

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)

A Story of Ultimate Importance and Uncomfortable Implications

The Parable of the Good Samaritan may be the most famous of Jesus' parables. Even those having little acquaintance with the Bible will know this story. The term "Good Samaritan" has even been enshrined in our cultural vocabulary, describing someone who stops to help a stranger in distress, at some cost to himself, expecting nothing in return. Our legal code has "Good Samaritan" laws that provide criminal and civil immunity to those who act in good faith and without gross negligence in an emergency situation, in case something goes wrong. I would be shocked if anyone in attendance this morning has never heard this parable, or at least knows something of the story.

Yet I am not convinced that this parable is widely understood, at least not in its entirety. I think that most people with a superficial acquaintance with the Parable of the Good Samaritan assume that by this parable Jesus was teaching three things: (1) we should love all people, regardless of creed, culture, or color; (2) religion gets in the way of such unbounded love; (3) love for neighbor is the core message of the Christian faith. There is a degree of truth in each of these statements. But as J. I. Packer famously said, "A half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth."¹ "Love thy neighbor" is not the gospel. "Love thy neighbor" is the law (Mt 22:34–40; Mk 12:28–33; Lk 10:25–28; Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14); and it is not even the primary command of the law, as even today's passage makes clear. "Love thy God" is the first and greatest commandment (Mt 22:37–38), and it is only when you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength that you are capable of loving your neighbor as yourself. I think that when most people hear Jesus say that the *law* is comprehended in the commandments to love God and neighbor, they assume that Jesus means that the *gospel* is comprehended in these two commands, and therefore that anyone who loves God and neighbor will inherit eternal life. But this is to confuse the law and the gospel, and to rip this parable out of its surrounding context, both within the Gospel of Luke and within the whole canon of Scripture. Such a reading of this parable does not account for the reality of human sin, or for the demands of divine justice and the

¹ J. I. Packer, "Saved by His Precious Blood: An Introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*," in *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, ed. J. I. Packer and Mark Dever (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 113.

necessity of atonement. In other words, before we can begin to fulfill the law, we need the gospel. Understood within both its biblical and canonical context, the Parable of the Good Samaritan does, in fact, lead us to the very center of the Christian faith, just not in the way that many suppose.

This morning, let's study the Parable of the Good Samaritan *in context*, that we may see the glory of the gospel shining through, and find the answer to the question posed by the lawyer to Jesus: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The main point of this morning's sermon is stated as follows: *To inherit eternal life, a sinner must be justified by the blood and righteousness of Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, which is revealed in a life of costly love.*

The Setting of the Parable

Let's begin, then, with the setting of the parable. What prompted Jesus to tell this parable? Let's begin in v. 25:

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (10:25–29)

Let's ask three questions of these verses.

First, who asked the questions that prompted the parable? Luke calls this man a "lawyer" (νομικός), which was a synonym for the more common term "scribe" (γραμματεύς).² Scribes

² "Luke uses three different Greek words for Jewish scribes, who, in the words of Schürer, were 'the undisputed spiritual leaders of the people.' The other Evangelists refer to scribes only by the Greek word *grammateus* [Mt 22:35?], which Luke uses in fifteen instances, especially when following Mark. In addition, Luke refers to scribes six times as 'lawyers' (Gk. *nomikos*), and once as 'teachers of the law' (5:17; Gk. *nomodaskalos* [again in Acts 5:34]. 'Expert in the law' here translates the second term, *nomikos*. Luke does not make a distinction among these terms, but *nomikos* may designate a distinguished category of scribes, a 'first among equals,' as it were, who both knew the law and were authorized to teach it"; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 318, quoting Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, ed. Geza Vermes, F. Millar, M. Black, and P. Vermes, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 2:4.

were experts in the Torah, as well as the Mishnah—the rabbinical teachings on the Torah. They were, in the words of Emil Schürer, “the undisputed spiritual leaders of the people.”³ This lawyer was important, respected, and powerful; he was the kind of man who, when he spoke, people listened. And yet, here he was, listening to Jesus. Yet at some point, he had had enough. He “stood up [the normal posture of one who posed a question to a rabbi⁴] to put him to the test.”

