

The One Who Showed Him Mercy
Luke 10:25-42
July 25, 2021
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CenterPoint Church

Read Luke 10:25-42

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
(Hebrews 4:12)

Introduction

In the final episode of the show, *Seinfeld*, the four main characters – Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer – have left New York City to fly to Paris, but their plane has to land in a small town in the heartland. They witness a mugging, but rather than doing anything to help, they make jokes, treating it as a spectator sport. What they don’t realize is that this town has just passed a “Good Samaritan” law that mandates that you must help someone in need or else be arrested. The rest of the show is their trial, as people from past episodes come through and comment on their character, or lack of it.

It was a brilliant way to end the show, I thought, and also an interesting way to ask the question, “Can compassion be forced?” Obviously, most of society would scoff at a law that forced people to help others. But then you have tragic stories, like that of CBS reporter and journalist, Hugh Rudd, who was mugged and beaten so severely in New York City that he lay conscious but unable to move outside his apartment from mid-afternoon until dark. In broad daylight no one came to his aid or asked him what had happened; or bothered themselves at all about him.¹

As Christians, are we compelled to help others? When you pass someone who is broken down on the side of the highway, do you to pull over and make sure they’re OK and that a tow truck is on its way? If you’re on your way to Bible Study and see a woman on the side of the road crying, do you pull over and offer to help her? When you roll up to a light and see a homeless person with a sign asking for help, what’s your best response? Or are you too busy and don’t feel compelled to get involved? If it’s been a while since you’ve read the parable of the Good Samaritan, let it confront you, even shock and jar you in a fresh way this morning.

The first five verses build up to a big question:

I. Who Is My Neighbor? (vv. 25-29)

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” 27 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.” 28 And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

When you think of a lawyer in that day, think less of a person who goes to court and either defends or prosecutes, and more of a man who was an expert in the Law of God. He asked Jesus a great question (“*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*”) even if he didn’t have the best motivation – it says

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1995), pp. 179-180.

that he was putting Jesus to the test. Instead of answering him straight away, though, Jesus guided him to find his own answer, asking him how he understood the main idea of the Law. Imagine that: asking a lawyer to explain the law. You might get a really long-winded answer, but the man did a good job summarizing the law - the first part of the answer is basically a direct quote of Deuteronomy 6:5 - "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" Adding "*with all your strength*" doesn't violate the spirit of the passage, nor does adding "*love your neighbor as yourself.*" In fact, this is how Jesus summarized the two great commandments in Matthew 22:37-40. After saying "love God" and "love your neighbor," Jesus concluded that "*On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*"

So Jesus commends him - "Great answer! Now just live that out perfectly and you can stroll right into heaven on your own merits." I think it's hilarious that the man then asks, "*who is my neighbor?*" because it means that he thinks he's already got the rest of his answer down. He already thinks that he loves the Lord with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind. I think Jesus was giving it to him straight, but also teasing him a bit: "Hey, just be perfect, follow God with every ounce of energy that you have, that'll get you eternal life." We all should realize that's absolutely impossible. I'm lucky if I give 5% or 10% of my heart, soul, strength, and mind to God. But to give it all? 100% concentrated energy on God and never a selfish thought or action? You're hopelessly deluded if you think you give that. That's one of the reasons that God gave the law: so that we would realize that we can't keep it. To realize our inadequacy, our failures, our depravity. But this man didn't see it; he was racking up the achievements in his head, giving himself a perfect grade; he just needed to know the definition of neighbor before he could give his full answer.

John Piper said that "another way of asking the lawyer's question would be, 'Teacher, whom do I not have to love? Which groups in our society are exceptions to this commandment? Surely the Romans, oppressors of God's chosen people; and their despicable lackeys, the tax collectors; and those half-breed Samaritans - surely all these are not included in the term 'neighbor.' Tell me just who my neighbor is, Teacher, that as I examine various candidates for my love, I will be sure to choose him alone.'"² I'm sure he was hoping that Jesus would narrow it down for him. But Jesus does the opposite of narrowing it down. And rather than answering the man's questions, this parable poses as a challenge from Jesus: are you willing to help anyone anywhere anytime you come across them?

