

A Lesson in Love

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[0 : 0 0] Now, we're going to read scripture together. Now, the passage that David's going to preach from! is Luke chapter 10, verses 25 to 37. And he said to him, Jesus replied, 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, he passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where Jesus 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'll 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, Go and do likewise.

Amen. This is God's own holy word. Well, we turn this evening to Luke chapter 10 and verses 25 to 37, those verses that Chris read for us. One of the most famous and well-known parts of the Scriptures. Even people with little or no knowledge of the Bible or Christianity have heard or heard of the story of the Good Samaritan. And even in our secular age, where there is, I suppose, great biblical illiteracy, it's a story that still retains some measure of cultural resonance. It's been the inspiration behind many acts of selflessness and moral heroism that have stimulated great works of art. Laws have been passed bearing its name. Many hospitals and charities have taken their own names from this famous story of Jesus.

And yet, for all its celebrated nature, it is, I think, one of the most misunderstood passages of the Bible. Most people think it's just a lovely story, helpful moral tale designed to encourage us to be nice to other people, to be loving, to be caring, and so forth. And who could ever disagree with that?

[3 : 0 9] But is this why Jesus told the story? Was He just trying to encourage us to be nice and helpful to our fellow human beings? Was He just trying to make us better citizens?

Is this story just a nice moral tale? I suspect that for lots of people, that is exactly what they think. And that's not just people outside the church, that's people within the church as well. For many, this story has been sanitized. It's been made safe. It's challenged. It's bar-blunted by familiarity. It's a story that no longer makes us stop and think and reflect on the kind of lives that we're leading. It's a story that no longer surprises us.

But friends, it should. For contrary to what many people think, the parable of the good Samaritan is not some warm, cuddly, feel-good story.

It's more like a punch in the solar plexus. It's actually a shocking story. It's one designed to provoke and challenge our moral complacency, designed to make us sit up and take notice, designed to confront us with the reality of the living God and the rigorous and righteous demands of His holy law.

And I want to look at this passage tonight, highlighting three things that I think Jesus is doing here with this famous story.

[5 : 01] So, what are they? Let's look at them one at a time. The first is this. Jesus is challenging here feelings of moral superiority. The setting, I think, is critical if we're going to rightly understand the parable's meaning. And we're fortunate because we've a very detailed account here in Luke of the circumstances that occasioned the telling of the story.

Behold, verse 25, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? So, this famous story is told in response to the questioning of a certain lawyer. Now, it's not that this man was a solicitor or a lawyer as we think of them today. This man was a biblical scholar. He was a theologian. He was a man who was an expert in the law. That is the law of God.

Very religious, very righteous, very moral, very spiritual. He was an expert in the Scriptures. He knew his onions. And because of that, he was confident in his own ability and in his right standing before God, he had a very positive opinion of himself. It's likely, commentators debate, but it's likely that he was unhappy with some of the things that he'd heard Jesus saying about the kingdom of God and perhaps thought that Jesus was in some way denigrating the law. And so, he wanted to test Jesus, to trap Jesus into saying something that perhaps would reveal some measure of contempt for God's Word. And so, the subject he wants to test Jesus on, the subject he wants to speak to Jesus about is the subject of eternal life. Teacher, verse 25 again, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

This is his chosen topic. This is the starter for 10. And it's a subject, you see, that this man knows like the back of his hand. He's not going to have any need to take, you know, a 50-50. He's not going to need to phone a friend. He's entirely at home on this subject matter. He knows his stuff inside and out. Here is a lawyer, a biblical scholar. He's on home turf, and he's got Jesus just where he wants him. And his question to Jesus, I think, clearly reveals an attitude of religious pride, self-satisfaction.

Because this is one of those questions that are asked without any real desire, in one sense, to know the answer. Because this man already knew the answer, or at least he thought he did.

[8 : 08] He knew that he, above all types of folks, was doing all that was necessary for eternal life. He knew all about it. And so, he comes to put Jesus in the spotlight.

And yet, in just a few short, uncomfortable minutes, the tables are turned, and it's he that is put to the test. And what Jesus is doing here in the story is bursting the bubble of this man's self-righteousness. He's taking a giant needle to the balloon of this man's self-importance.

Jesus is showing him what he is really like. Sometimes we need that, don't we? Someone to tell us the way that it really is. Someone to puncture our pride. So, we come to see ourselves not as we like to think or imagine, but as we really are. Because living our lives on the basis of a delusion, it's not just sad, it's actually dangerous. Some of you here will be aware of the TV show ran for a good many years here in the UK. It's called The X Factor. Anybody maybe heard of that, perhaps? Created by Simon Cowell. Reality TV music competition. And I happened, I wasn't an avid follower of this program, I isn't to add, but I did happen to watch a program which was one of the live auditions that took place across the country. And this one so happened to be from Glasgow. And it was quite incredible viewing. And perhaps the most remarkable thing was the number of people who clearly had no discernible talent whatsoever, and yet were utterly convinced in their own minds that they were going to win over the judges, and they were going to make it to the big time. String of contestants, many apparently devoid of any singing ability whatsoever, brazenly, unashamedly took to the stage to perform before a live audience.

