

Who is my neighbour?

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[0:00] So that's Luke chapter 10, verse 25 to 42. On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

! Teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? What is written in the law, he replied, how do you read it? He 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. You have answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live. But he wanted to justify himself. So he asked Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

In reply, Jesus said, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

[1:13] But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was. And when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day, he took two denarii 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. Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?

The expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, go and do likewise. As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?

[2:23] Tell her to help me. Martha, Martha, the Lord replied. You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed, or indeed only one.

Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her. I'll now hand over to Derek. Well, thank you, Dad.

I was going to say Roddy, but it just felt unnatural, so I'm going to settle with Dad. It's a real joy to be here tonight with you. As has been said before, I grew up in this church, and many of the saints helped me in my journey of faith.

I'm going to call them pews, because I still find it strange to call them seats, sat in these pews in front of me here. And we got married in this church. It was a very special place for my wife Lynn and I.

And so every evening in our home, my wife Lynn and I, we have a really beautiful privilege. We sit down with our son, Ruri. We read him a story. Ideally one, but often it goes into two or three.

[3:31] And as a parent, you quickly realize how stories shape the way children understand the world. But there's a terrifying danger when we approach the Word of God the same way we approach the nursery bookshelf.

There's a massive difference between reading a comforting bedtime story to a toddler and listening to the disruptive parable of Jesus. And this parable of the Good Samaritan is arguably one of the most familiar stories in the entire Bible.

Many of us have first encountered it in Sunday school or a kid's Bible, and we all know the story with illustrations. We can picture the scene now. The priest, the Levite, the wounded man, and finally the compassionate Samaritan and his donkey.

But familiarity breeds a dangerous kind of blindness. When we think we know a story inside out, we stop letting it cut us. We stop letting it teach us. We treat this text like a predictable fable.

But Jesus didn't tell parables to tuck us into bed at night. He told them to start a revolution in the human heart. And we often reduce the Good Samaritan to one simple lesson.

[4:40] Be kind or be compassionate. Nothing more than a comfortable moral fable. And that's the wrong way of the story. And think for a moment about cinema history.

I don't apologize for this whatsoever. So imagine sitting down to watch Star Wars Empire Strikes Back. That's the third or sixth film, depending on how you look at things.

Instead of beginning at the start of the film, you skip straight to the climactic scene where Darth Vader reveals his identity to Luke Skywalker. You miss the opening crawl that sets the stage of everything.

You miss everything that gives the scene its meaning. The scene would still be dramatic. Yes, we wouldn't carry the emotional shock or the narrative weight that it's designed to carry. And Luke, the gospel writer that is, wants us to read his gospel in exactly the same way.

Every episode sits in a larger story. And if we jump straight to the Good Samaritan without paying attention to what comes before it, what comes after it, we'll miss why Jesus told it in the first place.

[5:40] And one thing that's really easy to miss is where this story sits in Luke's gospel. And I would contend that Luke's gospel is almost like a book in two halves. Up until chapter 9, Jesus' ministry is centered mainly around Galilee.

Healing the sick, feeding the crowds, walking waters, establishing his ministry. Then everything changes in chapter 9, what we call chapter 9 and verse 51, where it says, When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go towards Jerusalem.

And from that moment on, Jesus is on a deliberate, unrelenting journey to the cross. And almost everything that follows, including this parable, is told in the road towards Calvary.

So the one who says go and do likewise is first and foremost one who's going to do for us what we can never do for ourselves. And that's exactly how Luke wants us to read it.

Right at the beginning of Luke's gospel, he tells us he's writing an orderly account so that we may know with certainty the truth about Jesus. This is not a story of disconnected stories, not a greatest hits.

[6:48] On this inspiration of the Holy Spirit, every episode is carefully arranged to reveal who Jesus is and why he came. So the Good Samaritan does not simply appear in what we call chapter 10.

Luke has placed it here for a reason. And to understand the parable, we must read it as part of the larger journey towards the cross. And Luke 10 itself, this chapter, is a beautifully connected narrative loop.