The next 8 verses build to the question:

II. Who Proved to be a Neighbor? (vv. 30-37)

³⁰ Jesus replied, "*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.* ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Let's think through a couple of the details of the story:

² Gibson, Joyce and Larry Richards, *God's Word for the Biblically-Inept* (Lancaster: Starburst, 2002), pp. 147-8.

-**The scene** – the road from Jerusalem to Jericho drops from 2,500 ft. above sea level to around 900 ft. below sea level. A 3,400 ft. drop in 20 miles is pretty severe and it was an easy place for robbers to hide, lots of caves all over the place. None of Jesus’ audience would have been surprised that the traveler got attacked.

-**The Priest** – priests were the ones authorized to offer the sacrifices at the temple. Most likely he had finished his temple duties in Jerusalem and was going home. It’s a fictional story, so that can’t be proven, but that’s probably what Jesus was implying.

-**Levites** – were the priests’ helpers. They were one part elder, one part deacon, one part worship leader, one part custodian. Temple worship was dependent on both of these offices.

Jesus doesn’t say why these two passed the wounded man by. Some have suggested that since Numbers 19:11 stipulates that touching a dead body would make someone unclean for 7 days, that these men would have avoided a body that was dying or might already be dead. But Jesus doesn’t say that, and as I said, they were probably leaving their temple duties. Whatever the reason, it’s enough to know that their own affairs and safety outweighed any concern they had for this man.

When the priest and the Levite passed by, and the audience heard that a Samaritan was coming next, they might have been thinking, “Oh, yeah, now a Samaritan is coming – he’s probably going to finish the guy off. He’s the real bad guy – if those other two didn’t help, he certainly won’t; he’ll make it worse.” There was a lot of bad blood between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews had kept racially pure during the Babylonian Captivity 500 years earlier; the Samaritans had intermarried with the Assyrians, the ones who had captured them. The Samaritans had built a rival temple to the one in Jerusalem on Mt. Gerizim, and the Jews had burned it down. Jewish travelers had been murdered in Samaria. To the Jews there was no such thing as a “Good Samaritan.”

But the Samaritan, of course, was the one who showed real love and compassion to the man. Not only did he bind the man’s wounds and pour oil and wine; not only did he secure lodging for a night; but he paid for the man’s extended care. There is no indication that this man was going to be paid back, rewarded, honored with a medal, or any other thing, other than the fact that he saw a man in need and responded. When Jesus asked the final question: “*Which of these... proved to be a neighbor?*” the lawyer couldn’t even bring himself to say the word “Samaritan,” so he answered through gritted teeth, “*The one who showed mercy.*”

A. This Parable Teaches Us That We Should Meet People’s Physical Needs

We can’t meet everyone’s physical needs everywhere, but where we are presented an opportunity to do so, Jesus tells us that He expects us to help however we can – “*you go, and do likewise.*” Christians around the world start hospitals, participate in relief efforts, run food pantries, and find hundreds of ways to care tangibly for hurting people. When God pours His love out on you, it’s so beautiful to then let that love spill over to others around you, particularly those in need. When we love and care for people physically, it gives our spiritual message credibility, but we should do it whether or not we get anything out of it – simply because people are made in the image of God and are worthy of our love.

I’m not going to get into the questions of, “When is helping someone enabling them?” or “When does helping hurt?” Those are good questions to ask, but this sermon is already going to be long enough. I want to focus on attitude. Frank Barker wrote that “the attitude of the robbers was ‘What is yours is mine if I can get it.’ The priests’ and Levites’ attitude was ‘What is mine is mine and I am going to

keep it.’ But the Samaritan’s attitude was ‘What is mine is yours as you have need of it.’³” Has the love of God transformed you from seeing your possessions as yours and other people as threats to you getting more, to the attitude of seeing what God has blessed you with to use to bless others?

