

# Right Answers. Right Heart.

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, this morning we find Jesus having a conversation with a lawyer. And we're in Luke chapter 10, verse 25. Have you ever sat down to get help from a lawyer with something?

! It's a fearful business. I'm always wondering, you know, if I ask just one more question, how much will that extra five minutes cost me? Fifty bucks?

Lawyers are expensive. So we try to stay out of their offices, but sometimes we need their counsel. Well, today we read about a conversation where Jesus is talking to a lawyer, and who do you think ends up giving counsel to whom?

Let's read it from Luke chapter 10, starting in verse 25. 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? Jesus replied.

[ 1 : 09 ] 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've 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.

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.

[ 2 : 28 ] Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took out 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 robbers?

The expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, go and do likewise. So Jesus has this conversation with an expert in the law.

Some translations say a lawyer. Back in Jesus' day, there were these sort of religious lawyers, and they weren't exactly like the kind that we're used to sitting down in the office of here in town, or like the classic defense attorney types of lawyers.

They were sort of religious lawyers. But that didn't mean that they were just focused on spiritual things either. They were kind of like lawyers who gave interpretations and rulings based on the law of Moses as it related to life in the community.

[ 3 : 51 ] And so they would give rulings and decisions on ritual purity and impurity, Sabbath observance, inheritance, marriage, divorce, business disputes, tithes, and more.

Their status and their work as lawyers depended on knowing the Old Testament law meticulously. And so this expert in the law, this lawyer, stands up, and we notice that he has a purpose.

Luke says, he stands up to test Jesus. This is an interesting word. In this context, to test Jesus means to subject him to a test in order to prove something.

Now just what he hopes to prove or what the lawyer would consider a pass or a fail, we don't know. But what we do know is that the lawyer asks his question with an agenda.

The question he asks is, what must I do to inherit eternal life? But his purpose in asking this is not simply to learn.

[ 5 : 09 ] It's not to get the answer to something that he's been wondering about for a long time. He asks this question as a test. And if we're kind of reading and understanding, I think the context here, it's because he thinks of himself as someone capable of grading Jesus' answer.

That's what this man did. He was a religious lawyer. He gave rulings on all kinds of things pertaining to the law. And so I think he asks this question of Jesus to test him.

And I think he intends to sort of make a ruling, to give a grade, to judge Jesus' answer and see if it measures up to his own.

Well, Jesus is the wisest person who has ever walked the face of the earth. Look at how Jesus responds. Jesus responds not with an answer because he knows that there's an agenda behind the question.

And so Jesus responds to the question with a question. What must I do to inherit eternal life? What is written in the law?

[ 6 : 26 ] How do you read it? See what Jesus did there? I mean, he basically just asked the guy to answer his own question. He basically says, you tell me.

How do you read it? You're the lawyer. You know, what do you think it says in the law about this? And the lawyer can't help himself. He takes the bait.

I mean, he could have really said here, well, I asked you. I want to hear what you think. But no, he doesn't say that. Instead, the lawyer goes ahead and answers his own question.

And suddenly, the roles are completely reversed. Now, the expert is answering his own question, but Jesus is the one evaluating his answer.

And the tables are turned. Well, how does the lawyer answer his own question? What does he think that he needs to do to inherit eternal life according to the law of Moses?

[ 7 : 30 ] The lawyer recites two commandments from the law. Probably most of us are familiar with these. The first comes from Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 5. 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. Found in Leviticus 19, verse 18. Well, what do you notice about the man's answer?

What does it remind you of? Where have we heard that answer before? From Jesus.

When? Before or after this? It comes after. In the week prior to Jesus' death, there's another expert in the law who asked Jesus, what's the greatest commandment in the law?

And, this is almost verbatim. There's a few other things added in, but, this is Jesus' answer. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength with all your mind.

[ 8 : 44 ] That's the greatest commandment. And then he adds, and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. That's found in Matthew 22, 37. All the law and the prophets hang on these two, says Jesus.

