

# Justification By Faith

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[ 0 : 00 ] discussions on topics of law and morality and faith. And in Jesus' case, this was often done in the form of parables, which we're going to see today. Now, in the West, we're conditioned from a very early age that when someone asks us a question, we should respond with the best answer possible.

However, as you look at the Jewish model of teaching, that wasn't the case. Your understanding of a topic wasn't based on the answer you would give. Rather, it was often determined based on the question you would ask about the question you had been asked.

So, being foreign to us, let's take a look. We'll just dive right into our text in Luke chapter 10 that Alex just read for us. And we'll see an example of this right off the bat.

It says, 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? So, right here, you can see Jesus doesn't just come right out and answer his question. He asks him a question about his question. And if you follow through scripture, you're going to see that over and over again, especially in conversations with Jesus.

[ 1 : 13 ] We obviously know that we are going to be working through this passage in Luke, this very well-known parable. Now, the thing about parables is that if you go through and teach about them, you can make a parable say a whole bunch of things that it was never really intended to say.

The idea behind a parable is to connect with this teaching style, is to connect with the people that you're talking to, which is why Jesus would use this form of teaching so often.

So today, we're going to spend some time understanding the context of what's going on, understand the setting of the story and the people that are involved in it, so that we can get a better understanding of what they might have been thinking as they would have heard this.

And I think as we do this, it'll shed some new light on this amazing story. One of the interesting things we see about this passage is that while it's often taught as a parable, many scholars would actually say that this was probably an actual occurrence.

Whether or not it did, whether or not it was, won't really affect the outcome of the story. But the nature of the story suggests that it probably did happen because if Jesus were to have told a story like this about a Samaritan to a Jewish audience, they wouldn't have given it any credence because they didn't like the Samaritans.

[ 2 : 32 ] And they probably would have just dismissed it as outrageous had it not actually been true. So, the story takes place on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Jerusalem to Jericho. So this is a stretch of road that traverses a patch of land that's about 17 miles down this road, and it actually travels down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

You descend about 3,400 feet in elevation as you go down from Jerusalem to Jericho. So, it's a very rocky stretch of road, and it's changed very little in the years since Jesus would have told this story.

To give you an idea, it takes about eight hours to travel down by foot on this path of road. So, if we go to the next slide, you can start to see it travels down the side of that road, and it really winds down and descends down all this elevation.

And if you go to the next slide, you can see there's not a whole lot out there. It's very barren. It's very rocky. If you're traveling down, you would have been able to see for miles and miles ahead because it would have kind of wound down.

[ 3 : 41 ] And so you could see what was going on on the road in front of you. Well, it was a very heavily traveled road, and during Jesus' time, it was known also as the Way of Blood.

Because it wound down through these craggy hills, there were several places along the road that made for a good ambush spot. So, robbers and thieves would commonly hide out, and as they were traveling along this road, they would ambush people and steal their things.

And that's the backdrop for this story. In fact, roughly halfway down, there's still a massive boulder to this day along a narrow pass in this road, and it's very possible that that was the actual setting for this story.

Now, the last thing to note about this location are the cities that lie on either end of it. So, obviously, Jerusalem was the site of the temple. That was the place where the Jews would flock to worship. And Jericho, at this time, was kind of a bedroom community to Jerusalem. There were thousands of temple workers that served on a regular basis in the temple, and many of them lived in Jericho.

[ 4 : 46 ] So, it was very common for them to travel up and down this road in their service in the temple. So, now that we have a better idea of where the story transpired, let's dig into the various people mentioned in the story.

Now, the reason I want to talk and spend some time on the background of this, that with a story like this, it's very easy to just kind of read it and say, well, yes, of course, as I read this, I understand that I'm supposed to love my neighbor.

But as we better understand who the people in the story are and where it's taking place, all of a sudden there are nuances to this that bring depth and meaning to the motivation behind what's happening.

And I personally believe that God cares more about why we do things than he necessarily does about the particular things that we do, and I think that's very much at the heart of this story. So, if we open back up to Luke chapter 10 and verse 25, the first thing we're going to see is that Jesus is speaking to an expert in the law.

Now, so the NIV calls him an expert in the law. Other translations would simply call him a lawyer. So, obviously, he is well-versed in the Old Testament law, the Jewish law, and he would have been learning this his entire life.