Second, what questions that prompted the parable? The lawyer posed two questions to Jesus. The first question is stated in v. 25: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” On the surface, this seems an appropriate question to ask a rabbi, even if you don’t believe that He is the Messiah.⁵ It is good to ponder this question of ultimate significance; it is better to pose this question to Jesus, who alone is qualified to answer it. But this was not a sincere question asked by a sincere inquirer, but rather a trap set by an enemy of Christ. That is *very* important to our interpretation of the response that Jesus gave. As He often did in such circumstances (e.g. Mt 21:23–27; 22:15–46), Jesus did not give a straightforward answer because this was not a straightforward question. We will get to the lawyer’s motives in a moment, but for now, simply look at the way he posed the question: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Leon Morris writes that the way the lawyer phrased the question “shows that he was thinking of some form of salvation by works and had no understanding of divine grace.”⁶ Furthermore, not only was he thinking in terms of salvation by self-righteousness, but the fact that he used an aorist-tense verb (ποιήσας) indicates that he was thinking of a single, great work that would assure him of eternal life.⁷ [It is interesting to note that when Jesus responded, “Do this (τοῦτο ποίει) and you will live,” He used the present tense, indicating that the law requires what the Baptist Confession calls “personal, entire, exact, and *perpetual* obedience.”⁸]

³ Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 2:4; quoted in Edwards, 318.

⁴ “V. 25 recalls a typical Jewish teaching scene, with teacher surrounded by disciples and hearers, all seated. Jewish disciples normally honored rabbis by standing when they spoke or asked a question. The description of the scribe as ‘[standing] to test Jesus’ thus suggests either disingenuousness or duplicity on his part, for his intention does not correspond to his respectful posture”; Edwards, 318.

⁵ “The same question is asked by a serious seeker in 18:18. Like modern-day politicians and sports stars who get asked the same questions over and over again, it is likely that Jesus was asked how to inherit eternal life many times (see Matt 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34)”; David E. Garland, *Luke*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2011), 437.

⁶ Leon Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988), 206.

⁷ “The verb in Greek is in the aorist tense, implying a pat solitary action: ‘What *thing* must I do?’ If it does not intend a single deed, it intends something that at least can be calculated”; Edwards, 318.

⁸ The Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), 19.1. This was pointed out in Philip Ryken, *Luke, Volume 1: Luke 1–12*, REC (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), 539.

As the lawyer was thinking in terms of works-righteousness in order to justify himself (10:29), Jesus directed him to the law rather than the gospel. Why? Because before this man would be ready to cry out to God for mercy and receive justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, he needed to be brought to the end of himself. And the divinely-ordained sword for slaying self-righteousness, the divinely-ordained hammer for shattering human pride, is the law.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19–20)

So rather than direct this man to the mercy of God revealed in the gospel, Jesus directed the lawyer to the impossible standard of righteousness revealed in the law. “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” The man responded with an accurate summation of the demands of the law, drawn from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: “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 , and your neighbor as yourself.” The lawyer’s response was correct, so far as it went. The law does indeed promise eternal life to those who obey the law.

“You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them.” (Lv 18:4–5)

“So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live.” (Ezk 20:10–11)

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. (Rom 10:5)

And the law is indeed comprehended in the commands to love God supremely and love your neighbor selflessly. Jesus Himself taught this on occasion (Mt 22:34–40; Mt 12:28–31), which may be why the lawyer answered in this way. But it does not seem to have occurred to the man that the standard of the law is perfection, which places eternal life by works of the law beyond the reach of sinners. Not only that, but the same law that promises life to those who obey perfectly, threatens death to those who fail to render perfect obedience.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” (Gal 3:10; quoting Dt 27:26)

Not only is the blessing of eternal life beyond the reach of sinners, but they stand under the curse of God’s righteous wrath. In order to be justified before God, then, a sinner needs a righteousness that he cannot attain, and an atonement that he cannot provide. Thus, Jesus could not have been giving a straightforward, sincere answer to the lawyer’s question, when he responded, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live,” or else Jesus would be teaching falsely.

