

25. The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

What Must I do to Inherit Eternal Life?

If ever there was a question a Bible teacher wanted to be asked, this is it. Usually, when someone asks that kind of question, it is because a person is awakening to their need for Christ. This question was asked when Jesus was teaching about the Kingdom of God. At this time in Christ's ministry, most of His teaching was outside the town as the synagogues were too small for the people who wanted to hear. People were sitting cross-legged on the grass when an expert in the law stood up. Luke writes that his motive was to test Jesus (v. 25). Let's read the first part of the passage:□

²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷He 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'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" ²⁸"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:25-28).□

Some translations call him a lawyer. This man was not a secular lawyer, but someone trained in the details of the law of God, interpreting it so that the general population could live it out. He was an expert in God's revelation to the Children of Israel, but there was a God-shaped void in his life. While he was listening to Jesus' teaching, perhaps, he came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Somehow, in the depths of his heart, he was aware that, with all the knowledge that he had, something was missing. There was a vast difference between himself and the Lord Jesus. Was it the joy that emanated from the face of Christ? Was it compassion for people so evident in Christ? Was it His love for the poor, or the downtrodden and the sick that were present?

Luke writes that he stood up to test the Lord Jesus (v. 25). Did he put the Lord to the test because he was put up to it by others in the hope of discrediting Christ, or was there an awakened heart to a genuine awareness of the void in his life? When a person hears the Word of God, it is like a seed planted in his heart, and God works to bring the seed of the Word to germination for a man to be born again and receive life. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them" (John 6:44). A man's knowledge can hinder him by putting up roadblocks in his mind. Sometimes, people have to put to rest the questions in their minds before fully pursuing the righteousness that comes by faith in the finished work of Christ.

Question 1) What are some of the hard questions that you have for the Lord? Were there important questions you wanted answering before you decided for Christ? Have you ever put the Lord to the test?□

Notice that the man's focus was on what he should do. He said, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 25). At the foundation of this is the widespread belief that eternal life is the reward one gets for the good things we have done. Some believe that God somehow weighs us in the balance, i.e., with our good works on one side and our sins on the other. The truth is that eternal life is a gift from God, which one receives upon surrendering his life to the Lordship of

Christ, i.e., what the Bible calls “believing” on Him (John 3:16). One never inherits anything by “doing.” Inheritance is passed down to us by the gift of a father, and in our case, the relative is the Lord Jesus, and He has not left us to do anything but receive a gift, i.e., the gift of God. There was a passage in the book of John when someone else asked Him something very similar.

²⁸Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” ²⁹Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (John 6:28-29).

If it depends on what we can do, then salvation is no longer a gift. It becomes wages that we earn for good works. It glorifies self and, therefore, fosters pride in one’s accomplishments, something about which man would boast. Salvation is given freely as a gift:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God**—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

For the wages of sin is death, but the **gift of God** is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

If you knew the **gift of God** and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10).

The expert in the law had no conception of sin; he thought it was a natural inheritance for all Jews that were descendants of Abraham. Jesus graciously answered the man’s question with a question: “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” (v. 25). The Greek text brings out that the man was asked as to how he recited it every morning and evening. What did he understand about what he mechanically spoke twice a day?

Suddenly, it was the lawyer who was on the spot, with everyone in the crowd looking at him, waiting for him to share what he knew about the way into eternal life. Jesus was asking the man what role did he understand the Law of God played when it came to man’s salvation. Are we saved by fulfilling the Law of God? I wonder if Jesus was looking at the small box on the man’s arm as if to say, “What does the phylactery on your arm say?” Religious Jews wore this box on their wrists and, sometimes, on their foreheads. Inside the phylactery was key Scriptures that Jews were to keep at the forefront of everything they did and thought. All religious Jews knew these Scriptures by heart.

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

The lawyer also quoted a passage from Leviticus:

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:18).

Question 2) If people were to ask you how they could receive eternal life, what would you say to them? Do you think it is possible to be good enough to earn eternal life?