But, Jesus says that later. Did Jesus get the answer from this lawyer? Well, of course not. I think we kind of know that.

Here's my idea. Now, I can't prove this, but, we know from the gospel accounts that Jesus often taught the same things from place to place. All throughout his ministry.

Even within Luke's gospel, there's repetition of the same things in different places and different contexts. And so, my idea, I'm betting that long before Jesus came to Jerusalem in the week prior to his death, he was telling people that the most important thing they need to do is to love the Lord their God with all their heart.

And the second most important, to love their neighbor as themselves. I'm betting that this man has already heard whether first hand or second hand, Jesus has said this.

[ 10 : 03 ] Maybe he's even eager to give this answer to Jesus because he knows it's the right answer. It's the answer that Jesus has given before. And so, I think that the expert has the right answer to his own question because he has Jesus' answer to the question.

Well, let's keep going. Verse 28, Jesus says, you have answered correctly. Do this and you will live. Again, Jesus is so wise, he affirms that the man's answer is right.

You got it right. You already know the right answer to your question. But notice that little bit that Jesus adds at the end. Do this and you will live.

It's so subtle. Jesus sort of raises another matter here. Like, you can know this. You can have the right answer. but are you actually doing it?

Are you loving God with all your heart? Are you loving your neighbor as yourself? If you are, then yes, you will live.

[ 11 : 26 ] You will inherit eternal life. It's just a subtle statement Jesus makes. You've answered correctly. do this and you will live. Well, now, all of a sudden, the man's attitude and his heart come out.

His agenda comes out. We see kind of where he's coming from. Verse 29, he wanted to justify himself. So, he asked Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

This is where we see things come into clarity for who this man is and what kind of an attitude he's bringing into this moment.

It's almost like he just didn't get the satisfaction he was looking for with the first exchange. I don't know, maybe he was looking for some congratulations and applause from Jesus for getting the right answer.

Maybe he was hoping that everyone would see that and hear that. Oh, yes, he knew it all along. He really was an expert. There was something, it seems, unsatisfying about Jesus' response when Jesus just kind of says, yep, you're right.

[ 12 : 46 ] Do that and you will live. And so the man tries a second question. Another matter of the law. And I'm guessing that like the first question, he probably has in mind what the right answer is or at least what his answer is.

You know, here's a tricky one, Jesus. Let's see how you answer this. Who is my neighbor? Who exactly am I commanded by God to love?

who qualifies as my neighbor? How many houses down the street does that extend to? And the man's heart is revealed in this second question because it's the kind of question that asks, what's the minimum required to fulfill my obligation to God?

Who counts as my neighbor? and then it's here that Jesus answers with the parable. Jesus tells him a little story.

The story starts with a man who gets robbed on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho and it's actually more than just a robbery. Jesus says that the robbers attacked him and beat him.

[ 14 : 08 ] So this is robbery by force. This is first a mugging and then a robbery. One of the details that especially at least to me is striking in this little story is that the robbers stripped the man of his clothes.

Now I didn't really look up what was typical of robberies back then in those days but nowadays you know most thugs they just were not really interested in the clothes they're just after the valuables right?

Maybe some money in the wallet or purse perhaps some jewelry now I don't want to pick apart Jesus parable too much but we kind of wonder did this man resist so much?

Did he fight back to the point that it made the thieves angry? Is that why they stripped him of his clothes? Did they want to humiliate him? Did they want to teach him a lesson for not just cooperating in the first place?

We don't know. It's a parable. It's not even a real account but this one detail just leaves us with quite the picture. Can you picture him in your mind there?

[ 15 : 23 ] Just this poor man lying on the side of the road naked and bleeding and wounded. Jesus says the thieves went away leaving him half dead.

And then Jesus tells of three different men who stumble upon him while he's lying there. The first man to come walking along is a priest. For this first guy Jesus chooses someone especially religious.