So why did Jesus respond in this way? Why did he point the lawyer to the law rather than the gospel? Why did he send the lawyer away to do the impossible, to do what He knew the man was incapable of doing? It was to bring the man to the end of himself. This interaction between Jesus and the lawyer closely resembles the interaction between Jesus and the “rich young ruler.” See if you can spot the similarities, and discern Jesus’ motive in His response:

And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a

needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” (18:18–27)

- Like the lawyer, the “rich young ruler” asked the question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
- Like the lawyer, the “rich young ruler” did not believe he was dealing with the Messiah, the incarnate Son of God: “Why do you call me good?” Jesus said. “No one is good except God alone.”
- As He did with the lawyer, Jesus pointed the “rich young ruler” to the law, this time summed up in Ten Commandments.
- Like the lawyer, who wished to justify himself (10:29), the “rich young ruler” imagined that he had kept the commandments and fulfilled the law: “All these things I have kept from my youth.”
- As He did with the lawyer, Jesus applied the law to the “rich young ruler” in a way that made it impossible for him to attain. The “rich young ruler” loved money more than Jesus, and therefore could not (“it is impossible,” said Jesus) give it away in order to follow Jesus. Similarly, I will argue this morning that this lawyer loved himself more than God or neighbor, and probably hated Samaritans and others like them who did not measure up to his own self-righteous standard, and therefore could not “go, and do likewise.” This lawyer believed that he was justified by his keeping of the law, so Jesus instructed him to go try to keep the law. For Jesus knew that he could not. After all, with man this is impossible, but not with God; with God all things are possible.

The lawyer believed he was justified by works of the law. Therefore, Jesus pointed him to the law, and invited himself to go attempt to justify himself thereby.⁹ But the man would never attain to the standard of the law; no sinner can.

⁹ Ryken comments, “Jesus was answering the lawyer on his own terms, giving a legal answer to a legal question. Is there anything we can do to gain eternal life? Yes, the law of God offers salvation to anyone who fully satisfies its demands. ‘Do this,’ Jesus said, ‘and you will live.’ But who is able to do it? No one, except the sinless Son of God. As the Scripture says, ‘by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 3:20; cf. Gal. 3:10). In other words, we can never be saved by keeping the law—not because there is anything wrong with the law, but because there is something wrong with us. This was

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 8:7–8)

If the law is indeed summed up in the commands to love God supremely, and to love others selflessly, then until a sinner is born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the righteousness of the law remains out of reach. You cannot love the God you hate, or the neighbor you despise. Indeed, until the regenerate man is raised in everlasting glory, and his selfish, sinful nature is glorified in the light of God's holiness (1 Jn 3:2), even his best works will be corrupted by sin. There is no hope in justification by self-righteousness, through works of the law.

The second question the lawyer posed to Jesus is stated in v. 29: “And who is my neighbor?” What lies behind this question? What is the lawyer getting at? It helps to know that the question of what constituted a “neighbor” (τὸν πλησίον) was an open debate in first-century Judaism. Leviticus 19:17–18 defined a “neighbor” as a fellow Israelite, “the sons of your own people.” But Leviticus 19:33–34 expanded that definition to include “the stranger who sojourns with you.” Some rabbis included Gentiles in this definition; most, however, included only those Gentiles who became Jewish converts. Some Pharisees in Jesus' day defined “neighbor” so narrowly as to exclude non-observant Jews—after all, did not David say, “I hate the assembly of evildoers, / and I will not sit with the wicked” (Ps 26:5; cf. 31:6; 139:21–22)? Does not God hate all evildoers (Ps 5:5)?¹⁰ We know this lawyer was insincere, and was “testing” (ἐκπειράζων) Jesus. Therefore, I suggest that his question was an attempt to demonstrate that Jesus was outside the bounds of orthodox Judaism, as defined by the scribes and the Pharisees, for Jesus clearly included Gentiles (like the centurion [7:1–10] and the Canaanite woman [Mt 15:21–28] and the Gerasene demoniac [8:26–39]) and sinners (like tax-collectors [5:27–32] and prostitutes [7:36–50]) within the bounds of His love. In the eyes of this lawyer, I propose, Jesus had corrupted the law and obliterated the distinction between clean and unclean by loving those whom God hates. I imagine that he was ready with those verses I quoted from the Psalms to show that Jesus was a dangerous liberal who lived in violation of the law of Moses. In answering this second question, then, Jesus accomplished two purposes at once. First, He made clear His position that “neighbor”

the obvious implication of what Jesus said to the lawyer. He was laying down an impossible challenge designed to drive sinners to seek the Savior”; Ryken, 539.