The verb *to love* is in the present tense indicating that one is continuously and in an uninterrupted way to love God with all his faculties and his neighbor in the same way, never failing once in his loving. The summation of the 613 commandments in the five books of Moses, could be fulfilled if one were to keep the Ten Commandments, part of which focused on man's relationship to God and the rest on man's relationship to one another. The summation of all the Ten Commandments could be brought down into these two commands: you shall forever and without failure love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul or mind, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. If we could adequately fulfill these two commands for all our lives, then it is possible to enter into eternal life. However, how many of us have kept those two commands?

In theory, it is possible to deserve eternal life by obedience to the Law of God, but in practice, none of us can ever be good enough, for the standard is too high. We have a heart problem that makes it impossible to earn salvation by our deeds. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Several years ago when I was out on the streets and talking to strangers about Christ, one person told me he would be alright when he came to the end of his life, for the man had helped two people get out of a plane crash before it exploded; he had saved their lives. When I asked him what he was going to do about his sin, he told me he had never sinned. He was deceived into thinking that his moral standing was better than most and that he would be okay in the Day of Judgment when God will bring all men to account for what they have done (Romans 14:12). □

Most people judge themselves by looking at the lives of others. Let me try to explain what I mean. Imagine that this large, blank, white wall behind me [in this auditorium] represents a scale of all the people who have ever lived and that the very worst person is at the bottom with the top of the wall representing the very best and most righteous of people. Who would you put at the bottom? Many might say Adolf Hitler, or Josef Stalin, or maybe Saddam Hussein, or perhaps their boss at work. □

Who would you put at the top? Perhaps, you would say, "Mother Theresa, Princess Diana, Dr. Martin Luther King, or Billy Graham. I think you would agree that all of us would be somewhere on the wall, e.g., Keith Thomas would be down there, and, maybe, you would be higher up. Well, what do you think the standard is? Many of us would probably reply that the ceiling would be the standard, seeing as the best of humanity is up there. However, that is not what the Bible says the standard is. Romans 3:23 says that the standard is the glory of God, "**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**" or the Living Bible translation of Romans 3:23 says, "**Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious ideal.**"

What is God's glorious ideal for life? The standard is not the ceiling of this room but the sky. None of us have kept the standard of God's righteousness—Christ Jesus. We have all fallen short of the target, which is what sin means, i.e., falling short. If we compare ourselves to armed robbers or child molesters or even our neighbors, we may think we come off quite well, but

when we compare ourselves to Jesus Christ, we see how short we fall. Somerset Maugham once said, "If I wrote down every thought I have ever thought and every deed I have ever done, men would call me a monster of depravity."

The essence of sin is a rebellion against God (Genesis 3), and its result is that we cannot ever be good enough to fulfill the standard of the law. The law shows us God's perfection and requirement, but it doesn't give us the power to attain it. Only the gift of God, i.e., the righteousness of Christ imparted to our soul, makes us acceptable to God. What, then, is the function of the Law? The Law was given to show us our sin nature and reveal to us our need of a Savior (Galatians 3:19-22).

Like many lawyers, the one in our study today began to try to find a loophole and justify himself. When Jesus brought up the matter of doing ("Do this and you will live," v. 28), a conviction of sin in the form of another question began to tug at his heart. He began to feel uncomfortable as specific thoughts came to his mind, to which he replied: "And who is my neighbor?" (v. 28).

Question 3) How does the Holy Spirit speak to us when we "fall short" (what the Bible calls sin)? Is it usually a thought? Are you reminded of a specific person or a situation that has happened? Do you recall a Scripture? Are you aware of the Holy Spirit's voice when this happens?