The priests I mean they were the ones who served at the temple. They were the ones who helped the people offer sacrifices to God. If there's anyone who knows God it should be the priest right?

Well what does the priest do when he sees the man lying there? He passes by him on the other side of the road. And again it's kind of subtle here but it's here.

The wording suggests that he deliberately chose to move. move or even maybe stay on the opposite side of the road because of seeing the man. When he saw the man he passed by on the other side.

[ 16 : 42 ] There is this sort of conscious choice there to keep a distance. Not to get too close after seeing him. And of course all sorts of people have you know kind of you know what would be the reason?

Why wouldn't he help the man? But Jesus doesn't give any reasons. this is just how it went. But I think we are meant to be surprised by this.

And we sort of expect that the most religious people will be the most loving people. The most likely to stop and help, right? Well next comes a Levite.

The Levites were those descended from Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, one of the tribes of Israel. They were the ones that God chose to serve in the temple and the priests were Levites but there were also others who helped with worship at the temple who were Levites.

So the second man, he's another religious man and what's his response to the man lying there bleeding on the side of the road? Jesus says it's the same as the priest.

[17:53] He too first saw the man and then after seeing him pass by on the other side. Now I don't think there's meant to be too much of a difference between these two men.

We might try to figure out the difference between Levite and priest and is that significant but they both stand for sort of the really religious people of the day.

And I think here maybe is the point. what are the odds that two highly religious men run across this man and neither of them stops to help? You know maybe we thought the odds would be good that at least one of the religious guys would stop.

But no he doesn't stop either. Finally Jesus introduces the hero of the story. The man who does stop to help. And Jesus deliberately throws this huge twist into the story and he makes the hero a Samaritan.

That in itself is such a loaded thing culturally. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews. They were considered half-breeds and corrupt.

[19:10] About 750 years before this the people living in the region of Samaria they were all Jews. But then the Assyrian empire came in and conquered them and when they did they did some nasty things to keep that region from revolting again.

They carted off many of the Jews who were in Samaria to other places in the empire. And then they brought people from the other nations that they had conquered and resettled them there in Samaria.

And so the people in Samaria were sort of this mixture of surviving Jews and people from all these other nations. And over time they intermarried. They had families together.

there was even the blending of religions. That's a really simple explanation of it. And so for Jesus to make the hero of this story a Samaritan was very provocative.

The Jews despised the Samaritans. So what does the Samaritan do when he sees the man lying there naked and wounded?

[20:19] Verse 33. As he traveled, came where the man was and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He had the reaction that we all hopefully did as we first pictured that man lying there naked, almost dead, on the side of the road.

The Samaritan was deeply moved with compassion. And what did he do out of that compassion? Well, the first thing we see is in verse 34.

He went to him. The complete opposite of the others who moved away, he goes right to him. And he bandages his wounds.

Since the man was naked and had nothing, the Samaritan may have even had to tear off strips of his own clothes or garments or outer garments to do this. Along with the bandaging went the pouring on of oil and wine.

That might sound strange to us today, but it was actually fairly standard wound care back then in a place where vineyards and olive oil were present in abundance.

[21:40] The wine acted as a bit of an antiseptic to disinfect the wound and then the olive oil was actually used to soothe and to dress the wound. The oil kind of kept the bandages from sticking and surprisingly there's even medical studies today that suggest that olive oil has other good health benefits for skin.

So the Samaritan, he looks after the man's wounds. He takes the time to carefully wrap them all up and make sure they're done properly so that they won't get infected. Then the Samaritan puts the man on his own donkey.

Quite likely the Samaritan had been riding this donkey till now but now with this man on his donkey the Samaritan would have had to probably walk the rest of the way.

The Samaritan takes him to an inn and looks after him and took care of him. He doesn't just dump him and run.

He gets him there and then he takes care of him and if we just read this really closely with the next line he doesn't even leave until the next day. So it seems he stayed the night to look after him.

[ 22 : 57 ] And then the next day he pays the innkeeper in advance to look after this man.

