

Team Jesus and their love

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray before we begin. Heavenly Father, you tell us last week that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, but you reveal them to little children.

And so this morning, help us to be humble like little children, teachable like those who sit at your feet, ready to listen to you. And let your word bring joy to our hearts and let them be sweeter than honey, leading us to keep your commands to the very end.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Around 10 years ago, Time magazine ran a poll asking, which fictional character do you think has had the greatest impact on our lives?

So, what do you think? One interesting name mentioned was Barbie, Barbie, which does kind of make sense. After all, to many generations of children, whenever someone says, Daw, they think Barbie.

But another name that popped up is none other than the main character in our parable today, the Good Samaritan. And that makes sense too, doesn't it?

[1 : 1 8] The Good Samaritan is one of Jesus' most famous parables. It might possibly be the one that non-Christians know best. They probably know at least that it's about someone who takes pity on a stranger who's been attacked.

And the Good Samaritan has proven to be a figure of inspiration for many to give selflessly to those in need, even total strangers.

That's why if you browse through the Star archives, like I did this week, you would find some of these headlines. Mystery Good Samaritan pays students' education fees for seven years. Good Samaritan donates land for Hart Centre in Cebu. Good Samaritan gives emergency supply of diesel to barrio folk. But today, I want to suggest that our cultural familiarity with the Good Samaritan figure can also be a potential barrier to true understanding.

You see, because the character of the Good Samaritan feels so familiar to us, we think we know why Jesus tells this parable.

[2 : 3 8] We think it's simply Jesus teaching us to be ready to do charity to all humanity. And one reason for that, I suspect, is because when we say we know the parable, what we might actually know is just verse 30 to 35, and not the entire reading from verse 25 onwards that Lynn just read for us.

But when we don't read the parable within its context, we very much run the danger of missing out on the true punchline of the parable.

We might end up misunderstanding, and therefore misapplying the words of Jesus. So let's be careful not to confuse familiarity with understanding.

Instead, let's be willing this morning to look again at what's going on in this passage without presuming we already know it all. That's what I prayed for this week.

And actually, as a result, the sermon that I'm about to preach isn't quite the sermon I thought I would preach. And I think the best way to proceed today is simply by taking you through the passage first, paying closer attention to both the details and the wider context of Luke's Gospel where appropriate, and then having established what's really going on, we will then draw out some of its implications for us today.

[4 : 1 5] So let's begin. And I think it might be helpful, first of all, just to note how this passage is structured. The best way to think about it is to see that Jesus and this lawyer are engaging in two rounds of conversation, which are basically parallel to one another.

I've put it on the table on your sermon outline. Both times, the lawyer begins by asking a question in verses 25 and 29.

And each time, Jesus responds by asking a question in return. And then the lawyer responds by answering Jesus' question.

And then Jesus ends with a final word, which, as we will see, actually exposes the lawyer's true condition. That's the pattern.

And that is going to be important because, as we will see later, that will help us understand what the purpose of the parable is. And so keep that structure at the back of your mind.

[5 : 27] Now let's begin with verse 25. On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up. And so here we have a lawyer.

And by that, we don't mean someone who is a criminal prosecutor or who does conveyancing or anything like that. We mean an expert in the Mosaic law, more like a theologian or a biblical scholar, if you like.

And so far in Luke's Gospel, whenever we encounter these lawyers, these experts in the law, they are always against Jesus.

In Luke 5 verse 21, after Jesus pronounces to the paralytic that his sins are forgiven, they think to themselves, who is this blasphemer?

In Luke 5 verse 30, upon seeing Jesus eat with tax collectors and so-called Gentile sinners, they complain. Why does he eat with such people?

[6 : 32] In Luke 7 verse 30, we're told that they explicitly reject Jesus' teaching. So what about this lawyer?

Do we finally have one who isn't like all the others? After all, he stands up. A typical sign of respect. Jews normally honoured their rabbis by standing whenever they spoke or asked a question. So, do we finally have a lawyer receptive towards Jesus?

Unfortunately, no. Luke tells us that while his external posture was respectful, his internal motivation was anything, but he is there to test Jesus.

You see, put yourself in this man's shoes. He's seen Jesus consistently associate himself with people known to be unclean or unrighteous.

[7 : 37] In Luke 7 verse 9, he would have seen Jesus heal the servant of a Roman centurion and then dare to praise the Roman soldier.

I tell you, I have found, not found such a great faith even in Israel. Just a couple of weeks ago, we saw that instead of avoiding Samaria, Jesus goes right into Samaritan country with the intention of preaching to them.