The lawyer did not seek clarification on the first part, loving the Lord with all his heart. Maybe, he felt that he did not fall short on that part of the commandment. Jesus very lovingly and graciously did not accuse him of sin but waited for his heart to convince him of falling short of that which he held in high esteem. Until a man sees his need for a Savior, he cannot be saved. People can lead a person in a prayer of invitation to Christ before they are truly convicted of sin and see their need for Christ. We can bring the baby to birth before the time of gestation is finished. Until a man sees that he has fallen short, or transgressed the line, and begins to feel indicted within himself by the Law of God, what need does he have for a Savior? □

We have a picture of this principle in the Old Testament. God allowed Israel to be under enormous burdens of slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh, a type or picture of Satan. He did not send a deliverer, Moses, until they cried out to Him in their bondage and slavery: "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. ²⁴God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob" (Exodus 2:23-24). He set them free from Pharaoh's slave market with the blood of a substitute lamb applied to the door frame of their homes. In the same way, God waits until we see that we are not all we are supposed to be, and we are convinced of our need for a deliverer or Savior. □

When Christ said to him, "Do this and you will live" (v. 28), Immediately, questions arose within his heart. He was bankrupt in the area of *doing*. All of a sudden, he was on the defensive, "But he wanted to justify himself," he asked the question: 'And who is my neighbor?' "He felt sure he was okay in his keeping of this commandment. To a Jew, a neighbor would have been someone of Jewish descent that lives nearby. Jesus shared a story that illustrates a spiritual truth about what God thinks when he talks about a neighbor. As we read it, we must remember that the

context of the parable is about how good a person must be, according to the Law, to receive eternal life. As we have already said, none of us are good enough. We all fall short of the kind of love, i.e., love for God and love for our neighbor that God requires.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ ³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” ³⁷The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:29-37).

Jerusalem is 2,300 feet above sea level; Jericho is 1,300 feet below sea level. As one travels eastward from Jerusalem to Jericho, the road drops into the Great Rift Valley that extends from the Galilee down into Africa. The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho is approximately twenty miles, as one descends 3,600 feet in the space of about twenty miles. Jericho is close to the Dead Sea and is the lowest city on earth. The town was given to the tribe of Levi so that they may keep their flocks and herds (Numbers 35). □

Only someone descended from Aaron could be a priest and work at the temple and offer sacrifices. The Levites were all descended from one of the twelve sons of Jacob, viz. Levi, and were those that served the priests and helped them in their ministry. The Priests would give their time of two months (1 Chronicles 24) serving at the temple, and then spend time at home. The only way to get home to Jericho was to go along this route. This road is very rocky, dry, and barren with very little grass or vegetation. There is a tradition that David had this road in mind when he wrote Psalm 23:

Even though I walk through the valley of the **shadow of death**, I will fear no evil, for you are with me (Psalm 23:4).

Part of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was called the Pass of Adumin, or “the bloody way,” because of the many robberies and bloodshed on this road. It is similar to the road many of us travel on this journey through life. The Master of story tellers, Jesus, shares a parable of a man that went down that lonely road and was set upon by robbers. Jesus said that the man was set upon, i.e., beaten. The Greek language brings out that he was repeatedly beaten and brought close to death, and on top of that, he was stripped of all his clothes and left naked with his life slowly ebbing away in the hot sun. The Lord then introduced hope as he spoke of a priest coming along the same road. We don't know which way, though, the priest and Levite were traveling.

They may have been going up towards Jerusalem. All that was hearing Christ thought that the priest would alleviate the need. After all, a priest was well aware of certain Scriptures of what the Lord required of them. Micah the prophet said, “He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Any hopes that the story would end well by the help of the priest were quickly dashed when Jesus told the crowd that the priest deliberately avoided him and passed by on the other side of the road.

Question 4) Can you think of any reasons as to why the priest and Levite did not feel morally obligated to help this man?

For the priest, it is likely that he thought that the man was possibly dead, and if he were to touch him, he would be ritually unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:11). However, his time of serving was over if he was going down to Jericho, but, as we said, he may have been going up the road towards Jerusalem. Many a man will justify himself as to why he should not help another. Sometimes, we don't support a person in need because it will inconvenience us. Hope was introduced into the story again by a Levite also coming along, but hope was dashed again when this man, too, passed by on the other side. Perhaps, the priest and the Levite, if they were going up the road, thought that they would make themselves unclean by touching the man, and they justified themselves from their moral obligation. Are we ever off duty, though, in serving our fellow human beings? Maybe, it was an inconvenience, an interruption to their schedule. Perhaps both thought that the robbers might be still near. They did not want the same thing happening to them.