[ 6 : 02 ] So, at this point in Jesus' life, he's come into regular opposition with the Pharisees. So, this lawyer was probably a part of the religious sect called the Pharisees that were part of the Sanhedrin, the larger Jewish governing body, and they were not real happy with Jesus.

They were becoming increasingly upset with him because of the things he was teaching. For example, if we turn to Matthew chapter 5. I'm going to just turn back a little bit. Now, Jesus has been teaching.

By the time we get to this point where he's talking about the story we're going to read today, he's been teaching for some time now, and he's stirred up a very emotional response, and you're going to see why. If we look at chapter 5, and we're just going to come in, let's see, we'll come in at verse 21.

So, Jesus has been talking to a group of assembled believers here, and he says, You have heard that it was said that to the people long ago, do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Verse 27, You have heard that it was said that. Verse 28, But I tell you that.

[ 7 : 19 ] Verse 31, It has been said. Verse 32, But I tell you. Verse 33, You have heard that it said that. 34, But I tell you that. 38, You have heard that it was said that.

39, But I tell you. And he keeps hammering this point home to the audience, and the Pharisees are hearing this, and he's saying, All this time, for millennia, you have been hearing these things.

You have been taught these things. You have been told these things. But what you have been hearing is incomplete. Listen to what this really says. But I tell you that. And you can imagine how these teachers and the experts in the law might have started responding to this, that they'd been teaching it wrong all these times, and the people who had taught them, and the people who had taught them had been wrong all this time.

It had been incomplete. But the thing that really gets them is what he says in verse 17. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. Now the fact that he says that he's come to fulfill them, to fulfill the law, is blasphemy to the Pharisees.

[ 8 : 27 ] But he goes even further in verse 20. He says, Now you see, the Jews largely believed that the kingdom of theirs was theirs alone by their birthright, simply because they were Jewish.

They were born into that. And they've been living their whole lives under the assumption that if they simply follow the rules, they'll be in. But now, Jesus, this blasphemer in their eyes, comes onto the scene and says that he is the fulfillment of the law and that no amount of clean living is going to get them into heaven.

Well, again, you start to see why he's probably not real well liked by the Pharisees. So as we think about that mindset, that's kind of the backdrop of what this lawyer, this expert in the law, would have already been thinking as he comes into this conversation with Jesus.

So let's turn back to Luke chapter 10 now. Sorry, you're going to have to flip around a little bit with me, so stay with me here. So back to Luke 10, 25. The lawyer stands up to test Jesus, which is never really a good idea.

And he says, teacher, which I can imagine he was just kind of scoffing this word teacher. You know, I don't think he really believed that Jesus was a teacher. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

[ 9 : 49 ] Well, if you remember what we talked about before, Jesus isn't going to come right out and give him an answer. He responds with a question. Well, what is written in the law? How do you read it? And the lawyer answers in the way you would expect.

He quotes the law. He cites Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 5 and Leviticus 19, 18. And he says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

He was clearly a very good Hebrew school student. He knew the exact two verses he should cite. It was the right answer. In fact, if you read later in Matthew chapter 22 and there's a passage where they try and trap Jesus again and they ask him what the two greatest commandments are, these are the two that Jesus would answer.

He clearly got the answer right. But he didn't stop there. And this is what's really interesting about this passage. If you remember back to me saying that God is more concerned about why we do things or another way, he's concerned about your motivation, he's concerned about your heart.

Jesus says to the Pharisee, yep, you got it right. Do that and you're going to live. But the lawyer then, and this is a really pivotal verse here, says he wanted to justify himself.

[ 11 : 06 ] He wanted to justify himself. This is at the very heart of the problem for the lawyer and for the Pharisees and for much of the Jewish generation at this time. They'd become so wrapped up in what they did and how they did it.

They'd completely lost sight of why they were doing it and who they were doing it for. Let's go forward a little bit to Romans chapter 3.

We're going to start in verse 9, or actually verse 19. Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law. Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin. So as he would personally say, the author of this passage, Paul, was one of the most pious Pharisees prior to his conversion to Christ.

And he knew the law intimately. But it wasn't until his eyes were opened to the gospel that he finally got a hold of the reality that no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.