¹⁰ Garland, 439–40. Garland cites *The Testament of Issachar* 5:2; 7:6; 1QS 1:10; 2:24; 5:25; 9:21; 1QM 1:1.

means anyone who bears the image of God, and that love must not be restricted by creed, culture, or color. And second, He set before this lawyer a standard impossible for him to keep.¹¹

Third, what motivated the questions that prompted the parable? I have already answered this question in my response to the first two. Luke explicitly stated two motives. First, in v. 25, we read that “a lawyer stood up to put him to the test.” In other words, these were not sincere questions, else they may have received straightforward answers. It is amazing how, “Have mercy upon me!” receives the declaration, “Your sins are forgiven,” while disingenuous inquiries receive enigmatic replies. We know that the leaders of the Jews, whether it be the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests, or the rulers of the people (the Sanhedrin), were all seeking an opportunity to ensnare Jesus that they might destroy Him (19:47; cf. Mt 21:45–46; Mk 11:18; et al.). This interaction was another instance in a long line of attempts to find a reason to arrest Jesus and ultimately have Him killed. Second, in v. 29 we read that the lawyer was “desiring to justify himself” (θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν); he was attempting to establish his own righteousness before God and men. Ryken suggests that he was attempting circumscribe the demands of love around those he already loved—that is, those like him and of whom he approved. He writes,

Obviously, he could not love everyone. That would be impossible. But if he could find a way to limit the size of the neighborhood, then maybe, just maybe, he really could love his neighbor, and then he would be able to justify himself before God. This is what always happens when we try to be saved by our own works. Rather than upholding the law in all its perfection, we undermine the law by reducing it to something we think we might be able to keep.¹²

Anyone who tries to justify himself inevitably attempts to lower the law’s standard, whether by focusing merely upon external action and neglecting internal affection (“I’ve never worshiped idols,” says the covetous man), or else by reducing the law’s scope (“I don’t lie or cheat or steal... from my family”). But God will not judge you according to your definition of the law. He

¹¹ Morris notes, “As we approach the parable we must bear in mind that it is told to the lawyer in answer to the question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ not, ‘What must I do to be saved?’”; Morris, 207.

¹² Ryken, 540.

will judge you according to His definition of the law, a definition that requires perfect, personal, perpetual obedience. And by that standard shall no flesh be justified (Rom 3:20).

The Story within the Parable

Now that the context is established, let's read the parable itself, the interpretation of which is fairly straightforward.

Jesus replied, "A man was going down to from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and 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. 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.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (10:30–37)

The details of the parable are sparse, because they are largely irrelevant to the point of the parable. But a few items do bear mentioning. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous, as Josephus, the Jewish historian, notes.¹³ Jericho lay eighteen miles to the northeast of Jerusalem, and was a descent of some 3,400 feet (Jerusalem sits at 2,600 ft. above sea level, Jericho at 825 ft. *below* sea level). Edwards describes it as a "serpentine road . . . pockmarked with caves, which, especially near the ascent to Jerusalem, offered refuge for brigands."¹⁴ In other words, the situation Jesus described in v. 30 was a common one, not at all out of the realm of possibility.

¹³ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 2.125; cited in Edwards, 320.

¹⁴ Edwards, 320.

Three men encounter the man who had been robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead. The first is a priest, likewise heading from Jerusalem down to Jericho. It was not uncommon for priests to be travelling, especially upon this road, for the majority of priests did not live in Jerusalem, and (like Zechariah) would travel there for their twice-a-year service. This priest was evidently returning home from temple service.¹⁵ Nevertheless, when the priest sees the half-dead man, he crosses over to the other side of the road (ἀντιπαρήλθεν) and passes him by. Next comes a Levite, who though not of the priestly line of Aaron (the Kohathites) was of the tribe of Levi and served the temple in a variety of ways. Edwards writes, “The tribe of Levi was responsible for oversight of the central sanctuary of Israel by assisting the priests, preparing sacrifices, cleansing and caring for the sacred courts and vessels, serving as porters, gatekeepers, singers, and musicians, and also by interpreting Torah.”¹⁶ The Levite likewise sees the man, crosses the road, and continues on his way. Why? Many commentators suspect that they did not want to contract ritual defilement, by touching blood, or, if the man was dead, by touching a corpse.¹⁷ But this does not make much sense, as the priest and the Levite were travelling “down” (κατέβαινεν) from Jerusalem, presumably after their temple service was concluded. Furthermore, the Mishnah made provision for life-saving care such that it did not render one unclean.¹⁸ I think the answer as to why they did not help the man is far simpler—they did not love him because he wasn’t their neighbor.

