

The Good Samaritan

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we're going back today to the second of our studies on parables and Luke, Luke's Gospel. So we're going through not all of them, but we will be going consecutively.

So we're moving through the chapters in Luke, and today we're looking at a very famous parable of the Good Samaritan. And what we're looking for, what I've been praying for there, I guess, at the beginning of the sermon is for, we're always looking at, when we look at the Bible, we're always looking for Jesus Christ to do something as He speaks to us.

We're looking to be led and taught and motivated and conscious struck by the presence of God through His Word. We want Him to change our hearts, and we want Him to help us to see the world the way He sees it.

And really what we're wanting, we're wanting to get God's perspective on our hearts and on the world in which we live. And we saw last week that blindness, spiritual blindness, lies at the core of the parables.

We saw that really, if we are spiritually blind, the parables are just pretty stories to us, moral tales. But God wants us to recognize, to reach out, to search through them, to dig into them, and recognize that there's a deeper spiritual message that comes out of each of the parables for us, seeing things from His point of view.

[1 : 3 4] I guess in a sense the Bible and the parables are encouraging us to see that it's not all about me.

The world isn't all about me, it doesn't revolve around me, that Christ Jesus is King and Sovereign. So when we look at this very famous parable, the parable of the Good Samaritan that's used by Christians and non-Christians alike in many different contexts, the surface reading of that parable would be very much, you know, this is how to treat your neighbour well, you know, a kind of moralistic message.

This is how to act well in the world, this is how to treat other people, to look out for people who respond when you see need in the world in which we live. And that's not wrong, it's not less than that.

But there is something deeper than simply a message of good neighbourliness, which we don't really need the Bible for.

Jesus takes as far deeper than simply neighbourliness as he wants to reveal to us the secrets of the Kingdom that he is unveiling in the Gospel.

[2 : 5 3] So I'm going to ask one or two questions of this parable, you know it very well. I will not be teaching you anything new, but I believe God wants us to think about his living word again.

Now, it was interesting, wasn't it, that it was Neil's turn to read today, Neil's a lawyer and the passage was about a lawyer. There wasn't anything deliberate there.

And I've got to watch what I say because I've got a congregation full of lawyers. And it wasn't really the kind of lawyer that Neil is or that any of the other guys hear it. It would have been someone who is an expert in the law of God, not necessarily the law of the land.

So just so I don't get accused of picking on anyone, I'm going to call him something different. I'm going to call him the reverent expert, okay? So I'll bring it back onto myself a little bit.

He's a reverent expert in things biblical, the Old Testament law particularly. So what's the reverent expert saying in this parable? What's he saying?

[3 : 56] Not in the parable, sorry, in the passage that Jesus responds to with the parable. What is the reverent expert saying to Jesus? Well, really what he's saying is that I know more than you, Jesus.

He's coming with a degree of arrogance towards Jesus, this teacher. It's not a great start really because we're told that He wants to put Jesus to the test.

So His motives aren't that great. So it's not a great start to the conversation between the two. Can I call Him a religious smart alec?

That's kind of what He is. He's a bit of a religious smart alec. He wants to put Jesus in His place because of His own knowledge. He talks a great game.

He's like the pundits at the football and the television. He always talk a great game. Most of them are bang average players. But anyway, He talks a good game and He knows that His morality is comparative with others.

[5 : 00] And so He comes with a real confidence to Jesus, knowing more than Jesus. What else is the reverent expert saying? Well, he's saying that he really believes that he could inherit eternal life by his good works.

That's the whole basis of what he's saying. What is it that I need to do? What is it I need to do? Not what I need to believe, but what do you want me to do so that I can have eternal life?

So he believes that he can inherit eternal life by the good things he does by being a good lawyer, a law person when it comes to the law, or being religious.

Interestingly, he is focusing on the deep quest of humanity, which is eternal life. But he thinks that eternal life can be gained by doing something.

So he's got a real religion of works. That's what his belief is. Interestingly, he also, at least intellectually, he's saying that he knows what God demands.

[6 : 12] Verse 27, when Jesus asks the question and he says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, all your strength, all your mind, and your neighbor is yourself. Bang on. He's bang on with the answer.