And even more than that, not just a set amount, but when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have. Think of that.

He doesn't just pay for a couple days more, he reassures the innkeeper that hey, do it all the way. Make sure that this man gets back on his feet again. Any other expenses that are incurred from this, I'll look after them when I return.

You just let me know the day he checks out. Wow. That's going the extra mile, isn't it? That's what it looks like to love your neighbor as yourself.

And I'm sure that at some point early on in this whole scenario, the Samaritan would have realized that this man lying on the road was a Jew. The Jews despised the Samaritans, but the Samaritans also despised the Jews.

[ 24 : 14 ] The feelings ran both ways. And so I think one of Jesus' points here is surely that your neighbor even includes your enemy. Just a few chapters back in Luke's gospel, we heard Jesus say, love your enemies.

This is like a picture from Jesus of what that might actually look like in a real life situation. Well, finally we come to the end of Jesus' story, and Jesus asks the lawyer a question.

He ends with this question, verse 36. Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? Here comes the big point that Jesus is making, and another unexpected twist.

What was the question in the first place? This wasn't it. The question was who is my neighbor? Who counts as my neighbor?

Who exactly do I need to love? But Jesus kind of flips it around. Instead of who is my neighbor, which of these three was a neighbor to the man?

[ 25 : 31 ] in other words, it's almost as if Jesus is saying, you know, you're trying to limit the scope of who you need to love by getting me to define exactly who is your neighbor.

But what does it really look like to love your neighbor? It's far more about how you treat others than about how that person is related to you.

It's far more about how you treat others than about that person's relation to you. And I think, you know, the more I meditate on this, this is one of the wisest moments of instruction I think I've ever heard of.

We realize that Jesus' wisdom, I mean, it's out of this world. It's from heaven. We'll come back to this question in a second, but let's go back to the first question, the who is my neighbor question. Think about the answer we get to this question from the parable. Jesus set this whole story up deliberately to show us that my neighbor could be anyone.

[ 26 : 54 ] My neighbor is really defined as my fellow human being. regardless of the differences that I may have from him.

Whether Samaritan or Jew, that doesn't matter. Where you're from, the color of your skin, the difference of language, even the social tensions and conflict between your people and theirs, that's all irrelevant.

Your neighbor is anyone, it's any of your fellow human beings, regardless of the differences you may have to them. I mean, that's not how we usually use it.

We usually use that word to refer to those who live right next door to us, or right on the property right next to ours. And that's okay, that's true.

But Jesus forces us to expand who should be included. what about a stranger that you just happened across who comes from a different ethnic background and is from another province?

[ 28 : 04 ] Is that person my neighbor? Well, that's exactly what this man was in the story. Jesus basically says, yes, love your neighbor applies there, too.

And so maybe that's the first thing to take from this. God desires that we don't try to limit our neighborly love to only certain people. Everyone we find ourselves near, everyone we come across is our neighbor.

And I know that's not what introverts like me like to hear. Loving people who are different than us is hard. But it could be as simple as just meeting that most visible and obvious need that they have. You may not be a gifted conversationalist, but that's not really required to help that elderly man across the street lift that thing into his car.

Or maybe you see someone who just looks like they're overheated and they need a glass of water. Does it matter whether they're young or old, tall or short, Caucasian, East Indian, Filipino, friend or stranger?

[ 29 : 28 ] it shouldn't. So God desires that we not limit our neighborly love to only certain people.

Everyone we come across is our neighbor, is someone God wants us to love just as we love ourselves. So Jesus really does answer the man's question.

But then I think we really need to reflect on the question that Jesus asks the lawyer at the end too. It's a little different isn't it? Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?

Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man? And I love the way that Jesus reverses that question all of a sudden there. We try to use the same sort of things, Jen and I, as we encourage our kids.

Sometimes they've lamented, as maybe we all have, that nobody at a particular gathering or event was their friend. What they mean is, you know, nobody there initiated with me.