As we've read tonight, But notice the movement here.

So before we ask, what does the Good Samaritan teach?

We should first ask, why did Luke place it here? And this is not a story about kindness. It's Jesus' response to a self-righteous man who wants eternal life on his own terms.

[8:11] And tonight we're going to follow the passage that Luke presents it. We'll begin to question the question that reveals the lawyer's heart. Then we'll look at the story that turns it upside down. And finally, we'll see the Savior to whom the story oddly points.

And only then will we understand what it means to go and do likewise. So let's look at our first movement, the kingdom question. And right after Jesus declares, Rejoice, your name's written in heaven.

An expert in the law stands up with a very different mindset. Now this isn't a lawyer like we think. It's more like a scribe. Somebody knows the law of Moses very, very well.

And the disciples received the kingdom as a gift. The law approached it as something that can be earned. He asked the defining question of almost every religion. And let's look at that question in verse 25.

Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? The question sounds almost admirable on the surface. And we ask versions of this question all the time.

[9:12] We hear it almost every single week. It's a person who says, well, if there is a God, I'm a decent person. I pay my taxes. I don't hurt anyone.

I give my bit to charity. Should that be enough to get me to heaven? Or the religious version. One who whispers, I attend church. I read my Bible. I try to be a good person.

Surely God is satisfied with my performance. Yes, there's already a profound problem hidden within his words. Luke is vocabulary. He covers the word do with inherit.

Now, inherit is not something you can usually earn through personal achievement. It's something you receive by birth or relationship. You don't get inheritance necessarily by working hard for a stranger.

You get it because a parent or person loves you so much, they wrote you into the will. By asking what he's doing to inherit, he reveals a deeply transactional heart.

[10:07] He wants a list. He wants a spiritual checklist he can take off, present to God, and demand payout. But Jesus, massively turning his tables, refuses to give him the checklist.

He directs him straight back to the very law he claims to be an expert in. Verse 26. What is written in the law? How do you read it? The lawyer answers flawlessly. He pulls together two monumental texts of the Old Testament.

He gives a textbook answer. He quotes the Shema from Deuteronomy 6. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And weave it seamlessly with the holiness code from Leviticus 19.

And love your neighbor as yourself. It's a brilliant theological synthesis, and rightly called the great commandment. And Jesus responds simply in verse 28, the lion should pierce him the core.

You've answered correctly. Do this, and you will live. And that actually stopped us in our tracks.

Jesus does not talk about grace here. He doesn't say, well, don't worry about law.

[11:10] Just believe in me. He holds up the mirror of God's perfect law to the lawyer. We're also interrupting Jesus here. We want to raise our hands and say, oh no, Jesus, you can't tell him this.

You can't tell him to do this and live. Our minds raise the words of the apostle, who says time and time again, a person not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So why does Jesus tell him to keep the law to live? Is Jesus teaching us salvation by works? Not at all. He's doing something brilliant, something subversively brilliant.

He'll recognize this man knows all the answers, knows all the answers from the Bible, or the Hebrew Bible. But he has a moral problem. He thinks he's keeping the law perfectly. He thinks the law is his ladder to heaven.

So Jesus points to this ladder and says, fine, if you want to get to heaven by your own performance, the standard is total, flawless, uninterrupted love for God and neighbor. Go ahead, just do it.

[12:09] Jesus is exposing the law's ultimate purpose here. The law was never meant, it was never given to us to provide salvation. It was never given to expose our sin. It was a diagnostic tool, not the cure.

It's meant to show the lawyer and show us utter failure to love perfectly, driving us to our knees to beg for mercy. And knowing deep down he hasn't loved perfectly, but desperately to maintain his clean reputation, he tries to justify himself.

Verse 29, he asks, and who is my neighbor? The lawyer knows a great commandment, but what he wants now is a small print exception. And see what he's doing here?