[ 12 : 19 ] Rather, it's through the law that we become conscious of sin. There's absolutely a purpose for the law, but it is not, however, the means of justification. So after this, after Paul tells us this, he spends the next few chapters outlining the true source of justification.

If you look at the very next verse in verse 21, it says, But now righteousness apart from, a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There's no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

Now in verse 26, we find out that justification comes through a person, not actions. He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

And in verse 28, this is really the heart of the matter in this story. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

[ 13 : 36 ] Well, now we begin to really see why Jesus is sharing this story with the lawyer. I think on the surface, it's a great example of a story that talks about helping others in need.

But at a much deeper level, it's a story about the source of life and salvation and shows the huge gulf that exists between our ability to find justification on our own and our opportunity to find it in Christ.

So let's keep going. Paul turns right around in chapter 4 and verse 1 and he says, What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God.

What does scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. So now he's using their own patriarchs as examples for someone who had lived as their justification was not by their works, but it was in God.

It wasn't Abraham's doing, it was God's doing. And if you look at chapter 4 and verse 25, it says, He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

[ 14 : 50 ] Paul just keeps on going back to this message over and over again. Chapter 5, verse 1, Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we see the outcome of this justification is peace and joy. And in verse 9, since we now have been justified by his blood, verse 16, verse 18, he keeps going back to this message and back to this message because he knew it was central to the heart problem that these people were having. So now we see that Jesus has very acutely identified the source of this expert's problem and more generally the problem of the people of this time.

And then he proceeds to tell the story in Luke chapter 10. I bet when I stood up, you didn't think we would spend this much time talking about the context before we actually told the story, but we're going to get on to it.

In verse 30, the expert has just replied, and who is my neighbor? When replied, Jesus said, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers.

[ 15 : 51 ] They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Well, now that we have a better understanding of this road that he's traveling, we understand that this was a common occurrence for someone to be robbed along this stretch of road.

The point I want to make here is that not only was he robbed, but he was stripped of his clothes, and it seems like this is kind of an odd detail to include. But the thing to keep in mind is that during this time, the way you dressed had a connection to your cultural heritage.

And we don't see this much today in this culture, but in some of my trips to Kenya, I've seen this.

There are several distinct tribes of people that live there, and especially in the more rural areas, it's very easy to identify which tribe of people somebody belongs to based on the clothing they wear, especially the Maasai tribe.

It would be very easy to pick them out. Well, in Jesus' time, this would have been much more prevalent. And this is important to note, because if you can identify someone's cultural identity, we might be much more inclined to help that person.

We tend to like people that are like us. I'm in sales, and at work, we have a saying that says people buy from people they like, and people tend to like people that are more like them. And so as salespeople, we try to adapt to the people we talk to on the phone.

[ 17 : 10 ] Well, here, this guy has been stripped of his clothes, so essentially his cultural identity has been removed. And we're going to come back to that in just a minute to see why that is, why that's going to be important.

So, they beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. So from that, we can infer that the guy's in pretty bad shape. He's probably beating, bleeding badly, he's possibly unconscious, and he's clearly not in a position to help himself.

Well, in verse 31, it says, a priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. Well, if this is the first time you've read this story, or you think back to the first time you heard this story, this is the point at which you start scratching your head. You think, why would the priest pass by on the other side and not stop to help? Well, does he just have a callous heart? Does he not care?

What's going on here? Well, I think there are a number of factors that are at work. Some of these are very practical, and some are more religious in nature. So, let's take a look at practical. Well, as we discussed before, this was a common route for workers in the temple to take as they go down, and again, it was known for its violence.

[ 18 : 23 ] Well, the priest, as he's traveling down and he sees this guy laying beaten on the side of the road, could very rightly have been concerned for his own safety. If he stops to help the man, the robbers could be hiding right around the other side of that boulder and come and lay upon him and beat him and take his things as well.

So, he could be thinking, well, I need to keep going or else the same thing could happen to me. You know, and maybe the guy is in such bad shape that the priest thinks he's already dead.

Well, if he thinks he's already dead, what would the implication of that be? Shouldn't he just check on the guy to make sure, to see if there is anything he could do? Well, this gets us to some of the religious factors at work.

Now, you have to remember that the Jews were ultra strict about keeping the law. So, if we turn back to Leviticus, chapter 21, we'll get a little insight into what he might have been thinking.