And as I say, many appeared absolutely convinced that they were in fact very good. Nothing could have been further from the truth. A staggeringly high proportion of these contestants, it was clear that they believed something about themselves that was patently and obviously not true.

Their deluded assessment of themselves and their talent was exposed and revealed as a fantasy before a TV audience, I suppose, of millions. For many, that huge gulf between what they thought of themselves and the awful reality was cruelly, but I suspect in the long term, helpfully exposed.

[11 : 31] And that is exactly what Jesus is doing here. He's revealing to someone that what they thought was true about themselves was in fact a complete fiction. He's exposing that gulf, you see, that so often exists in our own minds between what we believe about ourselves and what is actually the case. We like to think, you know, we're good people. We consider ourselves pretty moral folk. We're nice. We're loving. We're caring. We're thoughtful. We're not that bad. We're better than others. We'll be okay before God. But, friends, unfortunately, the reality is very different. The truth is that most people are quite deluded about their condition before God. And the truth is we are not as good as we like to think we are. The lawyer here is like so many of us. We think that we are morally upright. Deep down, we're good people. You know, maybe God should be glad there are folks like us around. We're confident in our own righteousness. Will I go to heaven? Shall I receive eternal life? Well, of course.

I go to church. I'm a good, loving person. I've been baptized. I believe in God. I say my prayers. I'm spiritual. I watch songs of praise every week. I love animals and children. I don't do anyone any harm.

Friends, when our confidence rests on all these good things that I am doing or have done, it is resting on a shaky foundation. And this is why Jesus told this famous parable. The story of the Good Samaritan is in effect a demolition job on that kind of human or religious pride that is in fact in all our hearts.

So, that's the first thing that Jesus is doing here, challenging feelings of any kind of feelings we have of moral superiority. And that brings me to the second thing Jesus is doing here.

The way He does it is by this. He is expounding the true meaning of God's law. Jesus is expounding the true meaning of God's law. He takes the law that this man apparently knew so well and expounds and explains its meaning to him. They encounter the parable that follows all about the law of God and its demands upon us. And so, Jesus responds really by turning the question about eternal life back on His Inquisitor.

[14 : 32] What is written in the law, verse 26, how do you read it? This expert in the Scriptures, he replies by quoting from Deuteronomy and Leviticus. And his answer simply rolls off the tongue.

Love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself. Now, certainly this man knew his Bible well.

His answer is right on the mark. And we know that elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus Himself distills out these two commandments as summing up the essence of God's moral requirements.

And it may well be that the lawyer was taken aback by Jesus' answer. Jesus had a reputation, perhaps, for radical ideas, challenging teaching, and here He simply, you know, applauds the lawyer's traditional orthodox biblical answer. You've answered correctly, Jesus replied. Verse 29, do this and you will live.

Literally, He says, keep on doing this and you will live. And the lawyer looks silly. He's answered his own question. Jesus hasn't been put to the test at all. And so, He pushes for some further clarification.

[15 : 54] Perhaps He wanted to save face. Maybe He detected an edge to Jesus' reply. But whatever it was, He's immediately on the defensive, He's immediately on the defensive, and He attempts to justify Himself.

Desiring to justify Himself, verse 30, He said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor? He wants Jesus to explain, expound the law. And so, Jesus does just that.

And what becomes clear is that the lawyer, for all his Bible knowledge, hadn't really understood the law at all. He could quote it, but he didn't really understand it. And I think what this man, and I think countless other sins, did not, could not grasp, was the depth of the law's demand. The law of God, our Creator, reminds us that as human beings, we are accountable to Him, and that we owe Him love and devotion. We are to hold nothing back from Him. We are to give Him our all. He wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Not only that, but He wants us also to love those around us. He wants us to meet the needs of our neighbors with all the joy and enthusiasm that we meet our own needs. And that's why Jesus tells the lawyer, do this, and you will live. I once heard a sermon on this passage many years ago in which the minister explained to us that in this text, there's a mention of being born again, conversion, even faith, and these things are not really that important.

The key thing that Jesus asks of us is not faith and trust, but simply that we love God and our neighbor as ourselves. Do this, and you shall live. Live like Jesus, the minister said. All will be well.

Live like Jesus, and you'll have eternal life. Live like Jesus, and you'll go to heaven. A more profound misunderstanding of this text and of Christianity itself, it would be hard to imagine. Lots of people read these words. Oh, they're beautiful, wonderful, admirable. They contain such a noble aspiration. Let's all just love God and love one another.