It's an insightful, you would think, spiritual answer that he gives. But yet, in a sense, it seems that he's kind of trivializing the answer because when he says that, and Jesus answers, you know, when you've done all this correctly, you will live, he goes on and says, I wanted to justify himself.

Who's my neighbor? So it's kind of like he trivializes that answer, which is an unbelievable answer. And he says, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, just love your God and love your neighbor perfectly.

You know, I've done the love God, but I don't even need to ask about that. But what about my neighbor? And he was wanting to justify himself that he was doing that as well.

So there does seem to be that he knows what God's demands, but he's kind of trivializing it because he believes he's justified before God, doesn't he?

[7 : 27] But he, desiring to justify himself, says, who's my neighbor? He really wants Jesus to really justify the life he's living.

He wanted Jesus to endorse the fact that he was a lawkeeper. He was a brain law, a boy in God and loving God and loving his neighbor. He wanted Jesus to vindicate his understanding and his lifestyle by confirming his definition of what a neighbor was.

And a neighbor to him would very much have been his family and those of the Jewish community that he belonged to. Okay? So are you with me so far?

Excellent, thanks. I'm glad someone said that because I am feeling that the heat in this building is sending you off into a super-rific dream. Okay?

And I'm sorry about that. The weather changes so much, so you've just got to nip yourself every so often. Okay? Or otherwise, I'm going to start saying things that are radically dangerous just to keep you awake.

[8 : 34] Okay? Right? What was the Reverend expert saying? We've looked at some of that. But what was Jesus saying? So we come into the parable here. What was Jesus... How did Jesus respond to him?

This is an unspoken... Can you paraphrase something that's unspoken? I'm not sure. But I'm paraphrasing what I think is the summary of what Jesus was saying in the parable.

My friend, he's saying, you are as blind as a bat. That's basically what Jesus is saying in this parable of the Good Samaritan. To this religious lawyer who believes he's right before God.

He says, my friend, you are as blind as a bat. You don't see things spiritually. Now, it's interesting, sometimes God puts things on our hearts, sometimes He does things, He plans things that we don't.

And today's sermons are both all about shock tactics. God really shaking us, I think, by His word. If you think this morning's bad, just wait till we come to the night.

[9 : 46] The picture in Ezekiel, which I'll not go into, but you need to come. It's just amazing. And I wonder sometimes when that happens, when He brings two things together like that, is God really trying to tell us something?

Is He trying to tell me something? Anyway, how does Jesus go about saying to this man, Luke, you're as blind as a bat?

How does it unfold? The first thing is that He answers, interestingly, this is just about a tactic, really. He answers this religious lawyer with a question. Now, Jesus does that a lot in the gospels.

And that's a really interesting thing. It's a really good tactic. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus says, what's written in the law? So He answers the man's question with a question, to open up reverent experts' thinking.

And that is also a good tactic for us in our lives. If our faith is challenged, it's often a good thing, not necessarily to give a pat answer back, but to ask a question which might unpack the mind and the heart of the listener, of the questioner, and unveil a little bit more about what they're thinking.

[10 : 56] Okay, that's just by the way. But also we notice that He endorses the only way to eternal life. He's right. And He said to Him, You have answered correctly.

Loving the Lord, Your God, loving Your neighbor, do this and You will live. Do this, He says, and You will live. And really that's the key in many ways to the parable, because He's saying, do this and You will live.

Nobody has ever done this. Nobody has ever done that perfectly. So see, do this and You will live is right. And we look back and we say, Jesus is the only one who'd do this and You will live.

He's the only one that's done it. And in a sense, He's already beginning to point to Himself. He's not speaking, He's not rubber stamping a justification by works to say, and if you just do certain things, you'll live.

And you're right, but you're absolutely wrong, because nobody has ever done this.

[12 : 04] You've trivialized, Jesus saying, this amazing standard of God to be perfect in love. And He then masterfully exposes the Reverend Expert's heart, if only He would see it.

We don't know, do we, if He saw it or not? He exposes this lawyer's heart by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Now I'm reading into this and I may be wrong in this, but when He starts the parable, He says, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Now I can imagine Jesus at that point with the expert in front of him, see, Eric's the expert there, and he was saying, a man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and pointed to the lawyer.

