

# Luke

## The Gospel for Everyone

Study 20 | Luke 10:25-37

Luke 10:25-37 "New Neighbors"

### News and Needs

#### Upcoming Events:

- 2/6- Intro to Resurrection class, 9 AM - 1 PM at the church. Let your newcomers know, please RSVP.

#### Opportunities to Serve:

- 2/7 - Giving to Ethiopia - in lieu of a fundraiser this year, prayerfully consider making direct donations above and beyond your regular giving that will go towards the cost of the trip. Checks can be given during the additional offering on Sunday or mailed to the church office (174 Prospect Park West, Apt. 1L, Brooklyn, NY 11215) with **"Ethiopia" on the memo line.**
- Ethiopia Team leaves Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> until Feb. 27<sup>th</sup>. Please pray for the Project in Addis Ababa, Andy and Bev Warren the project managers, and our team going over this year - Pastor Chris Hildebrand, Audrey Morrison, and Jerod Hughhins.

I recommend reading N.T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*, pg.. 304-307 for working through this parable of the "Good Samaritan." I credit much of what I say below as paraphrase of what Bishop Wright has to say there. You can also find a similar treatment in his commentary *Luke for Everyone*.

### **1. What is the importance of the exchange between Jesus and the lawyer in verses 25-28 for understanding the parable of the Good Samaritan? What does the lawyer seem to be seeking from Jesus and in life? How does Jesus seem to judge the lawyer's intentions?**

The lawyer asks, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This is a standard Jewish question about what it takes to participate in the age to come. It's likely that he anticipated that Jesus would answer with a question and precisely the one Jesus does ask, "What does the Law (Torah) say?" Therefore, he already had his next move planned with an answer he knew that Jesus approved of, the *Shema*, one of the most famous of Hebrew prayers (Deut. 6:4-9). Combining the *Shema* with the command to love one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18) was a common combination in Hebrew tradition. So now the lawyer makes his move, asking the real question. If "loving my neighbor" is part of my duty as a good Jew, a good Jew who would inherit the age to come and all the blessings in store for God's people, then how do I define who my neighbor really is?

So, at that time, there were two ways Jesus could answer. Option 1: The Jewish leaders take the Law (Torah) as a boundary marker for who Israel is. Those who have the Torah are the covenant people and therefore gives a natural and quite limited definition of "neighbor." Option 2: Or you can define "neighbor" more broadly, so as to include those outside the marked out covenant people of God. But to do so, one would have to give up the idea of Torah as it stood in Jesus' day, as boundary around who the covenant people of God truly are. And thus the trap that the lawyer is trying to set for Jesus. If Jesus opts for #2, then Jesus could be accused of heresy according to the Jewish leaders. They could accuse Jesus of rejecting Torah.

Key to understanding this parable is to understand this opening exchange. Especially what it means that the lawyer sought to "justify himself." The lawyer is not trying to "justify" himself in the sense that he's trying to earn salvation by doing enough good works. He's also not trying to "justify" himself in the sense of not wanting to look like a fool for asking such an easy question of Jesus. What he's asking is the justification of the Jew. He wants the boundaries of who the covenant people of God are to have an appropriate place, with he himself inside those boundaries, and all kinds of other people are left outside those boundaries.

Jesus knows where the lawyer is going with this line of questioning. And he, in fact, is happy to implicate himself that he does in fact have a new and radical view of observing the Law. And he lays his cards on the table in such a brilliant way that it actually turns the table back on the lawyer. The point of the parable was not meant for Jesus' hearers (the lawyer and those listening in) to identify with the Samaritan. The point is not that the Samaritan regarded the Jew in the ditch as his neighbor despite Jews and Samaritans being sworn enemies of each other (which still shows up today

in the tensions between Israel and Palestine, by the way). The story is not simply an encouragement that we should help those in times of trouble, even if it's someone we habitually despise. Those points can be made here, and are legitimate. But the true point is more subtle and actually gets at what the lawyer was asking. Which is why Jesus at the end of the parable doesn't ask the lawyer how you should treat people you normally despise (which would be to identify with the Samaritan). Instead he asks, "Who did the Jew in the ditch discover was in fact his neighbor?"

