sheer grace and mercy then you don't ask "who do I have to love like that" but "who can I love like that?" That's the genius of Jesus's response. He doesn't answer the lawyer's question about "who's my neighbor?"—rather than answering his question he gives him a better question to ask: "How can I be a good neighbor?" How I can go and do for others what's been done for me?" It's a question this lawyer should ask and it's a question this morning that we have to ask. Like are we the kind of neighbors individually, and are we the kind of church corporately, that demonstrates the love for our city that Christ has shown for us? And specifically, as we close this morning I want to point out a few things in passage that provide us with some requirements for being good neighbors...

It will require compassion. Vs 33 says a Samaritan, "as he journeyed, come to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion." This word compassion in the Greek is built on a root word that means inward parts (*splanxna*, Strong's 4698). That's what compassion is, being moved in the inward parts—inside. Notice that while the Samaritan shows compassion, the text says nothing about him gathering information to make sure the man on the road is worthy of help. Isn't this our tendency? "Excuse me I just need to ask a few questions before I feel compassion and help. Are you in some way connected to what happened?" Now I don't want to suggest for a second that the way we help should be unexamined or uncalculated; that we shouldn't think through how we're helping people—we certainly don't want to enable anyone to live a toxic lifestyle. And yet, too often I think our failure to feel compassion and help doesn't stem from a concern for their long-term good but our short term convenience. MLK preaching on this parable gave a great picture of the way a compassion person thinks...He says, "I imagine that the first question the priest and Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But by the very nature of his concern, the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'" —MLK Ask God to give you compassion. This is a struggle. Especially for men. If you don't find

yourself being a compassionate person ask God to change your heart and then, in the mean time, take action... that's #2. Being a good neighbor will require compassion and...

It will require action. Notice here that the Good Samaritan starts with compassion but doesn't stop there. He goes to action. Vs. 34 this is all one verse! "he went to him, bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine, then set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him." This man took action. That's why Jesus says at the end which man "proved" to be a neighbor. We said that we need compassion for the broken in our city, but we need to see that compassion itself isn't enough. It has to translate to action. This isn't a story about how the Samaritan cared about the man on the road, "in his heart". We can't just care for the least of these "in our heart". We can offer destitute children in Roanoke all of our tears, but it will do absolutely nothing for them, if our tears are all we offer. It has to translate to action. Don't forget, while we need to ask God to cultivate compassion in us, personal compassion for struggling people is not the ultimate reason we extend mercy. We extend mercy because of the mercy that's been extended to us. This is what keeps any Christian from exempting themselves "Well I'm just not a compassionate person, so that's not for me." Are you a someone who's been rescued by Jesus? Then extending rescue to others is for you. This not just an option for people who have a big heart, this is command every person who has a new heart. Like this is good news for folks who struggle to feel compassion...Even if you don't have the feelings, you can still be faithful...ask the kid who helped more the person who felt sorry for them and did nothing or the person who didn't but entered his situation because of what Christ had done for him. Which then leads us to number #3 if we're going to be good neighbors...

It will require sacrifice—simply put there's not way to do this, and not take a hit. To your time, energy, perhaps your money in some cases. There's no way to extend mercy to the people in this community that won't infringe on something you have going on in your life. You look at the Samaritan here, he risks his safety by stopping on this road—what if the robbers were still around? There's some personal risk here. He comes to a Jewish man—social sacrifice. He offers his own personal wine and oil to this man—monetary sacrifice. He puts him on his animal—which mean he walks—physical sacrifice. Like entering people's brokenness is inconvenient and uncomfortable. And we may say, "I just can't afford to do that...But friends, in light of the incredible love we've been shown, we can't afford not to." God forgive us for ever thinking that Christ has come to rescue us in our sin and brokenness only for us to pass by others in theirs. And I want to say that as your pastor, I'm committed to taking steps personally and helping us take steps corporately to be people who do not pass by on the other side of the road. We're in conversations with Total Action for Progress trying to see how we can help serve the needs of our community. In 2019, we're launching a ministry directed specifically at children in the form of a dance ministry that Rebecca will be heading up (Life 127!) There are two impoverished neighborhoods in Roanoke within a few miles of this church. Could we adopt a neighborhood? Is there a way we can help the inordinate high percentage of single mothers? This is what we're thinking through as elders. Give us your ideas!