He's looking for boundary lines. He's asking, how tight can I draw my circle, Jesus? Where does my obligation end? He didn't want to act. He wants to debate definitions, so he can limit his liability and keep his distance.

And if we're honest, the lawyer's attempt to redefine neighbor isn't just an ancient problem, it's ours as well. The lawyer wants to know who he can leave outside the circle of love.

[13:13] And before we're too hard on him, perhaps we should ask ourselves this, who sits outside ours? The calling we want to avoid, the family members hurt us, the neighbor whose lifestyle we disapprove of, the person living rough for whom we hope someone else will stop and help.

We're often happier discussing mercy than showing mercy. It means we can avoid looking across the street at someone we'd rather ignore. And that brings us to our second quest, our second movement, the kingdom lifestyle.

Now, the lawyers, the teachers, the lawyers asked a question. Instead of giving a sterile answer, Jesus tells a story that drops like a bomb in a room. He describes a nameless man walking down

notorious roads from Jerusalem all the way in the heights, down to Jericho, all the way below sea level.

This road is known as the Path of Blood, and it was notorious. A steep, 70-mile descent through the Dujain wilderness full of caves and blind corners. The perfect place for bandits.

You're trapped alone, you're taking serious risk. The traveling Jesus story loses that gamble. He's attacked, stripped of his clothes, his social status, identity, and now erased, beaten until he's unconscious, and left half dead in dirt.

[14 : 28] But then, hope passes by. The priest comes, then a Levite. They both see this bloody mess, and the text says, both pass by on the other side. Now, we shouldn't assume that these men were cartoon villains.

It doesn't say they're wicked. It doesn't infer that. They look to be respectfully religious people. They were perhaps heading home after completing their sacred duties in the temple.

I need excellent movements to keep on moving. But notice this. Jesus doesn't tell us why they didn't stop. He leaves their motives completely unexplained. He doesn't tell us what they were thinking. He could have, but he didn't. The point isn't why they failed. The point is simply that they saw the man, calculated risk, and kept going. So, whatever their reasons, compassion lost to convenience. Then Jesus turns the whole story upside down with two shocking words in verse 33. But a Samaritan. His listeners were gasped and disbelief, probably even disgust.

[15 : 30] To a first-century Jew, a good Samaritan was a jarring, offensive contradiction. Sent to the bitter, violent, religious hatred sat between them. So, good Samaritan sounded like a holy criminal.

And that's lost its weight for us today. Because good Samaritan for us is a positive term used for many organizations. But to a Jew, that had been deeply offensive. So, Jesus takes the very person his listeners and lawyer would cross the street to avoid and makes them the definition of God's love in action.

And when Samaritan sees a victim, the NAV tells us exactly what happened next. The text says, he took pity on him. In the Greek language of the New Testament, this isn't polite sympathy.

It literally describes a deep, physical, heartfelt sorrow so overwhelming that violently drives a person to act. And if you track this specific type of compassion through the New Testament, you discover something breathtaking almost every single time this word is used.

It's reserved exclusively to describe the divine pity of Jesus Christ himself. This is Jesus' own compassion right here. It wasn't cheap sentimentality. It was incredibly costly.

[16 : 44] Notice what Samaritan sacrifices. He sacrifices safety to treat the wounds. He sacrifices property pouring expensive oil and wine and putting the man on his own donkey while he walks in the dirt.

and he also sacrifices finances. He left two denarii, two full-day wages for labor with the innkeeper. He doesn't stop there. He leaves an open tab and in verse 35 he tells the innkeeper, wherever you spend when I come back I will repay you.

He assumes unlimited liability for a stranger who if he were conscious would likely despise him. And it's precisely where the story becomes deeply painfully uncomfortable.

If we're completely honest for ourselves we want to see ourselves as a hero. We want to see ourselves as a Samaritan helping the poor, helping everyone in need. But if we read the story honestly we see a reflection not in the sacrificial reactions of the Samaritan but in the hurried self-justifying reactions of the priest and the Levite.