Why did Jesus choose a priest and a Levite as the villains of this parable? Why not a Pharisee and a scribe, for instance? The Pharisee and the scribe represented run-of-the-mill Judaism in Jesus’ day far more than the priest and the Levite.¹⁹ Perhaps that would have been too on the nose, although Jesus was not opposed to punching people in the nose (metaphorically, of course). The answer must have something to do with the temple, for that is what set the priest

¹⁵ “The greatest number of priests who did not live in Jerusalem lived in Jericho, the closest large city”; Edwards, 320.

¹⁶ Edwards, 321.

¹⁷ Morris, 208; Garland, 441–42; Ryken, 542–43.

¹⁸ Edwards, 321n114.

¹⁹ “Normative Judaism is usually stereotyped in the Gospels by ‘Pharisees and scribes.’ Jesus’ pairing of ‘priests and Levites’ (elsewhere in the NT only John 1:19) seems particularly significant in the parable, for the two offices frequently occur in a trilogy of ‘priests, Levites, and people’ as a designation for all Israel”; Edwards, 321, citing 1 Chr 28:21; 2 Chr 34:30; 35:2–3, 8, 18; Ezra 2:70; 7:7, 13; 8:15; 9:1; 10:5, 18–22, 25–43; Neh 7:72; 8:13; 9:38; 10:28; 11:3, 20. Edwards continues, “‘Priests and Levites’ thus personifies the distinctive relationship of Israel with God, particularly as it was expressed in the temple cult of Jerusalem”; Ibid. Garland writes, “The priest, therefore, was likely to have been perceived by the listeners as a notable representative of Jewish piety”; Garland, 441.

and the Levite apart. By choosing a priest and a Levite as the villains of His story, there was something Jesus wished to communicate about the temple. I am speculating here (the text does not tell us why Jesus chose these particular characters), but I suspect it has to do with the inefficacy of external, formal worship, bare rituals and ceremonies, to change the heart. These two men had not only been in Jerusalem participating in the rituals and ceremonies of temple worship, they had been *conducting* the rituals and ceremonies of temple worships. Thousands of animals had been sacrificed, hundreds of psalms had been sung and prayers had been prayed, and yet, when their two weeks were up, they headed home just as calloused and hard-hearted as they had come. This, of course, serves as a reminder that the bare act of coming to church, singing the songs, praying the prayers, hearing the sermon, eating the bread, drinking the wine... has zero power to change a cold, stony heart into a living heart throbbing with love. Only the Holy Spirit can do this. So, first, this is a reminder that you must be born again, born of the Spirit, born from above (Jn 3:1–8). And even then, when you come to worship, you must ask the Spirit’s help to turn the elements of worship, which apart from the Spirit’s power would be bare rituals and ceremonies, into effectual means of grace. The Baptist Catechism states,

Q94: How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

A94: The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.²⁰

Take care, Beloved, that you be not like the priest and the Levite in your approach to church, thinking of it as some duty to fulfill, some box to check, some task to complete, some merit to attain, while your heart remains hard and disengaged.

But then along comes a Samaritan, who upon seeing the man, “he had compassion” (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη)—literally, “was moved with compassion.” In other words, love was not a choice, a decision; love was an affection, the reflex of his soul to the sight of need. And out of his overflowing compassion, he acted in mercy, at great cost to himself, both in terms of time and money. “He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine [forming a

²⁰ The Baptist Catechism (1693), Question 94.

makeshift compress²¹]. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii [about a day's wage for an average laborer] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' (vv. 34–35). This is what love does: (1) it moves toward need, rather than avoiding need; (2) it addresses the need in real and practical ways, as opposed to simply well-wishing [which is the way many of us treat prayer—using it as a way to cross over to the opposite side of the road, as it were, and still feel good about ourselves]; (3) he stays on the need until it is resolved.

