

The Good Samaritan

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[0 : 0 0] So, if you have a Bible, maybe you can turn back with me to Luke chapter 10, Church Bibles, it's page 1041, to think about the Good Samaritan story, perhaps one of Jesus' most famous parables.

In many cultures, to hear that phrase, the Good Samaritan, even if we don't know anything about the Bible, we understand that a Good Samaritan is someone who offers help to a stranger, not expecting reward, and it's an action that may involve risk and cost. I think in God's timing, it's a wonderful parable to find ourselves in today. I think it asks really important, helpful questions for us. Who is my neighbor? How many of us are brand new to this city?

We literally do not know who our neighbors are, but we hope and pray that you will find a home and a welcome in our city, in our church, and indeed a place where you can show mercy and kindness to the folks that you haven't yet met. It's also an important question for our society, who is my neighbor? Because I'm sure I am not alone in recognizing how easy it is to build barriers of politics or of culture or of race. And when we set up walls and we ignore people who are different from us, we can very easily limit our concern. I'm going to help the people who are like me, the people who are like me. So it's a really important story for this purpose as well.

It's also an important story for the great story of our lives, your life and mine. As Jesus calls us to practice justice and mercy and kindness for all people, for all kinds of people, as a way to reflect God's character and in response to God's love in sending us Jesus.

And even before we get into the parable, I want to remind especially if you haven't been here before, we find in this section of Luke's gospel, Jesus is on a journey. So that's interesting.

[2 : 2 9] He tells a journey story while he is on a journey. Jesus is on the way to the city of Jerusalem, and he knows when he gets to Jerusalem, he is going to be killed on a cross.

Part of God's plan to save sinful people. And he knows in Jerusalem, he will rise again, and he will return to the glory of heaven. But Jesus is on this journey to demonstrate the love of God and the mercy of God to sinful people, to bring eternal life to anyone who will trust in him.

And he tells a journey story that has those exact same themes. He introduces us to a traveler in desperate trouble. He introduces us to surprising mercy from the good Samaritan. So our story is important for this reason too. It speaks to us about God's story. It speaks to us about the gospel.

It tells us about the mission of Jesus. So let's get into this famous story, and we'll look at it from four different angles. The first, let's think about love without limits. Okay, so at the center of this discussion that leads to the parable is the question, who is my neighbor? So the question is there in verse 29, this expert in the religious law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, who is my neighbor? He already says he understands that God calls us to love God and to love our neighbor as ourself. And so why is he asking the question? He's most likely asking the question because many Jewish teachers in the first century said, yes, you love your neighbor, but your neighbor is your brother.

Your neighbor is your fellow Jew. Jesus, is that what you think? Should I just love the Jews because I am a Jew?

[4 : 46] That's what the religious leader is asking. And Jesus refuses to put limits on love. He refuses, first of all, to limit who we love. Okay, so Jesus in the first century, us in the 21st century, we live in societies where the ugly scars of prejudice and of racism and of them and us attitudes are seen out there and in here all too quickly. And what Jesus does is he uses the barriers, he uses the divisions to focus our attention on true neighbor love, which is costly. In two different ways, look at your Bible and look at verse 30, who is the person in trouble? Jesus said a man was going down. Where does he come from? We don't know.

What is his background? We are not told. And that's the point. This man is every man. And so Jesus is saying we are called to love and to meet the needs of anyone who has needs. Here's another way Jesus makes his point. Who is the hero in the story? Well, it's not the usual good guys of the story. It's not the religious priest and it's not the religious Levite because they see the trouble and they cross the street and they walk on by. Rather, his usual bad guys, the enemies, it's the Samaritans. A Samaritan saw him and took pity on him.

So Jesus turns this usual story on its head to force people out of our comfort zones to say, no, we don't just show kindness to people who belong to our group. And remember, Jesus tells this story on the road to the cross. And that helps us perhaps when questions or objections come to our minds. Questions like, well, why should I help this person? They're nothing like me. What do we see in Jesus? We see that Jesus' love crosses differences. In his ministry, he cared for all kinds of people, friends, strangers, enemies, his country, other countries. And in becoming human to save us, leaving the glory of heaven, that's the biggest difference of all. But Jesus crosses that difference so he can show mercy to us.