In other words, saying, you're the man. You're the guy that's going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Now I may be wrong there, but it's kind of every man in a sense. But nonetheless, the man was certainly Jewish.

[13 : 08] That seems to be the case. He was one of their own people. He was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. It's a dangerous road. There was hillsides on either side, it was easy to be robbed, and that's exactly what happens.

He's robbed and stripped and beaten up and left dead. And then we've got God, a Jesus, slowly unraveling the lawyer's heart because he says, a priest and a Levite pass that way.

The priest and the Levite. That was his mates. That was his friends. That was, who were they? They were his neighbors.

And they were the neighbor to the man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. And they failed to do what their law required them to do. They failed their own law requirements to help their brother in need.

His own kind. That was inconvenient. It would make them late. They had a church service to go to. The guy was unclean. He might have been dead by this point.

[14 : 18] That would have broken the ceremonial law. They were afraid that they might get caught by the robbers who were maybe hanging about. It was going to be costly in time and in effort and in energy.

Nobody was looking. They were on the road on their own. Nobody would see if we passed by on the other side. And maybe, just maybe, the reverent expert had made these excuses himself at some point in not helping his neighbor.

Was Jesus exposing past decisions he'd made? Very possibly. Certainly exposing my heart. And then you come to the absolute explosion of a verse.

But a Samaritan. He'll emphasise it rightly, but a Samaritan. That is an explosive. The phrase would have hit this religious lawyer like a freight train.

It would have sent short waves and gas to all the audience who were there, who were Jewish people. It was devastating. A devastating statement to introduce into this nice story, but a Samaritan.

[15 : 30] And you know why, don't you? Because Samaritans were universally despised by the Jews. They were half breeds. They were enemies. They were idolaters.

They had no dealings with them. We have that in other accounts in the Bible, that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. It wasn't right. But that was the reality. One commentator I was reading, this is a bit risky, said it was like an Irish Republican going to help an orange ulsterman, maybe a member of the National Front being helped by a Syrian refugee, a white supremacist by a black migrant worker.

A mint, someone who lives in Jerusalem being helped by a Palestinian. That's the kind of shock tactics that Jesus was using in this story.

Who would be your chosen enemy? And mine if we were to write into this particular story, our own story. Who would be the most shocking person to come to your aid and to come to mine?

Because that's what Jesus is wanting us to do. The Samaritan acted out of compassion. That's what we're told. The Samaritan as he journeyed, he came, he saw him, he had compassion on him.

[16 : 51] So he didn't see the limitations of the situation. He didn't see the race, the religion, the creed or the color. He saw the need that was in this person and he was moved to act.

The word of pity and mercy is that he was moved in his inner being and his, you know, your move sometimes, your stomach moves. That's what he's moved to.

He went to help and it was costly for him, wasn't it? It was costly to put him out of his way. It cost him money. He was going to have to come back. It was dangerous, risky. There was a huge amount of cost, but he had compassion on him.

And then it's getting worse. Jesus says and asks another question, which of them is the neighbor?

The man can't even say, how is this Samaritan? He can't even say, he just says, the one who showed him mercy. And Jesus says, what does he say?

[17 : 52] Go and do likewise. And that's a remarkable inversion. It's amazing. He asked the question, who is my neighbor?

And Jesus says, rather you should ask the question, how can I be a neighbor? Do you see the difference? And the lawyer wanted to put a hedge around who he'd be nice to.

Jesus was wanting to deal with his heart. Jesus deals with our hearts, not the hedges. That's the difference. Jesus says, go that far. We say, how far do I need to go?

And the neighbor hears whoever needs your help, even your worst enemy. But more than that, he's saying to this man, he's saying to this lawyer, you can only show this kind of mercy when you understand how much mercy you've been shown by God.

Go and do likewise. If you're the man, if Eric's a man in the story, and he's been helped by the Samaritan, Jesus says, because you've been helped, you now go and help.

[19 : 01] And there's a spiritual lesson there, that reverent expert, he's saying, your heart needs to be changed. You need to come to me for mercy and salvation, because your heart is hard and far from me.

And when you do, then you will understand who your neighbor is. Then you'll understand what mercy is, if we've talked about mercy. Okay?