[18 : 46] Everything will be fine. Let me ask you tonight, have you ever tried it? Do this, and you will live. Friends, those words of Jesus are a dagger to the heart because they utterly convict us.

Do this, and you shall live. Which one of us can do it? These words of Jesus condemn us utterly. These words of Jesus, in one sense, are not good news. This is not the gospel. This is the law that brings condemnation to our hearts. These words are bad news. I can tell you this evening, if you can love God 100 percent, and you can love your neighbor 100 percent all the time, if you can live an absolutely perfect life of love. You will receive eternal life.

What one of us can do that? What one of us can do this and live? It's not good news, is it? You see, Jesus is trying to get the lawyer and us to see and to think a little more deeply about the implications of God's law beneath the rules and the regulations to the attitudes of heart and mind that God really wants to see in His people's lives. He wants us to understand what the demands of God's law really are. And actually, they're very scary. And I find it interesting that on the other occasion, Jesus is asked this question in Luke's gospel, what must I do to inherit eternal life? The other is in Luke 18, verse 18, by the rich ruler, that on both occasions, Jesus points His inquisitors to the law and to the righteousness required there. Both times, Jesus seeks to bring about conviction of sin.

Remember what He says to the rich ruler when He's told, all these I have kept since I was a boy. Jesus tells them, sell everything you have and give it to the poor. When Jesus tries to show the righteousness and love that God requires, He speaks about loving and caring for the needy and the poor. And friends, Jesus tells this story to explain what neighbor love is all about. The parable is a mirror being held up to this man's life and to this man's heart and to ours also. And the story is so familiar to us. It's a story, isn't it, of extravagant love. A Samaritan, we know that the Jews hated the Samaritans. They prayed that the Samaritans would be kept out of the kingdom of God. In John 8, when the crowd is vilifying Jesus, they insult Him by calling Him a

Samaritan and one who is demon-possessed. But in Jesus' story, it's this despised Samaritan who finds a man beaten up at the side of the road and who risks his life to stop and help him. The Jericho Road was a notoriously dangerous place, winding, descending, seventeen-mile journey through all sorts of limestone cracks. It was a notorious, I said, haunt of robbers and thieves. It was not the kind of road to travel alone. And so, it would have been no surprise to his hearers that this lonely traveler comes a cropper.

[22 : 42] He's set upon, he's beaten, he's robbed, he's left for dead. And upon seeing this poor man lying, bruised, and battered by the roadside, a priest and a Levite, the men of the cloth, walked quickly by on the other side of the road. They're being sensible, they're being reasonable.

Didn't want to get involved. Didn't want to share the same fate. Perhaps they didn't want to become religiously unclean. And we remember that Jesus is speaking to this expert in the law.

The priest and the Levite are representative, really, of his faith. And yet there's no evidence of neighbor love on show from them. Instead, it's a hated, despised Samaritan who stops and cares.

It's the outsider who breaks into his schedule, puts himself out, gives time, money, medical attention. The Samaritan gives love, he gives advocacy, friendship, gives of himself. Now, you read the story. It's an over-the-top goodness, isn't it? Here's some money to the innkeeper. If there's any more expense, I'll take up the tab. This is the picture that Jesus is painting. The response of the Samaritan is one of overwhelming generosity and kindness, no expense spared. And Jesus is telling the lawyer, friend, this Samaritan is doing what you're not. Here's what you've not been doing. Here is the glaring omission in your life. Wake up, friend. You're not even close to loving your neighbor as yourself. You're nowhere near fulfilling the demands of God's law. You know, that passage in Matthew 25, and the great picture of the last judgment. And Jesus is dividing the sheep and the goats, distinguishing, I suppose, those who were

Christians from those who only claimed to be Christians. And the basis of judgment he uses there. Prayer? No. Bible reading? No. Church attendance? No. Not that these things are bad? Of course not.

[25 : 07] He says, no, I was hungry. You gave me something to eat. I was thirsty. You gave me something to drink. I was a stranger. You invited me in. I needed clothes. You clothed me. I was sick. You looked after me. I was in prison. You came and visited me. All those people you helped and cared for, that was me.

Now, in Matthew 25, the hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick, imprisoned are other believers. But nonetheless, this concept, this idea comes up in the Bible in other places.