Leviticus 21, verses 1 through 4, the Lord said to Moses, speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, a priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband, for he may make himself unclean.

[ 19 : 47 ] He must not make himself unclean for people related to him by marriage, and so defile himself. Well, that's a new wrinkle. Now, do you see why the cultural identity of the man could have been important?

And you might imagine the thoughts that are going through the priest's head. First, he sees the man lying there badly injured, and then he realizes that the guy is naked, so he can't even identify if he's possibly related to the guy, but then his legalism kicks in, and he immediately knows that he can't even pass near the man, or else he would have been made ceremonially unclean.

Why does that matter? Well, one, in the priest's mind, he is commanded not to do it. And then there's even a more practical side to it. So let's turn to Numbers, chapter 19, verses 11 to 13.

Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days. He must purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, then he will be clean.

But if he does not purify himself on the third and seventh days, he will not be clean. Whoever touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the Lord's tabernacle.

[ 21 : 08 ] That person must be cut off from Israel because the water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him. He is unclean. His uncleanliness remains on him. Well, now it becomes even more complicated.

If he does walk over to the dead man and touches him and he turns out to be dead, then he's got to go through the purification exercise again. That means he'd have to turn around and walk the four or so hours back up the road to Jerusalem and begin the purification ritual all over again that would take another seven days.

So not only would he have broken the rules that he was expressly thinking he was supposed to follow, but he'd spend the next week having to go through the purification ritual to become clean again. And he's probably also thinking maybe he's got other commitments down in Jericho and the synagogue there and all of these other things going on.

We have no way to know some of that. So you see, purity was very important especially for the priests and the Levites that were serving in the temple. I read this about purity this week.

Purity qualified one to participate in worship, an activity central to the life of ancient Israel. breaking that purity was a serious matter. Blood related to the mysterious power of life and any loss of blood called for purification.

[ 22 : 21 ] Ritual impurity also came as a result of contact with a corpse since death was the enemy of God. Well, as we begin to think about what the priest was thinking, hopefully you're beginning to see that not only did he probably not feel bad, not feel guilty about not stopping to help the man, but it's possible that he even felt good about the fact that he was keeping the law the way that he was supposed to in passing on by.

Now this starts to feel a whole lot like he's being justified by his works. Now if we flash back to what the lawyer was thinking as he's hearing all of this, what do you think is going through his mind?

He's probably thinking through the same laws and rules that the priest was thinking through in the story and going through that same process of rationalization. At this point he's probably still a little bit bored with this story that Jesus is telling him and hoping that he's going to get to the point soon.

Little did that lawyer know that the ultimate purification for our sins was the one that was speaking to him at that very moment. Well then back to our story, along comes a Levite.

So to a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. Now if you remember the topography of the road as it winds down, if you're traveling down this road for several hours on foot, you would easily see the people that were traveling in front of you.

[ 23 : 45 ] Well the Levite says people who served in the temple would have recognized the priest and he would have known that this guy was in front of him. So as he comes upon this man who is lying dead, there are a number of things that go through his head.

First, he would have recognized that the priest had kept on going because the priest was not their stop to help the man. Then his religious and legalistic side kicks in as well and he starts going through the rules and laws and decides that the best thing to do is pass by.

And with that additional piece of information that the priest had already done it, it wiped out any doubt in his mind that he should just keep right on going, that that was the right thing to do.

Because when all else fails, you do what the priest does.

So now we get to the part in our story where we actually come to the Samaritan. Verse 33. 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, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day, he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper.

[ 24 : 53 ] Look after him, he said, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have. So, this is the part of the story we will be very familiar with. So, the Samaritan comes and finds the guy and he helps him.

He bandages his wounds, he spends his own money to have the man taken care of. And you could preach an entire sermon simply on the morality of an action like this. But I think that this could have been any person and this story would have still been effective on so many levels.

However, the fact that it's a Samaritan just has to grate on the lawyer even more. You see, the Jews considered the Samaritans inferior as they were a race of people who were of mixed Jewish and Gentile heritage.

Just to give you a bit of insight into the Jews' feelings for Samaritans, if we look back at chapter 9, just before this, chapter 9, verses 51 and 56, we'll get an idea of this.

And if we go back to our slide, yep, one more forward. Nope, other way. Nope, other way.