And so to this lawyer, Jesus must have seemed like quite the maverick. At the very least, Jesus must have some rather unorthodox views of the law.

Why else would Jesus do what he does? So he wants to put Jesus to the test. And he wants to do so, especially in light of last week.

Do you remember what Jesus claimed at the end of last week's passage? In Luke 10 verse 22, Jesus says he is the one who perfectly reveals the Father.

[8 : 49] In other words, God has divinely revealed himself through Jesus. Hear Jesus, hear God. See Jesus, see God.

But in this lawyer's eyes, how can a person who does what Jesus does, be Lord? Indeed, never mind Lord. How can such a guy even claim to be a good teacher of the law?

So he does what Satan does earlier in Luke's Gospel. He tests Jesus. He asks a not altogether uncommon question.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? Now Jews saw eternal life as God's gift to the righteous at the end of time.

So another way we could phrase the lawyer's question is like this. What must I do to be counted among the righteous? And this is what the lawyer is probably hoping for.

[10 : 01] He's hoping to catch Jesus out. He's a bit like some people who participate in Q&A; sessions. They stand up. They ask a question.

But they are not genuinely looking for an answer. Instead, they simply want to make their point. They want to show that they're the smart guy. And the person that they are questioning isn't as great as he looks.

And this lawyer wants to call into question Jesus' actions and teaching. But what does Jesus do? He does what he loves to do.

Answer a question with a question of his own. Verse 26. What is written in the law? He replied. How do you read it?

And with that, Jesus does what he also did with Satan. He drives the discussion back to God's word.

[11:08] He doesn't just ask the lawyer. What do you think? Instead, he points the lawyer not to the thoughts of his own mind, but to the words of scripture.

And in doing so, Jesus is expertly getting the lawyer to show his cards, so to speak. He's saying to the man, Actually, You're the expert in the law, aren't you?

So, why don't you tell me first? What is the law all about? Not just what it says, mind you, but how do you understand it?

Who are the righteous? What's your interpretation? And so the man is forced to commit himself to a position. Verse 27.

He answered, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.

[12:12] And love your neighbor as yourself. The lawyer combines two quotes from the Old Testament. One coming from Deuteronomy 6 verse 5.

The other coming from Leviticus 19 verse 18. And if that sounds familiar, And if that sounds familiar, that's because we know from Matthew and Mark's gospel that this is also how Jesus himself summarized the entire law on other occasions.

Love God. Love neighbor. Love neighbor. Love neighbor. So, at this point, Maybe the lawyer is mentally patting himself on the back.

Oh, good job. Full marks. even Jesus himself cannot say it better. And so, end of discussion. Over to you, Jesus.

Well, not quite. Jesus says, verse 28, you are absolutely right. You have answered correctly.

[13:20] I 100% agree that is the essence of the law. So, go and do likewise.

Since you know the answer, go and do it. You want to inherit eternal life? You want to be counted among the righteous? Then put your expert knowledge of the law in action.

Go love your neighbour. Now, at this point, we might be a bit confused. Wait a minute. Is Jesus teaching salvation by works here?

But I want you to imagine Jesus saying, verse 28, with a knowing look, or perhaps with a cheeky little smile. You see, Jesus knows perfectly well what the man has been trying to do all along.

He knows this man is hoping to catch him out on the law. But Jesus has now completely turned the tables.

[14:31] This man now finds himself having to grapple with what the law itself says. And now, he is caught out.

He wanted to put Jesus to the test. But now, Jesus is putting him to the test. Is he someone who actually practices the law consistently?

Is he someone who does, in fact, love God as he loves his neighbour? Which brings us to round two of their conversations.

If in round one, this lawyer was going on the offensive and testing Jesus, now in round two, he finds himself on the defensive and having to justify himself.

He must show himself not to be a spiritual failure. Quite the contrary. He must show himself to be someone who is successful at doing verse 27.

[15:41] He must justify himself. So he asks, who is my neighbour? Not because he doesn't know, but because he is certain he knows the answer.

He is trying to score a point again. You see, here is the lawyer's strategy. He is thinking, hold on, Jesus.

I actually know what Leviticus 19, verse 17 to 18 says. Here it is in full, on the screen. Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart.

Rebuke your neighbour frankly, so that you will not share in their guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself.

I am the Lord. Ah, so Jesus, I know this text, and in its context, and we've got to read things in context, right?

[16:49] The neighbour here is clearly my fellow Israelite. And so by asking this question, he believes he has forced Jesus into a corner.

Jesus will be forced to admit that not everyone counts as a neighbour, and so not everyone qualifies for neighbour love.

Right? And so even though this lawyer isn't being neighbourly with Gentile sinners, and Roman centurions, and Samaritan villages, he is still a righteous guy.