The story was intriguing to the listeners. Who would help? We all want a good end to a story. What would be the outcome of the man if two of the most religious men that kept stringently to the law passed by on the other side?

Question 5) Was there ever a time in your life when you had a need and were unable to help yourself? Did someone come to help you, or were you left to fend for yourself? □

As the listeners around Jesus were waiting for the hero to appear, Jesus had already relieved them of two heroes. Who would be the hero? Their minds must have been racing to think about who it could be. They all presumed it to be an Israelite. When Jesus introduced a Samaritan into the mix, it must have shocked them. The expert in the law could probably think of several individuals with whom he worked in his ministry as a scribe and lawyer. Jesus wasn't talking, though, about how to be good enough to earn salvation, He was talking about the depth of one's love to God and another human being. □

The Samaritans and the Jews hated one another, but in the parable Jesus shared, the Samaritan went to the poor man; whereas, the others had avoided him. Secondly, he treated his wounds, pouring wine as an antiseptic on the injuries. The Samaritan was not dabbing a bit of wine on the wound but pouring it on and not seeking to spare any for himself. He was quite lavish in his application of the cleansing and washing of the injuries. He also poured oil upon the skin to soften and close up the wound. The man was naked, so the Samaritan then tore up his own clothes to bandage the wound. He undoubtedly saved him from death for Jesus said that the

robbers left him half dead (v. 30). He would not have lasted much longer, for in that region of Israel the temperature gets close to 100 degrees and above. □

Thirdly, he put the man on his beast, perhaps a donkey, and walked alongside, holding him on the animal and taking him to an inn. Maybe the Samaritan would have finished his journey if he had not taken the time to stop and take the man to the inn. Fourthly, he took care of him at the inn by getting him into a bed and feeding him, staying with him all night and taking care of him until the next morning (v. 35). Fifthly, in the morning, he gave the innkeeper two denarii, i.e., two silver coins, enough money to keep him for two weeks with food and a bed.

The Samaritan promised the innkeeper that, when he returned that way, he would pay more if the man stayed longer. It was shocking to the Jewish listeners as this was the kind of thing that only close relatives would do. The thought that a Samaritan enemy would do it for a Jew was mind-boggling to them. □

Life can be a lonely journey, and many of us have been beaten and left for dead by an enemy, Satan, who has met us, robbed and stripped us, wounding us in the process, and left us suffering in pain and close to death. We were dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1; 5). The Law of Moses came to us but had no compassion on us, leaving us in our state and passing by on the other side. We have been found by One who was called a Samaritan by his enemies: **“The Jews answered him, ‘Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?’” (John 8:48).** Our Lord Jesus has come to us and lovingly bound up our wounds, poured on us not only just the wine, symbolic of joy in communion and oneness with him, and the oil, symbolic of the Holy Spirit, but also He has shed His own blood for us, thus cleansing us of all shame and guilt. He has taken care of us and put all the expenses for our care to His account. □

Jesus now applies the parable to the lawyer and Pharisees convicted of having passed by the general populace time and again on the other side, disdaining to help them in their heavy loads. **“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”** ³⁷**The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:36-37).** This lawyer had spent many years learning his trade of ministry with the Law of Moses, but Jesus sent him to the school of the Samaritan. These words were designed to bring conviction to the lawyer—for none of us can love like this for all our lives. We are all bankrupt and in need of mercy and grace from God. The Lord Jesus shows us the standard of the glory of God, and we all fall short. No matter how good you think you are, no matter how loving, none of us have ever loved our enemies to this degree and always. This story brings us to our knees again to recognize our abject poverty before God, and our need for grace. Thank God He is so willing to give it! □

Prayer: Please, Father, give us compassion for the poor and disenfranchised of the world. Help us to feel what they feel. Lord, I confess that I don't love in this way. I cast myself upon You to be gracious and merciful to me, for I don't love my neighbor as You have loved. I need You and Your forgiveness.

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