Maybe another objection. Well, I don't know whether that person deserves my help, so why should I help? Remember, Jesus is on his journey to the cross. And Jesus on the cross shows his love freely, knowing full well that we do not deserve mercy and love from God. Yet Jesus freely shows it anyway.

And he asks us to do likewise. So Jesus refuses to put limits on who we love, but he also refuses to put limits on how we love. And this is challenging as well.

[8 : 28] He wants us to take the second commandment really serious. The second great commandment that we find in verse 27. If the first is love the Lord your God, the second great commandment from Leviticus 19, love your neighbor as yourself. Now let's think about that for a moment. How do we love ourselves?

Well, we care for our needs, physical, mental, social, financial. We are concerned for our own well-being.

We pursue our own happiness. We will spend time and effort and money to provide for ourselves.

We don't limit self-care. And Jesus wants to say to us, we shouldn't try to limit neighbor care either.

And he gives us a really radical demonstration in the Samaritan. So go back to your Bible and to verse 33, and we find in this story, a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

[9 : 44] So here's where love begins. It begins with an emotional response. He sees needs. He refuses to walk away. He has compassion. But it doesn't just stop there. Oh, I feel sorry for you.

It moves beyond that, doesn't it? Verse 34, we see effort and energy being poured out here. He went to him and bandaged his wounds. He poured on oil. He put the man on his donkey, and he brought him to an inn so he could be cared for. And it doesn't just stop there. Verse 35, the next day he's back.

He's giving money, and he's providing for future care. Emotion, effort, energy, expense all come together.

Now, was he caring for a friend, someone like him? We're not told. Was he caring for an enemy? Again, we're not told. That's not what's in view. What's in view is sacrificial love and mercy.

It's a challenging call, maybe because of our economic circumstances. Perhaps because we feel so time poor, and helping people is costly in that way.

[11 : 02] Perhaps it's because of the emotional cost that we recognize the challenge of these words. But as we seek to follow in the way of Jesus, this is the life of love he calls us to.

I wonder if anybody has heard of Daryl Davis. I love this guy whenever I come across him. He started a foundation called the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism. Fair. Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism. He is a black American Christian who describes his life as one of following the light of Jesus. And following the light of Jesus has led Daryl Davis to some very surprising places. He has taken it upon himself to actively make friends with white racists from the Ku Klux Klan.

And because of his love and his kindness in the name of Jesus, 200 white racist Klan members have left that organization and have left a life of racism behind. And listening to Daryl Davis this week, he said this, he said, it is hard, that's an understatement, it is hard to love those who hate you, to respect in the face of disrespect, to treat fairly those who abuse power to hurt you, to listen to others when their ideas are hurtful. But to show love and kindness, that's what can stop the toxic cycle of racism. That's one example of love without limits following the teaching of Jesus. Here's another angle, here's another way to think about this parable.

Let's think about mirrors of mercy. Because this story can help to remind us about God's design for your life and mine. So we are introduced to an expert in the law. That doesn't mean he was a lawyer in court, that means he was a religious expert. He knew his Old Testament inside out. So he knows the story of creation in the book of Genesis. He knows people were made in God's image to know and to enjoy loving relationships, to know and enjoy love from God and with God, and to love others in the world. And as Adam and Eve were made in the image of God and placed in the Garden of Eden and lived in perfect love, in perfect love, they were entitled to, while they were obeying, to eat from the tree of life. So the theme of eternal life is there as well. So the question he asks in verse 25, what must I do to inherit eternal life, in a sense takes us back to that deep longing for the life that we were made for. Not just a quantity of life that lasts forever, but a quality of life, enjoying God's love, and living in a world of love. Jesus asks him about the law, and he knows these two great commands that have been there from the beginning. With all of our energy, with all of our being inside and out, love our God and love our neighbor. Then the parable answers the question, how do we do it? How do we love our neighbor? And Jesus wants to make the point that the way that we show love is the love that is full of mercy. To go to the end of the story, which of these three men was a neighbor? The expert replied, the one who had mercy, and Jesus told him, go and do likewise. Mercy sees that is need, feels that need, and acts to help the person in need. And if we do that, we are mirroring God's mercy.

The light of love that God shines on us is full of mercy. He sees our need, and he responds in love, and he sends his son. How do we know that God is a merciful God, that he shows his love by mercy?