Proverbs 14, 31, he who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker. Insulting the poor is like insulting God. Proverbs 19, 17, he who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord. Why does God say that?

there's a very famous story told um i'm not exactly sure where it came from but uh it's a story of a very wealthy woman um and she had uh one heir that was a nephew and uh whenever she was around this nephew the milk of human kindness oozed you know out of him towards his aunt he was deferential to the point of obsequiousness so over the top was his affection for her that she used to wonder i wonder what he's really like and his presence in her presence he was such such a nice person and so she resolved to find out and she i suppose dressed up as a bag lady camped outside his front door he couldn't stand the sight of her hated this old tramp being at the door kicked her shouted at her verbally abused her eventually called the police to get her moved on then she knew what he was really like and god knows what we're really like in the way that we treat others and in particular the way that we treat our brothers and sisters in christ and in the way that we treat the poor the marginalized those in need friends this is what the law of god teaches us and this is the kind of love that god looks for it's not something cosmetic superficial it's something deep and real and lasting and god says when you know i see how you treat those around you and the needy on your doorstep then i know what you're really like i know where your heart really is the way we treat our neighbors reveals what is in our hearts and you saw jesus is challenging yes this man's moral complacency by explaining to him the true and frightening demands of god's law he's challenging feelings of moral superiority he's expounding the depth and the power of god's law but that brings me to the third thing here briefly and finally why what's the point of all this and the third thing here is this is here jesus is revealing our need of divine mercy actually our need of him there's the punchline which of those three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers he said the one who showed him mercy and jesus said you go and do likewise the story indicates that you cannot confine restrict the showing of mercy cannot confine it to the people we like or who like us tim keller writes not everyone is your brother and or sister in faith but everyone is your neighbor and you must love your neighbor anybody and everybody out there is my neighbor is my neighbor what was it uh charlie brown used to say of course i love the human race it's just lucy i can't stand but of course it's lucy that is the measure of love and it is easy for us to hide behind vague generalizations about loving people but this story kind of asks us you know how much are we prepared to go and do

the apostle john writes 1 john 3 18 dear children let us not love with word or tongue but with actions and in truth it's not enough to say i don't do anybody any harm it's not enough to say it's none of my business it's not enough to say i'm too busy it's not enough to say well these people are not really my type because this famous story is not primarily designed i think to teach us our moral duty it does do that but it is designed to reveal our moral bankruptcy it's designed to expose our guilt before god our failure to love god and to love others as we should jesus is showing us the bad news here so that we can better appreciate the good news so what is the good news here well the good news is this is that there was another man who traveled the jericho road only he traveled it towards jerusalem not away from it and he traveled it in the shadow of a cross and he traveled it to show us extravagant love and he traveled it to pay the debt of our sin we may not be able to love god 100 and to love our neighbor as ourselves a hundred percent but friends there is one man who did just that and he did it for us he did it for you and it's the man telling the story it's the man on his way to jerusalem it's the man going to the cross to show us the meaning of love it's the man who's come to do for us what we could never do for ourselves very often the allegorical interpretations of this parable many of the early church fathers get a get a pretty bad press and certainly some of them are super ingenious and somewhat fantastical but nonetheless i think they have this in their favor they point us to that man they point us to jesus and the good news we find in him so this parable is meant to drive us not merely to great moral effort but actually to despair of our own righteousness and to look in faith to jesus christ because in the end the one who truly fulfills this parable is the lord jesus himself to those of us like the lawyer who think we can work our way into heaven by being good or religious people jesus confronts us with moral bankruptcy let's not kid ourselves on he says you are not and shall never be good enough or loving enough or righteous enough we're all moral failures we all fall short we all need a savior we all need a new heart a new power a new motivation we all as as cory was reminding us this morning need a new birth we need jesus christ in our lives in all his grace mercy love and righteousness to receive that love you must see yourself as the person lying at the side of the road dead in trespasses and sins maybe battered and bruised and beaten up by this world

[34 : 01] every other religion every other philosophy has walked past on the other side of the road unable to bring you the help you need friend you need to see jesus as your good samaritan because it's only as jesus and his love overwhelms us indwells us penetrates our hearts that any of us can even think begin to think of loving like this only when we know ourselves to be loved by him in this incredible manner can we be transformed to love others as he has loved us we cannot do this by ourselves we need to be united to jesus christ it's only as god's love is poured into our hearts through the holy spirit that we can be changed to live like jesus the true good samaritan for he's the one who's shown us mercy he's the one who's crossed the great divide he's the one who on the cross displayed sacrificial costly love towards his enemies jesus and once it's not just our good samaritan he is the good news he is our righteousness he is the gospel and we need to experience the touch of his hand on our broken lives rescuing us lifting us up out of up out of the mud and the mire of our sin only when his mercy captures our hearts only when our souls are united to him by faith then and only then can we rise as his disciples and albeit imperfectly rise to the challenge of these words to go and to do likewise our good samaritan our great savior and his wonderful gospel he can change us no one else will no one else can let's pray together father we confess that we are sinners we fall short of your just demands we are lawbreakers not just on the outside but on the inside oh lord we need a new heart we need jesus christ in our lives every day and so our god we pray that you would pour out your holy spirit upon us that your love would be poured into our hearts through the holy spirit that we might be more like jesus our true good samaritan and in whose name we pray these things amen