We don't know how he responded. He either probably responded with deep anger or with conviction. We don't know. And maybe you're, and I am in the same place today.

How do we respond to the Word of God? What I do ask is that you don't just not respond to the Word of God and walk out unchanged, because we either are angry with God or we're convicted by God.

And that's a reality. So do we see Christ at work through this parable? What's he saying? He's saying that gospel, he's right, it is about eternal life.

[20 : 01] We find that a very easy concept to ignore. It's big issues. Our faith is about big issues. Our commitment is about big issues. He's also saying there's only one way to eternal life.

So he's right. There is only one. You live perfectly. You get eternal life. But that exposes us, doesn't it? Because none of us have done that. There's only one person who's done that, Jesus Christ.

Yet he died. Because he's our Savior. Why? Because he has compassion. Am I saying, are you religious experts here, spiritually?

Are you saying, are you interpreting that Jesus is the Good Samaritan? Is that not a bit of a deep and unnecessary comparison? Well, I'm not necessarily.

But he's certainly getting good Samaritan attributes. Matthew 9 verse 36, when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like a sheep, a shepherd, Romans 5, 6 to 10.

[21 : 14] For while we were still weak at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one more scarcely died for our righteous person, though perhaps our good person is scarcely in fact, but God showed his love for us.

For while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Okay. And then he goes on to say, while we were enemies, he died for us.

The Ephesians 2, 4 and 5. See the same thing. God being rich and merciful because he was great love. While we were dead in our trespass as in sins, by grace we're saved.

So Jesus is showing the characteristics of the Good Samaritan by reaching out to his enemies by reaching out to those who are spiritually red to reaching out to those who need his mercy.

And there's only one way that we can understand this parable of the Good Samaritan. If we are to avoid it being a moralistic tale about how we treat one another.

[22 : 15] It's when we see what our own hearts are like before Jesus Christ through repentance and faith. And when we recognize that he was the last person in the world that should come and save me and show compassion on me.

Just like the lawyer thought, the gentile, the Samaritan is the last person in the world that should come to me. We should say, God, you're the last person that should come and save me because not because of your background, your race, but because you're perfect and because you're God.

And therefore God is saying a couple more things. Love your neighbor, he says. What does he say? He says love you. And it's a really interesting part of the law. Love your neighbor as yourself.

See, until you love yourself biblically, you'll never be able to love your neighbor. How do you love yourself biblically is by being honest with yourself, your truest self, being honest with yourself and accepting an honest assessment of your lostness before God and the remedy that Jesus Christ provides and receiving that mercy and that forgiveness and grace.

That's the greatest act of self-love we can engage in is honestly coming to the living God and recognizing that because he offers life. And if we love ourselves, we want life and life comes from him.

[23 : 45] And as we recognize that, then we can love our neighbor because we've come to receive that love for ourselves. Can you see that? Can you see that unusual reality?

The true self-love finds itself on its knees at the cross of Calvary because it's a place of rescue and redemption and hope and life. And if you love yourself, that's where you want to go because we want to live forever.

And then we can love our neighbor. So we love our neighbor because he first loved us. While we were still enemies, harassed and helpless, he loved us.

And that's how we can love others. So I finish with a question. Who is my neighbor? Who's your neighbor? It's like the lawyer asked.

I think there's two, from this parable, there's at least two answers. One is whoever's in need. So as Christians, as we know and understand how needy we were and what Jesus has done for us, then whoever in need becomes the subject of our love.

[24 : 57] And that is first going to happen in our home and in our church community. So we first reflect it by having an outward looking, sacrificial love for one another in our family and in the church to people who are in need.

We should be a good Samaritan congregation internally to one another, okay? But also to the poor in society that we know and come across.

Now, that's a whole other sermon, okay? And maybe 10. But we need to be time and resource generous and there's a wrestling struggle in that of how we can make a difference.

But the motivation to do that should never be guilt. Oh, I ought to do that. I must do that. I should be nice to people who are, the poor are needy and damn, it should be gratitude.

Not guilt but gratitude. The good Samaritan is a nightmare parable if you're driven by guilt, nightmare. It can only become a good parable if we're driven by gratitude for what the mercy we've received and therefore how we look at other people.