[ 26 : 02 ] That one. So, as you can see, if you're here in Judea and you're in Bethlehem or Jerusalem or Jericho or any of these ways and you need to go to Galilee, which was a common passage for people, they had to go through Samaria.

That was the most direct route. But the Jews, most of the time, wouldn't even travel through Samaria. They didn't even want to defile themselves by going through Samaria, so they would take a much longer way to go around Samaria to get to Galilee.

So they wouldn't even travel through this land. And if we look in chapter 9 and verse 51, it says, as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

And he sent messengers on ahead who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him. But the people there did not welcome him because he was heading for Jerusalem.

When the disciples, James and John, saw this, they asked, Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven and destroy them? But Jesus turned to rebuke them and they went to another village.

[ 27 : 02 ] So, these are Jesus' own disciples asking if they want to, if they want, Jesus wants them to call down fire from heaven and destroy this Samaritan village. So clearly, they were not good friends.

So, this is where there's a school of thought that suggests this was an actual occurrence, this story, because had Jesus made this up and taught it as a parable, as I mentioned, people would have given no credibility to the story where it had a Samaritan doing the right thing.

However, had this been a well-known occurrence, something that people would have known through the local news, then he would have been able, they would not have been able to refute it. So, Jesus finishes the story and at this point in the story, he knows full well that the lawyer has been now trapped in terms of standing up and trying to test him and now he's kind of caught in a snare because Jesus has told this story.

And he simply asks him, which one of these three was a neighbor to the man? I can only imagine what's going on with the lawyer's non-verbal stuff now. Because he's kind of standing there. By nature of the fact that it says he stood up to ask this question, it suggests that there was a gathered group of people that were around and he was going to try and be the smart guy and stump Jesus. So, he's standing up and he had kind of puffed out of his chest at first and now Jesus has him trapped and the guy's stuck and he's standing there and he's probably starting to sweat a little bit and his face is getting red and a little bit of steam is starting to come out of his ears.

[ 28 : 30 ] And all he can do, his response, is he says, the one who had mercy on him. And I'm just sure this response came through gritted teeth because he was just so unhappy about this.

He couldn't even say, he loathed the Samaritan so much that he couldn't even say the Samaritan helped him. He said, the one who had mercy on him. And Jesus simply says, go and do likewise. So, what do we take away from this? Well, hopefully, we've unraveled this fascinating story enough to see that it's more than a simple tale of morality. It'd be easy enough to walk away from this with just kind of a feel-good message about helping people in need.

But there's so much more here. You see, every time Jesus spoke, he challenged everything his audience knew. He turned everything that they had been taught and they had learned their entire lives on its head.

And that's the very essence of repentance. It's not a slight deviation from the course you're on. It's a 180 degree turn toward something else. That's what Jesus was doing over and over and over again as he taught.

[ 29 : 40 ] This could have very easily been taught with the Sermon on the Mount where we looked at all those passages that says, you have heard that it was said, but I tell you that. This is what you've learned before, but this is the way it really is now.

Jesus is trying to help them see that it's not possible for them to find justification through their own actions. It's only through faith in Christ that we can find our ultimate justification.

We see clearly in Ephesians that it says, it is by grace we are saved through faith and this not of ourselves. It is the gift of God so that no man can boast. We can't do it on our own, but fortunately, we don't have to.

Jesus died so that we could be fully justified in him. And as we read Romans, chapter 3, verses 23 and 24, we looked at those before.

It says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are freely justified by his grace through the redemption that came through Jesus Christ.

[ 30 : 45 ] Let's pray. Father God, you are almighty and magnificent in every way. Father, we thank you that you came into a lost and dying world and provided the ultimate justification for us all.

That you brought that amazing act of love into the world in the person of your son, Jesus Christ. And through relationship with him, we can be reconciled to you. We can be brought into a right relationship finally with the author and perfecter of our faith, with the God of the universe.

And Father, it's just, it's miraculous that you even offer that to us. It's amazing that we can come before you and speak to you and we have someone that will speak on our behalf in the form of your son.

And Father, we thank you for this story, for the truth that's contained in it, for the idea that we can't do it on our own, that we need help, that we need someone to step in in our place and do what we could never do.

We thank you for the death of Christ and the resurrection that means we can come into that perfect relationship with you. And it's in Jesus' perfect and mighty name we pray. Amen. Amen.