[15 : 54] Because Jesus is the son of God, and Jesus was sent from God, and Jesus is the perfect image of God. You want to know what God is like? Learn about Jesus. And Jesus shows us what it looks like to truly love God, and to truly love other people. And how did Jesus love other people? He shows mercy. Jesus came on a mission of mercy. He actually told us that in Luke chapter 4. You can turn back to Luke chapter 4, and Jesus, the first time he publicly preaches in the gospel of Luke, he reads this, and he says, this is what I've come to do. The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. This is mercy from God.

And if you read Luke's gospel, every time Jesus heals someone, it's mercy. Every time a demon is driven out, every time an outcast and a sinner is called to be a friend of Jesus, every command to love enemies.

Even when Jesus wants to go to a Samaritan village and they reject him, when Jesus refuses to destroy that village is mercy. To look at Jesus is to understand what mercy looks like. And Jesus is on this journey of mercy, because he's on the way to the cross, to be a loving sacrifice, to meet your deepest need and my deepest need, to pay for our sin, our sin that separates us from the God of love and from God's love. We need to be forgiven. And only Jesus can forgive us. And so in this parable, when Jesus says, here is the good Samaritan, you go and do likewise, what he's saying to us, he's saying to us, you are to be mirrors of my mercy. You have received mercy, now reflect that to others. To care for people in need is to reflect the love that Jesus has shown to us.

I was thinking about this this morning. Jesus doesn't include any details by accident in his stories. There's a detail that he could have left out, because the story would still be powerful, wouldn't it? If the man was going down from Jerusalem and he was attacked by robbers and he was left half dead, and straight away the Samaritan came and helped him. There'd be a wonderful power in that.

Jesus didn't need to include those first two characters, did he? But he chose to. Why? He chose to remind us that religion without love, religion without mercy, it's no good.

[19 : 16] It's no good. The parable begins in a very ordinary way. Lots of people knew that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was dangerous. It then becomes very surprising, because when religious figures show up in stories, you expect them to be heroic, and to be full of kindness, and to act for God.

But they choose to look after themselves, perhaps afraid of attack, perhaps the fear of being unclean. Maybe they were off duty. Maybe they felt they were late for much more important work.

And then Jesus introduces that really shocking twist. Maybe the people thought, okay, the religious leaders aren't going to be the hero, but a regular Jewish guy, he's going to be the hero. But no, it's a Samaritan. It's an enemy. It's an outsider who keeps the law of love, who acts as a mirror of God's mercy. And the point Jesus wants to make is that knowing the law is not enough. Knowing the Bible is not enough. Knowing the truth that God is a merciful God is not enough. Do you, do I know the mercy of God and the God of mercy? Is this your story? That Jesus saw me in my spiritual need? That his heart was moved all the way to the cross to pay the ultimate price to rescue me. Do you know that mercy? And if you do, and if I do, do I show the mercy of God in response? Am I ready to make sacrifices? Am I ready to take risks? Am I ready positively to cross the street to the other side? Because that's where need is.

Because that's what Jesus did. And he wants us to follow his example. This week I discovered something interesting about Vincent van Gogh. In 1889, van Gogh, not for the first time, checked himself into a mental hospital, a sanatorium in Provence. He found himself penniless.

He found himself sick. He was the epitome of the tortured artist. And as he was making his way to that hospital, he couldn't get there by himself. And so he had to be helped on his way by two fellow travelers. Well, in that hospital where he stayed for a few months, he had two rooms. One was a small bedroom. One was an artist's studio. And in that studio, he would draw and paint the landscapes outside. But he would also, many times from memory, copy down famous paintings that he'd seen in the past. And one of those paintings in that hospital was the Good Samaritan that had been painted by a chap called Delacroix. But that guy painted with really dark colors. But when van Gogh painted it, really light colors. And art historians have puzzled and asked questions about why. And nobody's particularly sure. But one thing that we can be sure of, whenever you and I experience mercy on the journey of life, it is as if light shines in the midst of darkness. And that's what Jesus calls us to be and to do as Christians. Let me encourage us never to underestimate those small acts of kindness and mercy. Remember Jesus said, even if we give a cup of water to someone in Jesus' name, there's reward for that. Never underestimate what God can do as Christian people like us look to show kindness to others. Because I know for a fact that for some people here today, your story is that you're a

[23 : 28] Christian in part because someone chose to pour mercy and love and kindness out on you. And God uses people and God uses kindness and mercy to open people up to salvation. And so may we be mirrors of mercy and we see many more come to faith. Here's another thing that we recognize from this parable.

