

## ***Can we truly be good Samaritans? (Luke 10:25–37)***

The well-known parable of the good Samaritan has wonderful implications on how we should live, but people frequently fail to see in the context the intent which Jesus had in telling this parable. His intent had eternal consequences for the lawyer who came to test Him. By asking three questions, we can get to what we should learn from the parable.

### ***I. What were the issues at hand (10:25–29)?***

1. The lawyer, who was one skilled in understanding the Mosaic law, came to Jesus wanting to test Him. Jewish leadership had become opponents of Jesus and were rejecting the divine prerogatives which Jesus claimed, some of which are seen in the beginning of this chapter.
2. The lawyer specifically asked how to inherit eternal life, a question to which Jesus was responding whether asked honestly or more probably as part of the effort to test Him. Jesus did not challenge the lawyer's attempt to test Him, but did challenge the lawyer's thinking in a way that could lead him to eternal life.
3. Jesus replied by having the lawyer give his answer from his own understanding of the law. Jesus fully agreed with his quote from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 which Jesus elsewhere said form the foundation for all the rest of the law. But others, like the rich young ruler (Luke 18) and the apostle Paul (Romans 7), discovered that they and others cannot love God wholeheartedly and cannot love others as themselves.
4. The lawyer sought to justify himself, showing probably a gnawing sense of guilt, by returning with the question, "who is my neighbor?" Centuries of distancing themselves from pagan neighbors and rigid standards of the Pharisees against association with "unclean" people led Jews such as this lawyer to reject such groups as neighbors to love.

### ***II. What did the parable say in light of those issues (10:30–37a)?***

1. The parable is a straightforward story. The dangerous trip from Jerusalem to Jericho left a certain man robbed, naked, beaten, and half dead at the hand of robbers. Two religious leaders, a priest and Levite, saw him and avoided him, though they should have known and acted better. It was a Samaritan, despised by Jews, who saw the wounded man, had compassion, cared for his wounds, transported him to a place where he could recover, and covered the costs (at least two days pay!) of continued recovery.
2. Jesus used the parable to ask the question: "who proved to be a neighbor to the injured man?"
  - a. Jesus did not ask who had loved their neighbor, because that would have skirted the lawyer's heart issue.
  - b. In the parable it is not the Jew helping a despised Samaritan, but a despised Samaritan being the helper, forcing the lawyer to recognize the Samaritan as the good neighbor.
  - c. But the lawyer avoids saying it was the Samaritan and refers to him only as "the one who showed mercy." But by answering so, he affirmed that loving one's neighbor is not merely doing nice things to nice people, but costly service to those in need, even if enemies.

### ***III. What was the expected or desired response (10:37b)?***

1. On the surface it seems that Jesus expected the lawyer to be a good neighbor and show mercy to others. But that does not address the issues raised in vv. 25–29.
2. In light of the issues, Jesus was responding to the testing: would this lawyer accept Jesus and His word. Jesus was addressing the question of inheriting eternal life: trying but failing to perfectly love your neighbor cannot save you. You need a Savior. Jesus was restoring the full demand of the law to love one's neighbor, which neither the lawyer nor anyone can fulfil.

Essentially, the parable was intended to reveal to a self-righteous lawyer his true spiritual need.

The importance of loving one's neighbor is clear, but not the primary intent of the parable. Just as the lawyer should have recognized the difficulty of that challenge, we too should know even in the present medical crisis the impossibility of loving God whole-heartedly and loving our neighbor as ourselves. The failures we see in ourselves and others should move us to the conclusion Jesus wanted, we need a Savior and that Savior is Jesus Christ. Only in and through Him can we grow to love God whole-heartedly and to love our neighbor.

#### ***Questions for further thought and discussion:***

- To what extent in the present health crisis are you motivated by self-preservation or love of neighbor?
- What examples of self-love have you observed in this crisis and how can you avoid doing anything similar?
- Where are the dangers of being self-righteous and how can we correct or guard against that in ourselves?
- The parable of the good Samaritan is a much loved children's story. How would you explain to a child that Jesus is not teaching that helping people can save you? (Or are you tempted to skip verses 25–29?)