[ 30 : 41 ] Nobody played with me. Nobody was the same age and gender as me. Nobody there was my friend. But we always try to encourage them.

We've got to flip that around. Instead, we've got to always be asking, who is here that I can be a friend to? Who can I initiate with?

Who's got nobody else talking to them or playing with them? And that's the same sort of thing that Jesus is doing here. You know, don't worry about defining exactly who is your neighbor.

Be a loving neighbor neighbor to anyone you come across. Don't think, you know, who do I have to love? Are there any of my neighbors here at this thing?

Instead, think, who's here that I can show neighborly love to? Who needs a neighbor? I mean, this is the sort of thing that if we really live like this and with this mindset and heart, this will so change who we are as a church and what we're known for in our community.

[ 32 : 00 ] There's lots we could meditate on here. We could think about the things the Samaritan did for the man who was wounded. What an amazing picture of how it looks to love someone, to really love someone as yourself.

It's lavish. It's such a giving love. It goes well beyond the extra mile to care for this man. Do we love our fellow man like that?

Or are we just content to do the bare minimum? But then, what really astounds me is that there's one more layer to this whole conversation.

At the end of this conversation, question, what is Jesus' main point to this man? Is it just that the lawyer needs to adjust his thinking when it comes to how he defines neighbor?

And be a little more broad in the definition. I see another layer here. Pieces of this conversation which get to the heart. Which character in the parable represents the lawyer?

[ 33 : 20 ] It's probably both the priest and the Levite. This man wasn't a priest, but he considered himself well versed in the scriptures, well studied in the word of God, a religiously devout man, just like the priest and the Levite in the parable.

people. And what is Jesus demonstrating through the priest and the Levite in the story? I think he's showing that you can have the right answers to the big questions and yet lack the love and compassion spoken of in those answers.

answers. You can have the right answers without having the right heart. You can know the most important thing, the greatest commandment.

You can know what you need to do to inherit eternal life, to love God with all your heart. You can know that truth and yet not do it. You can know that you should love your neighbor as yourself.

And even what that looks like. And at the same time be a person who lacks compassion and does the bare minimum or even passes by on the other side of the road.

[ 34 : 48 ] I think that's the main point of this whole conversation. It's as if Jesus is saying to this man, yes, you have the right answers, but go and live those things.

you aren't living them out. You know you need to love God with all your heart, so now do it. Do this and you will live.

You know that you need to love your neighbor as you love yourself and you know what that even looks like, but you've been like the priest. You've been like the Levite.

you need to be like the Samaritan and do like he did. How easy is it for us to be like this lawyer and to take pride in having the right answers, but do we have the right heart?

we can talk about how important it is to believe the right things from the Bible and to have the right doctrine, but do we actually love God?

[ 36 : 06 ] Do we actually love our fellow man? In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 13, we won't be here long, but he's got this thought experiment here.

He poses this thought experiment question. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, if I know everything there is to know, but do not have love, I'm nothing.

What good is knowing the right answers if we don't have the heart of love? described in those answers. We have this tendency, because of sin in our hearts, to try and do the bare minimum.

To try to be good enough. We have this tendency to try and be religious without truly investing our hearts in the relationships of our religion.

In a loving, wholehearted relationship with God and in a lavish, loving relationship with others. I mean, that's the religion we profess.

[ 37 : 26 ] We would all give the same answer the lawyer gave. Because we know those verses, but is it the religion we practice? we need to seek the right answers and the right heart toward God and man.

Both have to go together. let's pray. Lord Jesus, I'm not sure how you will stir in each of our hearts from these words, but I do pray that you would convict us, that you would expose us, that you would deal with us as a loving God that you are, that you would show us where we have gone wrong, just like Jesus did with this man, and that you would correct us, and that you would bring us back into that vibrant and real, authentic relationship with you, and keep us there, and that that would spill out into our relationships with each other and with the people that we know all around us here in our community.

Do that work in us, we pray. In your name, amen.