Now, why a Samaritan? Why did Jesus make the Samaritan the hero of the parable? It is because he—at best a half-breed with a corrupted religion, at worst a pagan Gentile—serves as a foil to the priest and the Levite—those in the story most expected to be righteous. As we saw a few weeks ago when a Samaritan village rejected a visit from Christ, prompting James and John to ask permission to destroy their village with fire from heaven (9:51–56), the Jews and the Samaritans did not like one another ("Jews have no dealings with Samaritans," wrote John [Jn 4:9]). This hostility traced all the way back to 722 BC, when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and carried off many of its inhabitants into exile (2 Kings 17) and repopulated the region with Gentile colonists from pagan lands (Ezra 4:2, 10). Generations of intermarriage and syncretism followed. The Samaritans constructed a rival sanctuary on Mount Gerizim, claimed the Pentateuch, but rejected the rest of Scripture and all of Jewish rabbinical tradition. The hostility went deep, and it went in both directions.²² What is the point? Let me first tell you what the point is *not*. The point is *not* that the religion of the Samaritans empowered its adherents to fulfill the law of the love. Jesus explicitly condemned the false religion of the Samaritans ("You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" [Jn 4:22]). The false religion of the Samaritans was just as dead as the formal religion of the Jews. Rather, the point of Jesus' use of a Samaritan as the hero of this parable is that true religion—a religion that genuinely loves one's neighbor [true religion is more than this, but it is not less than this (Jas 1:27); true religion cannot be reduced to "love thy neighbor," but

²¹ Edwards, 322–23. Morris writes, "Wine would have been used for cleaning the wounds (the alcohol in it would have had an antiseptic effect though, of course, the man could not have known that; he only knew that it helped). Oil, i.e. olive oil, would have eased the pain. The two appear to have been widely used by both Jews and Greeks"; Morris, 208.

²² See Garland's excursus, "Jews and Samaritans: An Adversarial History," in Garland, 443–444. See also Edwards, 322.

neither can “love thy neighbor” be divorced from true religion]—is no longer to be found in the Jerusalem temple, exclusively among the Jews. In fact, with the coming of Christ, true religion can no longer be found in the Jerusalem temple (Jn 4:21). Rather, true religion is centered in Jesus Christ, and may be found in every tribe, tongue, people, and nation on earth.

Jesus then asked the lawyer, “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise” (vv. 36–37).²³

The Sum of the Parable

Now that we have established the context of the parable, and explained some of the elements of the parable, what point(s) did Jesus intend to make by telling this parable, and how do they apply to us this morning? I see two main points, corresponding to the two questions posed by the lawyer.

First, *no sinner can be justified by works of the law, but only through faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ*. In response to the first question the lawyer asked, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded by directing him to the law, summed up in the command to love God with an affection appropriate to His majesty—namely, with *all* his heart and with *all* his soul and with *all* his strength and with *all* his mind—and to love his neighbor as himself, and then told him, “Do this, and you will live.” And that is true... if it could be done. But it cannot be done, not by sinners born in a state of corruption and condemnation. For one thing, we are born into this world already guilty by virtue of our covenantal union with Adam (Rom 5:18), and we do nothing but add to our condemnation with every sin. For another, we are born into this world thoroughly corrupted by virtue of our inheritance of a sinful nature from Adam (Rom 5:19), such that our hearts are hopelessly bent toward sin and self, rendering it impossible for us to love God *at all*, let alone supremely, or to love our neighbor selflessly (Rom 8:7–8). Listen to the apostle Paul’s damning indictment of the entire human race:

²³ “The question Jesus asks the lawyer is not the same question the lawyer asked Jesus in v. 29. For the lawyer, ‘neighbor’ is a noun. ‘Neighbor’ is an object to whom one owes duties—burdensome duties that the lawyer desires to avoid (v. 29). For Jesus, ‘neighbor’ is a verb, a way of behaving toward people in need that gives life to both giver and receiver. The Greek word *gegonenai* is crucial to Jesus’ question in v. 36: ‘Who of the three *became* a neighbor [or *showed* neighborliness] . . . ?’ For Jesus, one does not *have* a neighbor; one *is* a neighbor, or better, *becomes* a neighbor”; Edwards, 323. Later, Edwards writes, “The lawyer does not expect the conclusion to which the parable leads him; the fact that he cannot bring himself to say ‘the Samaritan’ in answer to Jesus’ question may betray his difficulty in accepting the full ramifications of the parable”; Ibid., 324.