Jesus teaches about religion with relationships. The conversation with the lawyer and Jesus asks the identity question, who is my neighbor? Which really becomes, am I a neighbor? Is my life defined by love for God that shows itself in love to others in response to God's love for me in Jesus?

Because Christianity is a religion of relationships. This call to right living that we receive is social. It's never just a private religion. Here there is this call to do good that does not place limits on rank or race or class or background because God shows His love widely.

If you have time to read the Old Testament laws, you will find that God emphasized care for the poor and the needy and the immigrant to show justice and mercy within society. That's what we should do for people who bear the image of God. And so this lawyer, who's an expert in the law, he needs to see you express your love for God as you express your love for your neighbor. Those two religious leaders who closed their eyes to need, they were not showing love for God, nor were they showing love for their neighbor. Especially when we remember at the center of the Christian faith stands a loving Savior, who is ready to journey from the glory of heaven, to be born in a stable, to go on a journey in His life that involves suffering and death, to obey that great command to love His Father with all of His life.

And that second great command to love His neighbor as He completed the Father's loving plan to save sinners. And the wonderful thing is we receive the love of God through Jesus, we become children of God.

[26 : 07] We enter into the family of God. We have these new relationships. And as we understand that new identity, Jesus intends then that right actions will follow, that love and mercy will follow to friends, to strangers, and even to enemies. As we close, I have one last angle to think about this parable, and it's that we need salvation from the Great Samaritan. To go back to our lawyer, notice that in verse 25, he begins the question, what must I do? What effort must I put in? How must I earn this eternal life? Verse 29, he wanted to justify himself. We could describe his attitude of one of moralism or salvation by works.

And Jesus wants to show him and us that it just doesn't work. Maybe you have tried salvation by works.

I know I have. And you have discovered perhaps that frustration. Maybe on your good day, you feel a level of pride. Then you have a bad day and you feel despair. It never gets us closer to God. And Jesus, because He loves us, wants to show us that we cannot save ourselves. And so Jesus, because He loves this lawyer, He pushes him to think about the law. Do you really love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength all the time, all your life, in every moment? Do you really love your neighbor with the same time and energy and effort as you love yourself? Do we love the way God intends?

And as we feel the weight of that demand, hopefully we understand that nobody can keep these laws except for Jesus. And to see that is to understand why we need God's grace and why Jesus becomes good news. If we want to be a neighbor, if we want to go from here and we want to show mercy and we want to be like a good Samaritan, and wouldn't that be a wonderful thing? First, we need a neighbor.

Back to Vincent van Gogh and his painting of the Good Samaritan. Art historians, they noticed a fascinating detail in that painting. Van Gogh, who did a lot of self-portraits, he painted himself into the story of the Good Samaritan. And do you know what figure he was in that story? He was the battered traveler being helped up onto the donkey. And friends, that's where we all need to see ourselves, to understand that we desperately need help from Jesus. The Bible says spiritually we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We are utterly powerless, not just injured with a possibility of recovery, our situation is far worse than that. We need Jesus, the one who is moved with compassion, to come to help us, to pay the price to rescue us on the cross by sheer grace alone, showing neighbor love to undeserving sinners. If we want to be a good Samaritan, we first need

[30 : 02] Jesus, the great Samaritan. Our only hope spiritually is that someone quite different from us would come to our aid. Someone who owes us nothing, actually someone in fact who owes us judgment because of our sinfulness, but who freely chooses to give us everything to rescue us. We need the journey of Jesus from heaven to earth, from stable to cross, from empty tomb to the glory of heaven.

We need him as our Savior. And as we receive his love, as we enjoy his kindness and mercy day by day, that's when we have that inner power to begin to show love and mercy to others in Jesus' name for his glory and honor.

Let's pray in Jesus' name together. Lord, we thank you for this story that shows us that you are a merciful God. We thank you for Jesus' life that demonstrates your love and mercy so clearly in his being willing to go to the cross to save sinful people, so that simply by putting our trust in him, by asking him to forgive our sin, by trusting him as our Lord and Savior and King, we might be forgiven and receive eternal life. Lord, as we enjoy that good news in our lives, help us to be merciful people as a church. Help us to be mirrors of your wonderful mercy, we pray. Amen.

Right, let's close our time together just now, singing the hymn, His Mercy is More. And we'll stand again to sing.