We see the human mess around us. We recognize the inconvenience. We calculate the personal cost to me. We find a deeply logical perhaps spiritual reason to quite like slip over to the other side of the road.

[17 : 58] We look at the brokenness of our city. We can't fail to see it. And we think the council should handle that. Or that's what charities are for. It's not my job to sort it out. We weaponize our good boundaries to excuse our total lack of mercy.

Now is Jesus saying that every time when I go out for lunch tomorrow at work and I pass someone sleeping rough I am personally required to stop put them into a travel lodge pay for their accommodation and meet every one of their needs?

Is that the point of the parable? Not at all. Jesus is not giving us a new legal checklist. He's not placing one form of self-righteousness with another. He's exposing hearts that are always looking

for the minimum requirement.

The question isn't that must I help every person I meet? The question is has God's mercy so changed my heart that I'm becoming the kind of person that moves towards need rather than away from it?

And some of us become experts at loving humanity while avoiding actual humans. The law is looking for the minimum requirement of love and we so often do the same. We look for reasons not to love rather than for opportunities to love.

[19 : 10] And this leads us to our third and final movement the greater Samaritan. And when Jesus finishes the story he turns the Lord's question on its head. Look at verses 36 and 37.

The Lord asked who's my neighbor? Jesus asked instead which of these three proved to be a neighbor? Do you see this shift here? Jesus changes the question entirely.

Not who deserves my love but am I becoming the sort of person who loves? The lawyer is so uncomfortable with his answer they can't even bring themselves to say the word Samaritan. He simply mutters the one who had mercy on him.

And Jesus says go and do likewise. And if we leave the sermon here we've missed the whole point of the sermon and more importantly we've missed the whole point of the gospel. This parable is just a moral checklist.

Jesus is simply telling us you have to try harder give more money be perfectly loving the Samaritan to turn heaven then Jesus hasn't given us good news. He's simply given us another impossible standard.

[20 : 10] If going to likewise is a condition for inheriting eternal life then this parable should not sit with your children's books. It belongs in the horror section. Because once you realize what Jesus is actually demanding it's because none of us has loved it this perfectly.

And we have to be very careful with this as well. It's right to say the action of the Samaritan is not the way to life but it is for those who love God with undiluted love to be a way of life.

And Jesus is not suggesting for a moment that he's setting aside all that he's come to do. No. The real test is a bit like the parable of the sower. The seed falls on different kinds of ground.

The seed that falls on good soil brings forth fruit. So evidence is in the fruitfulness. Not the dramatic nature of the response. In other words the Samaritan's actions do not hurt in them life.

They reveal the kind of life that's already at work. So mercy is not the root of our salvation it's the fruit of our salvation. We're not saved because we love our neighbor perfectly.

[21 : 17] When Christ has shown mercy to us that mercy begins to reshape the way we see and the way we respond to the person lying in front of us. Because once you realize what Jesus is actually demanding you realize it's such an impossible standard to live up to.

When we read the Good Samaritan to the ends of the cross we realize the profound depth of what Jesus is doing. The story is not primarily about what we must do it first shows us what Christ has done.

In the grand narrative of salvation we are not the Samaritan we're not the priest we're not the Levite we're the bloody beaten traveler dying in the dirt entirely unable to save ourselves.

Until we see ourselves lying helpless in the dust we'll never marvel at what Christ has done for us that he stopped for us and went on that cross for us. The priest and Levite teach us a painful truth religion cannot save.

The law can expose our need but cannot rescue us. We were spiritually bankrupt stripped of righteousness and helpless. The good Samaritan shows what love looks like.

[22 : 23] Christ that great Samaritan shows what saving love does. And look how beautifully Christ fills the shadow. The Samaritan came to the wounded man Christ came down from heaven to us.

The Samaritan bound up wounds Christ heals the wounds of our sin. The Samaritan gave his own resources Christ gave his blood on Calvary. The Samaritan paid the cross Christ paid her debt in full crying it is finished.