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:

*“None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.” (Rom 3:9–12)*

The way of justification by works of the law is forever closed to sinners like us.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19–20)

So what are we to do? Is our case hopeless; is all lost? No, praise God there is another way of justification.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to demonstrate God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:21–26)

We cannot be justified by works of the law. But we can be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. For God has done for us in Christ what we could not do for ourselves. The eternal Son of God

became man, yet being born of the virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born without sin—neither condemned in Adam nor corrupted by Adam. And as our appointed representative before God, He fulfilled every precept of the law. He loved the Lord His God with all His heart and all His soul and all His mind and all His strength, and He loved His neighbor as Himself—personally, perfectly, perpetually. *He* did this, that *we* might live. And as our appointed representative before God, He satisfied the full penalty of the law. Bearing our sin and guilt, He died in our place as a propitiation [a wrath-absorbing, atoning sacrifice] on the cross. In Christ alone we may be justified by faith alone, apart from works of the law. Would you inherit eternal life? You must *not* seek to justify yourself, but rather you must be justified by faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ.²⁴

Second, *the law is fulfilled in those born of the Spirit in a life of costly love*. The point of this parable is not, “You cannot keep the law, so don’t even try. Just look to Christ for justification.” It is true, you cannot be justified by the law. But the aim of the saving work of Christ goes beyond the justification of sinners by His blood and righteousness; it extends to the sanctification of sinners by the Spirit of Christ.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin the flesh [justification], in order that the righteous requirement of the law [love God supremely, love your neighbor selflessly] might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit [sanctification]. (Rom 8:3–4)

Justification addresses the problem of our condemnation; regeneration/sanctification addresses the problem of our corruption. By the regenerating, sanctifying, indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, God transforms us into loving people, who love, not like the priest or Levite, but like the Samaritan—a people who move toward need, rather than away from need; a people who meet those needs in real, practical, costly, sacrificial ways; a people who persevere in love until the

²⁴ Ryken comments, “At this point [after Jesus’ response in v. 28], the lawyer should have prayed for grace. He should have fallen to his knees and said something like this: ‘Help me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. I cannot love God the way he demands to be loved, and I have never loved anyone nearly as much as I love myself. Tell me how a sinner like me can be saved.’ If the lawyer had done that, Jesus undoubtedly would have explained the true way of salvation, which is not by anything we can do, but only by what Jesus has done—his perfect fulfillment of the law in love for his Father and for us as his neighbors”; Ryken, 539.

and the need is met and the ministry is accomplished. Do you know what the Samaritan in this parable represents? He represents a Christian—not a special class of super-Christian, but a rank-and-file Christian in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells. Does the Samaritan represent you? Can you point to practical examples of costly love in your life, particularly towards those whom it is not easy to love? The injured man was more than likely a Jew. And yet, the Samaritan, the avowed enemies of Jews, loved him as a neighbor. Who is your neighbor? In order to evaluate the presence of the Spirit in your life, you must look for examples of *costly* love—love that is not natural, love that costs you something. It is love for those who are different, love for those with whom you disagree, love for those whom you despise, love for those who have hurt you, love for those who have wronged you, love for those from whom you may expect nothing in return. *That* is the mark of the Spirit at work within you.

I remind you of the main point of this sermon: *To inherit eternal life, a sinner must be justified by the blood and righteousness of Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, which is revealed in a life of costly love.* The four elements of that statement hang together. If there is no evidence of costly love in your life, you are not being sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. And if you are not being sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, you have not been justified by the blood and righteousness of Christ. And if you have not been justified by the blood and righteousness of Christ, you will not inherit eternal life. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.