So that is what is going on. How is Jesus going to answer? Well, remember what Jesus loves to do?

Answer a question with a question of his own. But there is a difference this time. In round two, before Jesus asks his question, he has to set it up.

[17 : 57] He tells this now famous parable. And so finally we come to this story, but remember, this story is being told with that question, who is my neighbour, and the lawyer's attempt at self-justification in mind.

So let's get into the story and just recount it briefly. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. And by the way, he literally was going down.

Jerusalem is 2,600 feet above sea level, whereas Jericho was 825 feet below sea level. And so this road is steep, it is pretty treacherous, it's hard to travel on, and it is also dangerous.

Everyone listening knows that. This is prime highway robber territory, maybe like certain places in Mexico today.

And that is exactly what happened to this man. He's attacked by robbers, stripped of his clothes, because in those days clothing is pretty valuable, and left for dead.

[19 : 19] So what happens next? Well, along comes a priest, perhaps one who has just completed his temple service in Jerusalem. And if you're in the audience, you breathe a sigh of relief.

Here comes help. But what does he do? When he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

Then comes a Levite, a priestly assistant.

And he does the exact same thing. Now, why don't they help? People have tried to figure it out.

You might have heard it said that the priest wanted to avoid ceremonial impurity by avoiding contact with a dead body, for example. That is certainly possible.

But again, Jesus doesn't tell us. He is not really interested in their motivations at this point. All he simply wants to point out is that they do nothing for this man.

[20 : 28] In fact, neither of them even seem to wrestle with themselves. Oh, what should I do?

Should I stop and help or shouldn't I help?

No, there's none of that wrestling. They just confidently sidestep this man. So the audience waits for who comes next.

And they think they know who is coming. In many Malaysian jokes and stories, you often have three stock characters. Ali, Abeng, and Mutu.

And then all of us, Sarawakians protest that Malaysia is not just made up of three races. And Israel also had their stock characters back in their day.

So we have Ali, Abeng, and Mutu. But for them, usually, if you see a priest, then a Levite, the next person you expect to appear in the story is a Jewish layman.

[21 : 33] That's how it normally goes. So the audience waits with anticipation for this hero to emerge. But then Jesus says, a Samaritan appears.

And you have to understand what a shock this is. Today, we often say good Samaritan has become part of the English language.

But as far as the Jews were concerned, no such thing as a good Samaritan can exist. The two words cannot go together. They were completely detestable.

To get a sense of how strong these feelings were, let me share with you a couple of quotes from the Jewish writing of the time on the screen. Two nations my soul detests, and the third is not even a people.

Those who live in Seir, and the Philistines, and the foolish people that live in Shechem that's referring to the Samaritans. Or here's another one. He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like the one that eats the flesh of swine.

[22 : 47] And you can multiply these quotes many times over. So no love lost then. But now, such a Samaritan, verse 33, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

He bandages his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, the standard medicinal remedy. and then he goes on foot, letting his donkey carry the man to some place where he can have shelter and protection.

And there, he deposits two days' wages, looking to cover the accommodation cost for a week or so. And then, he says to the innkeeper, I've got to go.

But if this guy needs to stay here longer to recover, whatever the bill is, I'll pay it. Now, that is important because you see, during that time, if you owed money and you couldn't repay it, probably the only thing you can then do is to sell yourself into slavery.

And so, if this half-dead guy stays there for a long time and he can't pay, he's got to become a slave. But the Samaritan, by becoming the guarantor, is in effect telling the guy I am making sure you are free.

[24 : 30] I am making sure you won't be a slave. That's the parable. But why does Jesus tell it?

Well, remember what the lawyer asked. Who is my neighbour? And remember why he asked it? To justify himself.

he wants to show he measures up to the demands of the law and therefore, when he stands before God on Judgment Day, he can say he is thoroughly qualified for eternal life.

But how does Jesus now reply? Having told the story, he looks at the lawyer and asks, which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?

In other words, Jesus now asks, who acts as a neighbour? Not, who is my neighbour?

[25 : 44] Who acts as a neighbour? Not, who is worthy of receiving my love? But, who is the one who loves?

And all of a sudden, the lawyer now becomes the one being back into a corner. By reframing the question, Jesus has once again turned the tables.

There is only one answer to the question, of course, and the lawyer has to give it. The one who showed mercy. And just like round one, Jesus says, full marks.

You know the answer, it's correct. So, go and do likewise. And with that, the lawyer stands exposed.

You see, the lawyer has just tried to get Jesus to give a narrow definition of neighbour so that he can say, I'm righteous.