The obvious answer, though radical for the lawyer to admit, was that the Jew discovered the Samaritan was his neighbor. And by implication, the other two travelers on the road were NOT his neighbors. So, back to the question, "Who will inherit God's blessings in the age to come when Yahweh brings the kingdom to bear?" The answer Jesus gives is that outsiders are going to be brought into the kingdom and insiders are going to be left out. And to truly obey Torah, to truly live out *Shema*, one will have to pursue pushing that boundary of who the covenant people of God are to the limits, to include those normally on the outside. Which in turn (and here lies a lot of the scandal) would mean that the whole system of Temple, sacrifice, and cultic practices would have to be rethought. The scribe in Mark 12:28-34 gets this. And what does Jesus say? "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

The challenge to the lawyer is similar to Jesus' challenge to the "Rich Young Ruler" (Matt. 19). What must I do to inherit the kingdom to come? Jesus' answer is to follow him in a new and radical obedience to the Law, which meant loving your covenant God as the Creator of all and discover your neighbors who are beyond the borders of the chosen people. Those who will follow Jesus in this way would be "justified," which means they would be vindicated when God acted climactically in the course of history.

To try and tie this up, one more thing going on here. Jesus is constantly refuting those expectations the people had in terms of who the Messiah would be and what he would do. Specifically the expectation that when the Messiah came, he would lead the Jews in overthrow of Rome and put Israel back on top of the national food chain. At this point in Luke 10, Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem himself, so there is added significance to the parable being about people coming and going on this very road. Therefore, this parable is also the challenge to Israel that their current way of confrontation with the Samaritans, Romans, and all pagans in general is not the way of living and showing God's grace. Jesus is desperately crying to Israel to take the way of peace, as only the "children of peace" (10:6) will escape the self-inflicted violence that will fall on those dead set on political and military revolt. Which happens when in 70A.D. Rome crushes Jerusalem. The "children of peace" escape judgement, they are "justified" as the true children of God. (See Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, p. 128).

**2. At first Jesus seems content to let the man leave with a command "Do this and you will live." Why? How would this parable have challenged the lawyer and social convention? What does it take to 'love your neighbor as yourself?'**

Why does Jesus seem to wrap up the discussion with "Do this and you will live" when he knows the lawyer doesn't get it? Because the lawyer should get it. All of Israel should get it. Jesus' preaching that the kingdom was coming, not just for Israel, but for all the nations to be brought in was not new. This has been the mission of Israel from the start. They were chosen, blessed by God, so that ALL NATIONS of the world might be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). They were made a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, to have special communion with the one true God, so that all people would be

brought into relationship with the Father (Ex. 19:1-6). They were to live faithfully under the righteous, gracious rule of God as their King so that all nations would be brought under that righteous, gracious rule of God (Is. 2:1-4).

"What is at stake, then and now, is the question of whether we will use the God-given revelation of love and grace as a way of boosting our own sense of isolated security and purity, or whether we will see it as a call and challenge to extend that love and grace to the whole world. No church, no Christian, can remain content with easy definitions which allow us to watch most of the world lying half-dead in the road." (Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, p. 129)

Israel took the blessings they were given, the Law, the covenant signs, and made them into badges of pride to be kept to themselves. Jesus is saying, "Can you recognize the hated Samaritan as your neighbor? If you can't, you might be left for dead in the road."

So how do you "love your neighbor as yourself?" You don't hoard the blessings that God has given you for yourself. You are given His Holy Spirit, the covenant signs, inclusion into God's family, the promise to meet with him in worship, the privilege of prayer, His Word, his promise to be faithful to his covenant with you, the forgiveness of sins -- all the blessings of God's covenant with us -- to share God's blessing with all people. If you are not blessed to be a blessing, are you in danger of being dead in a ditch?

I leave it to you and your groups to dream about what "loving your neighbor as yourself" could and should look like for our church family.

**3. How do we attempt to 'justify ourselves' in ways similar to this lawyer? How does the Good Samaritan parable challenge your spiritual self-understanding? Who is your 'neighbor' today that you are tempted to overlook? And how can you 'Go and do likewise'?**

Again, I think you have to dig in among yourselves and talk this out. Here are some more categories to maybe help prod this discussion on:

How do we set up false boundaries as to who the people of God are and who can be included in the covenant? How about in terms of Christians of other denominations, whose doctrinal positions are different than ours? How do we redefine Torah observance that excludes some Christians from being part of the covenant people of God?

Are we "children of peace" to those considered our enemies? What is our stance towards our pagan neighbors? To those hostile towards Christianity?

Who do we look down our noses at instead of extending God's blessings to them? Are they the rich? poor? homeless? different race? nationality? educational achievement? political persuasion? gender? from a certain neighborhood? borough?

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