[26 : 07] So whoever's in need. But can I say specifically, this is where the rubber hits the road for us. Who's our neighbor? Who do we help?

Especially our enemy. Especially our enemy. That's the point of this story. It's so counter cultural and it's against our natural hearts.

Matthew 5 verse 44. I say to you, Jesus says, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

So the outworking of the good Samaritan isn't primarily about nice neighborliness. You can all be nice neighbors. We all want to be nice neighbors.

But it's loving our enemies and it's helping them in their time of need. I don't know who your enemies are. I need to work out who my own enemies are, whether it's perceived enemies or not.

[27 : 03] But maybe it's those that you think are worthless, undeserving, needy in your own context, whatever that is. Maybe it's those who don't love you back.

The people you avoid in the workplace because they're a pain in the neck. The people who treat you badly and you want to treat them tit for tat. They've nailed you.

You want to nail them back. Those that you want revenge against in a career context, in a laborally context, in a work context.

Those who you reject or those you simply ignore. Jesus says the standard of grace is much, much higher than just being nice to your neighbor.

It's much higher until we see who we are in Christ. We will not ever fully understand this parable.

[28 : 05] That's why it's more than just a story. So I finish with a question, where on earth do we start? Because I look at this and I feel so much short.

I feel I fall so far short. I have so much need. There's so much poverty and injustice. I'm so selfish in the way I often think.

What should I be doing? What social action should I and the church be engaged in all these questions? And they're all relevant and they're all important. But there's only one place I can say that you will find your bearings today.

I don't think it's without reason that this chapter finishes the way it does. It finishes not with a parable, but with a real life situation where Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet listening to him and Martha is busy doing.

She's busy acting. She's busy working. Now Jesus doesn't say these things are wrong, but he says to Mary and to Martha that Mary has got it right first.

[29 : 11] That Mary has got it right. Mary, Martha, Martha, you're anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen a good portion. That is the first place we need to go, in other words, is at Jesus' feet communion with God.

That's where we need to be. That's what must be the motivation for all our social action, for all our good Samaritan behavior, for our neighborliness to our friends and to our enemies.

It must be because we understand who we are before Jesus at His feet. And I'm saying when we get that right, the works will follow. That's what matters. It's not the other way around.

The works will follow. James makes that clear. He says faith without works is dead. So the works ought to follow our faith. It's no good saying we've got faith and being unmerciful, lacking in compassion and unneighborly in Jesus' characteristic of that.

The works, it's not that they're unimportant. They are vital. They will follow. Their neighbor, God's way, is not an optional extra. And I think the parable for us, once we've got over, yeah, yeah, I know this parable, yeah, no problem, good Samaritan, yep, that's how I treat my neighbor, it's a huge challenge to us all.

[30 : 28] It's a foghorn for our heart. Foghorn, because it's challenging us as to whether we truly understand what grace is about and our motivation for doing good, which is sometimes often just to be seen to be doing good, at least it is for me.

So the gospel teaches us to be radically different from those around us. And St. Columba's should reflect that gospel generosity as a people, Jesus' compassion and mercy among its members, that we care for one another, that we matter to one another, that people in need are not just to be rubbished or ignored or left to the side of people that we find difficult.

It's all about understanding our hearts so that we reflect the sacrificial deep commitment of Jesus which we can never match, that deep commitment for us, whether that people.

And that's the heart of the gospel for us as Christians. And if you're not a Christian, that's also the heart of the gospel. And Jesus wants us to see, wants you to see how much need you are in of His mercy and that doing can never please God and justify ourselves before Him.

It is as we trust in His finished work who did it on our behalf. Amen. Let's pray. Father God, help us to understand a little bit more as your word is unpacked.

[32 : 08] Let unravel it a little bit more for us. Help us not just to look at these famous parables and think, well, yeah, we know there's all, there's a million lessons and truth and spiritual gold that we didn't even begin to unravel in the word today.

So bless us, we ask, and move us and motivate us and help us to understand exactly who you are and exactly how much you have shown compassion to us.

And if we ever feel harassed and helpless, may we recognize and run to the one who has mercy on us and who loves us and who died for us and who rose again so that we might have eternal life.

Amen.