[27 : 00] I fulfilled the law. I'm following Leviticus 19. But now Jesus shows him how do you actually do verse 27?

How do you love your neighbour? Not by trying to work out who falls or doesn't fall into the category of neighbour. No.

You love your neighbour by graciously and compassionately responding to whoever you come across in need.

And actually that is completely consistent with the law. Because if we look not just at Leviticus 19 verse 17 to 18 but also Leviticus 19 verse 33 to 34 what do we find?

Have a look on the screen. When a foreigner resides among you in your land do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native born.

[28 : 11] Love them as yourself for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. And so even in the law itself it never was about figuring out who counts as my neighbour.

No, you treat even the foreigners like Israelites. you simply love them too as your neighbour. Do you see? Jesus is not changing or abolishing the law here with his parable.

Rather he is applying the law to its fullest extent. He is telling the lawyer do you want to justify yourself? Then love your neighbour like this.

Love them like this all the time. Love them with all your heart. After all, you are not a Samaritan who doesn't know the law. You're an expert.

You know Leviticus 19 in its fullness. So, have you loved like this? Will you? Can you?

[29 : 25] You see, what is the initial reason Jesus tells this parable? not to teach a general principle of charity.

No, he wants to expose this lawyer's self-righteous, self-justifying heart. And he wants to expose our self-righteous, self-justifying hearts too.

not because he wants to score points against us, like this lawyer. Not because he wants to showcase his superiority, like this lawyer.

But, as we'll see in a moment, because he has compassion on us, he wants us to get an accurate self-diagnosis.

You see, isn't this lawyer us as well? I mean, in my experience, whenever we do a Bible study on this passage, the first question we ask isn't, how can we love like this Samaritan?

[30 : 40] The thing we more often want to know is, what are the limits? How far does our love need to go? If it puts us in danger, do we have to?

Or, if the person has done lots of bad stuff before, do we have to? Or, if it puts us in a position where we might be taken advantage of, do we have to? We instinctively want to place limits on whom we are to love.

Now, part of the reason we want to know the limits, of course, is because we are genuinely overwhelmed. We know that there are so many needs our social concerns ministry is not big, certainly not as big as some other churches, but even then, sometimes it can feel like there is too much to do.

So, I get that. But, I think we must acknowledge our hearts genuinely have mixed motives. Like the lawyer, we also want to limit our definition of neighbour because, frankly speaking, it's much nicer to love only those we find lovable.

[31 : 55] It is much easier not to deal with people whose problems are big problems. It's much easier not to deal with people whose personality quirks strains our patience. Isn't it nicer to love those who are easy to love and help those who are easy to help and then be able to tell God, see, I'm a good Christian.

I do love my neighbour. But, Jesus knows our hearts. He knows we know we ought to love everyone.

And, he knows that the way we often try to get out of this is to find ways to downplay God's command. Ayah, she's so toxic. Does she really count as a neighbour?

It's so annoying. Does he really count as a neighbour? We justify ourselves. But, with this parable, he doesn't let us off the hook.

He exposes us. But, as we stand exposed, like this lawyer, the question becomes, what can we do then?

[33 : 15] What is the alternative? At first glance, it seems like the only solution is simply to try harder to be a good Samaritan. Does Jesus not say, go and do likewise?

So, let's love better. Let's help better. But, the problem with this is that it will simply lead us back onto the path of self justification.

We simply cannot love like the good Samaritan does all the time. I mean, I just said that it is easier to love those that we find lovable, but even the lovable neighbour is a challenge sometimes, isn't it? You know, every married couple and every parent and child knows that, right? You know, we love our spouse, we love our kids, we love our mum and dad, but sometimes they drive us crazy like no one else does.

Sometimes it is those closest in proximity to us that we find hardest to love. We can love a stranger whom we only meet once, but to love those who annoy us every day with their irritating habits or drive us crazy with their frustrating weaknesses, well, it feels downright impossible.

[34 : 35] And because it feels impossible, soon we will be trying to downplay God's standards again to something that we can meet to justify ourselves.

And so we're stuck in this loop. So what can we do? Are we stuck forever? Well, Jesus says, let's come back to this parable.

And I want us to ask, who am I really in this parable? Who am I supposed to identify with?

We know that we are not meant to actually identify with the priest or the Levite. They totally didn't love their neighbour and we know already both the law and Jesus frowns on them.

But then we find that we can't really identify with the good Samaritan of the parable either because we know that we simply do not love with such abundance like he does.

[35 : 42] Certainly not all the time. So who does that leave? Who are we really in this parable?

That leaves only one other character, doesn't it? it is the half-dead stripped-down man. It is the man who is not really capable of doing anything in this story.