B. This Parable Teaches Us That We Should Care About Our Neighbors, Not Just “Our Tribe”

Jesus basically expands the idea of a neighbor to include anyone that we come into contact with. It’s not just the people who live on our street, our development, our side of town that are our neighbors; and certainly not just the people with the same ethnic or religious identity. We should be willing to turn “neighboring” into a verb – I will “neighbor” you if I come into contact with you; I will seek to help you however I can.

Just as soon as we get this huge view of what being a neighbor is, though, I want to also suggest that we don’t overlook our actual neighbors. How many of us know the names of the people who live in the houses right around us? Maybe before we try to take on neighboring in the larger sense, we should try to get to know the people who live around us so that we can have some insight into how we can love them and be a good neighbor to them. There is actually a ministry and a website devoted to this idea, The Art of Neighboring. There’s the book by the founders, Jay and Dave, and the website has lots of great ideas and resources. One of the resources is these fridge magnets that you write your neighbors names into, with the hopes that first you’ll learn their names, then you’ll find some way to have conversations with them, and maybe move on to hosting them for a meal, even eventually sharing your faith or inviting them to church. But just start with their names because you can’t get any further in your relationship until you know their names.

Our final 5 verses indirectly ask another question:

III. How Will You Serve Jesus? (vv. 38-42)

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Martha got gently rebuked in this passage, but let me tell you: I appreciate the Marthas of the world very much. I love women and men who get the work done. In my house, when we host people for dinner, I may grill the meat, pour the wine, and I may straighten up and clean some things. But Kath does EVERYTHING else, tons of shopping, meal prep, and cleaning. She has a servant heart that gets it all done; our hosting people for dinner would be a train wreck if everything was left to me. People who serve the church and get all of the behind-the-scenes work done are invaluable! Thank you to the many people who work hard and serve here at CenterPoint.

Here’s where we go wrong when we act like Martha, though: 1) we forget to sit at Jesus’ feet, and 2) we get mad at the people who are sitting at Jesus’ feet. What does verse 40 say? “*Martha was distracted with much serving.*” Wow, that’s me! I get so caught up in writing my lists, working on various events and teachings, reading, talking to people that I can get through a day and not even realize that I didn’t spend any time with Jesus. I’m too distracted. And sometimes worse, I work so hard in ministry that, like Martha, I get mad at other people who don’t give as much effort as I think they should. Jesus has a gentle but firm rebuke for me in those times, and for you when you find

³ Dr. Frank Barker’s sermon “The Parable of the Good Samaritan” in *The Gospel of Luke, Volume 1* (self-published).

yourself working and thinking similarly. He says, "Come sit with me awhile, spend some time at my feet like Mary; choose to be blessed by My presence, My teaching, My grace." Keep in mind that you cannot serve Jesus well unless you sit at His feet and learn from Him first.

Conclusion

Let's go back to our Good Samaritan. How do we go and do likewise? Certainly we have the possibility of seeing someone beaten and lying on the side of the road like the man in the parable. But let's look at some other common scenarios of situations that we might find ourselves in:

- One of your co-workers is getting divorced and she has a hard time talking about it.
- One of the guys on your dorm hall gets drunk every weekend, and you've passed by when he was throwing up the next morning hung over.
- Your neighbors are shocked when their child gets expelled from school and arrested.

We as believers have four responses that we can give to these situations – either where unbelievers are experiencing the consequences of their sins, or just suffering in a hurting world (all start with I):

1) Indifference – You've probably heard the famous quote – that the opposite of love is not hate, but apathy or indifference. Saying, "it's not my problem. I've got enough on my plate without adding you and your problems. And maybe if I'm totally honest, I don't really care about you that much anyways." This is the priest and the Levite. They were most likely in the position that all of us will be in in about an hour: we will have just finished worshipping the God who calls us to love as He has loved, and we will be heading home. Will our lives away from church be marked by what we've been confronted with in worship, in our interaction with the Lord? Or will we cling to being comfortable and resist being inconvenienced?