Now the Samaritan left two denarii with the innkeeper and some of our early church fathers saw in this a beautiful illustration. Perhaps not necessarily what Luke was intending here but it's a fitting reminder that Christ our great Samaritan has given his church his words and his sacraments the common means of grace to nourish us and sustain us until he returns.

The Samaritan promised when I return I will repay you. Christ promises he is coming back a second and final time to finalize the restoration and wipe away every tear.

We can only love our neighbor because we've first been loved by the ultimate neighbor who died for us his enemy. And as C.S. Lewis masterfully wrote in *The Weight of Glory* there are no ordinary people you've never talked to a mere mortal.

[23 : 42] Nations cultures arts civilizations these are mortal and their life is to ours as a life of an act. It's to immortals humans that we conduct all of our dealings with one another.

So when we comprehend the weight of what Christ did for us while we were his enemy it fundamentally alters how we view humanity. So we walk out of this building tonight we pass someone sleeping rough in streets of Edinburgh or meet the difficult colleague tomorrow or the lonely neighbor across the stairwell you're not looking at an inconvenience.

You're looking at an immortal soul made in the image of God. You're looking at someone for whom the road to Jericho is that daily reality living in a fallen world carrying burdens you cannot see.

And the wonder of the gospel is that law which once condemned us for a failure to love is transformed by grace. What the law is powerless to do God did for us by sending us Jesus.

Now let's see how this beautiful structured chapter comes to its conclusion. And Luke brings us full circle here. The chapter that begins with mission moved through mercy now ends in worship.

[24 : 52] It doesn't leave us on a busy blood-soaked road to Jericho ends immediately after this in a quiet home in Bethany. There we meet two sisters Martha and Mary.

Martha is running around trying to do things for Jesus much like the lawyer wanting to perform. Our sister Mary sits peacefully at the feet of Jesus absorbing his words listening to his heart.

The 72 are sent out the Samaritan acts and Mary sits. And this is where the gospel this is where the heavy command becomes a gospel promise. Jesus told the lawyer go and do likewise.

Then Luke immediately walks into the house where Mary is sitting. Why? Because you cannot do the going until you've done the sitting. If you try to run out tonight and solve every problem try to be a good Samaritan try to be the perfect person in your own strength without first sitting at the feet of Jesus you'll burn out.

You'll start resenting the very people you're trying to help. So before you can effectively love your neighbor you have to stand before God empty-handed like the beaten traveler and simply receive the mercy he's already poured out on you.

[26 : 01] We must sit at his feet to be filled so we can go into the streets and pour out our love. So what does go and do likewise look like tomorrow? It's simply this who's lying on the road in front of you?

Go and do likewise is a life that flows from grace. Because gospel-shaped love is really convenient. It crosses boundaries interrupts our lives and costs us something.

But it costs Christ everything. And we'll just close with this short point. We started tonight with a question from a lawyer asking what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And here's the answer. You don't inherit eternal life by being the good Samaritan. You inherit it by realizing you're the one dying in the ditch and putting your faith entirely in Jesus Christ.

He is the great Samaritan who finds us helpless in our sin. When we trust in him he binds our wounds. He pays our debt on the cross and he promises his return to us.

[27 : 01] So friends it's only when we received his mercy by faith that we can begin to show mercy to others. We do not go and show mercy to earn life. We go because Christ because in Christ we received life.

And so having received the mercy of the great Samaritan Jesus now says to us go and do likewise. And we'll close. And so let us pray.

We thank you grateful God that when we turn our attention to your word the Holy Spirit brings it home into our hearts. We thank you that we are saved not by our performance but by the mercy of the great Samaritan Jesus Christ.

As members of your family heal our self-righteousness break our love of boundaries and replace it with the love for our people. Send us out this week to love you totally and to love the broken the unexpected and the forgotten people we meet along streets of Edinburgh so that they too might see the transforming power of your grace.

In the beautiful name of Jesus we pray. Amen.