Now, that is us, isn't it? It is the man who is in need of great mercy. It is the man who is in need of amazing neighbourly love.

Now, that is who we actually are. But the question is, will we acknowledge that? You see, as long as we insist on justifying ourselves, we will never identify with this man.

He is too weak. He is too pitiful. He is too pathetic. I mean, yuck! Who wants to be viewed in that light? We want to be the heroic Samaritan.

[36 : 49] God has to be the man. But remember what Jesus said last week? He said, back in chapter 10 verse 21, God has hidden himself from the wise and learned.

God has hidden himself from people like the lawyer, who, learned as he is, wants to justify himself. But God has revealed himself to little children.

He reveals himself to the helpless and dependent. And if that's what we admit we are, God is delighted to make himself known to us.

And that is the best place to be. Because Jesus says, what happens if you do put yourself in the shoes of this half dead man?

At first, it is not a comfortable place to be, is it? You are in a totally hopeless situation. And even when a priest, the guy who makes all kinds of sacrifices comes, he can't help you.

[38 : 05] Even when a Levite, a guy who is supposed to help you keep the law, comes, he can't help you. is there anyone who can?

After all, you can't help yourself. And all you can do is cry desperately out for someone to save you. But now, look, here comes another guy.

He's on a donkey. And you realise he is a guy whom the Jews despise and reject. But moved with compassion, he tends to you.

He binds up your wounds. He prepares a home for you. He restores you back to life. In fact, he pays the price so that you would never ever have to be worried about becoming enslaved ever again.

And he says, I've got to go just for a little while. But I'll be back. You see, if Jesus' only point is to expand our definition of neighbour, Jesus could have just given a statement, couldn't he?

[39 : 31] Don't ask who is your neighbour, be a neighbour. He could have just said that to the lawyer. Or, if he insists on telling a story, he could have easily made the victim a Samaritan and the hero a Jew, couldn't he?

That would still have made the point, perhaps in an even clearer way. But he makes the one who gives help a Samaritan. Why?

Have you ever wondered that? Now, I think there's probably more than one reason, but let me just give you the relevant one for today. I think it is because the Samaritan is not primarily meant to be seen as a role model.

Rather, we are meant to see him as the most unexpected source of salvation for this man. Because that is who Jesus is.

You see, Jesus tells the story in such a way that as I hope by now we all recognize, he is also deliberately echoing what he himself is going to do.

[40 : 51] He is going to Jerusalem as one who will be rejected by Israel to be the unexpected source of salvation for helpless man.

And to do that, he will end up experiencing what this man experienced, being beaten and stripped and be left to die on the cross.

And he does this all because he has pity on us. He is moved by compassion. He doesn't want to leave us lying all by ourselves on our own.

You see, here is what you can know. When we feel defeated or despairing, when we are in a place where we are consumed by our sin or crushed by the difficulties of this world, Jesus comes along not to add to your burdens or lecture you on your weaknesses.

He comes to be your good neighbour neighbour and my good neighbour. And when we become recipients of the greatest neighbour love of all, we can then go and love our neighbour.

[42 : 11] Because yes, this story does call us to be good Samaritans. But first, we must receive the ministry of the true good Samaritan.

for when that happens, we are brought back to life, we are no longer half dead, we can go and do likewise.

We give as God gave, we forgive as God forgave, we love our neighbour as Jesus loved his neighbour, we don't draw ethnic lines just like Jesus doesn't draw ethnic lines.

And we will have to pay a great price sometimes, just like the Samaritan in the story. We will have to take great risks sometimes, just like the Samaritan in the story.

We must go and do likewise. But we can do so because our names are already written in heaven. Jesus has secured us. We no longer have to justify ourselves.

[43 : 16] And so because team Jesus' people already experience his healing love, they extend that same love to others. That's what the parable of the Good Samaritan is all about.

It is not a moral story. It is not an example story. Rather, it is a love story. It is a story of the gospel. And though the parable itself is fiction, God is actually true. Because God really did so love the world that he sent his only son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have life forever more, a life spent loving him and loving our neighbor.

God is the gospel. Shall we pray? Amen. Father, I believe you have spoken.

I believe you have spoken very powerfully this morning. I pray that by your spirit, you will bring us afresh to see how marvelous the gospel is that we will not take it for granted.

[44 : 45] That the Lord Jesus is a true good Samaritan who gives us all the help that we need, who never leaves us lying in a ditch, who has paid the price so that we will never ever have to be slaves to sin again.

And so Father, we just pray that we will respond to this love with love. We will respond with a deeper love of you, a deeper love of our neighbor. We pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.