2) Indignation – One response to unbelievers and sin is anger and judgment: "You sinned and you deserve what you're getting." We can sit back and judge them for their foolish behavior. We can blame the co-worker who's getting divorced for not being a good enough spouse. We can blame the parents whose son is kicked out of school for being too lax in their parenting. And we can certainly slap our college buddy around and ask him what else he expects to happen after a night of hard drinking. But Jesus had a hard time with those who looked down on others. It's tough for people to see Christ in us when we're standing over them saying, "I'm glad you got what you deserved." It's really difficult for people to believe the gospel when we only offer them judgment and not mercy. It's hard for people to grasp grace if we don't model it.

3) Imitation – We can look at the sin around us, and we join in. Or we long to. We start experimenting with reckless behavior. We start entertaining thoughts of how nice it would be to "live only for pleasure," or to be single again, and distance ourselves from our spouses. But Galatians 4:9 confronts us: "*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?*"

4) Incarnation – Ultimately, our response should be modeled after Christ Himself. Jesus "*became flesh and dwelt among us*" John's Gospel says. He could have stayed in heaven where He reigned in glory and everything is perfect. But He was obedient to the Father's plan to come to earth to live a perfect life and die on a cross to save us from our sins. He modelled incarnational ministry for us, and so we know that if we want to reach most people, we must go and be among them. We cannot stay inside the walls of the church, or the safety of our homes, or the comfort of our existing relationships. We have to move towards pain and difficulty and uncertainty; move out of our comfort zones to love people and be willing to share Christ with them. This is where we break free from a lot of "Sterile Christianity"; keeping the rules Christianity, where we don't get close to anything that might corrupt us or make us look or feel bad.

What would it look like if Christians modelled this? Instead of judgment, anger, and indifference, what if we came alongside unbelievers and loved them out of their messes? What if we got our hands dirty walking through life with them, listening and caring for the woman who is getting divorced, offering any help for the parents of the troubled child, or befriending the heavy drinker? Incarnational Ministry is going and being present with those who need help.

I want to be careful that we don't make helping people the main issue of Christianity, though, because some people would tell you it's not what you believe but how you act that God is pleased by. Let's go back to the lawyer's first question: "*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" We all would love a checklist of what you have to do to earn eternal life: go help 10 poor people find food, help 5 people get jobs, buy orphans food and clothes around Christmas, host fundraisers for your church and a parachurch ministry, teach Sunday School, sing in the choir, host at least one church dinner, show up for church at least every other week, be nice to the pastor, say 5 Hail Marys, and you should be good to go!

But we can't do anything to inherit eternal life. Let's be clear about that, since I'm giving you a lot of ideas of things that you should be doing. Salvation is a gift given by God because of what Jesus has done to accomplish eternal life on our behalf. Romans 3:28 – "*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*" Forget the list of things to do! Christ has done it all!

Jesus told someone directly in John 11: "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live... do you believe this?*" And that person said, "*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*" Who was that person who had such an amazing faith that we should emulate? Martha. Busybody Martha who came to understand her Lord in a powerful way. She gave us the key to eternal life: faith in Jesus' saving work. After you are born again with that understanding of the Gospel, then God sends you out to do the works that He prepared for you to do.

Ultimately, we need to see ourselves as the wounded traveler and Jesus as the Greater Samaritan! He left His home in heaven to be an incarnational Neighbor to a bunch of hurting, broken people who have been robbed by sin and beaten by the devil. They are naturally His enemies, but He doesn't care; He picks them up, bandages them, and pays the price for their healing. Amen.

Benediction - Romans 16:25-27: "*Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*"