

Marks of a Disciple: Selfless Towards Others

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[0 : 0 0] Today, if you're a guest with us, we are in the middle of a three-message sermon series,¹ A mini-series concerning what are the marks of a disciple. And last week we had the opportunity to see and consider that one of the marks of a disciple is one who abides in the vine, one who abides in Christ. The second mark of a disciple or an attribute of a disciple that we're going to have a chance to look at today is one who is selfless toward others. One who is selfless toward others. We're going to look at a familiar passage today and just in case you're curious, well where are we going? There'll be another sermon about the marks of a disciple next week and then we will begin a new sermon series in the book of 1st Peter. And so if you want to begin in your quiet time reading the book of 1st Peter, we'll be there in a few weeks.

But one who is selfless toward others. We're going to look at a familiar passage to us. Luke chapter 10 starting in verse 25. If you have a copy of scripture with you, I encourage you to read along with me.

Luke chapter 10 verses 25 through 37. It is the familiar story of the Good Samaritan and I pray our familiarity with the story wouldn't hinder our ability to hear afresh what perhaps the Lord has for us today. Would you read along with me in Luke 10 beginning in verse 25.

And behold, a lawyer stood up and put him to the test saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he said to him, well what is written in the law and how do you read it? And he said, and he answered, you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your strength and with all of your mind and your neighbor as yourself. And he said to him, you have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.

But he desiring to justify himself answered Jesus and said, who is my neighbor? Jesus replied, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him and departed leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite when he came to the place saw him passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, he was journeying and he came to where he was and he saw him and he had compassion. He went to him, he bound him, he poured oil and wine. Then he sat him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And on the next day he took two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper saying, take care of him and whatever more you spend I will repay when I come back.

[3 : 0 6] Which of these do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, the one to whom he showed mercy. And Jesus said to him, you go and do likewise.

This is the familiar text of the Good Samaritan. The subheading is the parable of the Good Samaritan. And those little subheadings within the chapter are not inspired by God necessarily. They're just people have wrote those into the text just to help us know what that passage is going to be about. And so if I had to rewrite the subtitle of the subheading of this passage, I would say it's a contest between a lawyer and a teacher because that's what this is.

In the text you have two people who are in a thinly veiled debate initiated by a lawyer. And so in one side you have this debate between a lawyer and on the other side you have Jesus.

This lawyer is on one side that Jesus is this person who we know is the son of God who is fully God, fully man. But he is going about the countryside acting as an itinerant rabbi.

And he was received by the masses and people ascribed to Jesus the title teacher, rabbi. There was no record in the New Testament of Jesus studying under one of the great rabbis or a great theologian like Gamaliel or someone like that, Gamaliel. But again and again he spoke as one who has authority and that was noted by others. He has been instructed by God the Father who has revealed all things to his son, the incarnate Jesus Christ. On the other side this expert, who is he? We think he's known as a lawyer in the text. But who is this lawyer? He is, in our context in America we typically think of a lawyer as someone who is an expert in both the civil and criminal law. But in the Old Testament law, which this lawyer knew, the law of Moses, this lawyer knew, he is the law of God in the Old Testament touched on every area of one's life. Not just criminal or civil law. It also talked about the place of the state, the role of the state. It talked about religious community as well, what the religious laws of Israel was to be. And so the law of God was far more vast. It touched every area of one's life. And so he was an expert in the law of Moses. And he came to expose Jesus's perceived naivety. Here is this man who knows the law of Moses. He knows the law of God. And he is here to expose

[6 : 10] Jesus's perceived naivety. Jesus is this man who is unlearned. He doesn't, he didn't study under anyone. He didn't go to seminary or law school. He didn't do this. And so he comes to expose this man.

Comes to expose his, the naivety, perceived naivety of Jesus. And yet Jesus is admired greatly by the throngs of people who are following him. And he asks this question to Jesus. This is the question that kicks off the whole discussion. Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Found there in verse 25. He was probing to understand Jesus's understanding of theology, hoping to expose him as an unlearned rabbi. As an aside, I think his underlying assumption is deeply tragic. If you notice his underlying assumption, he is thinking that is prevalent today that he has to do something in order to earn eternal life. Eternal life can be earned. And that's what's deeply tragic under the underlying assumption of this man.

I also think it's tragic that this lawyer is asking the most critical questions someone could ask. What must I do to be saved? What must I do to be saved? To inherit eternal life?

And yet the question is not a sincere question. That is what is most tragic. He is using this question to trap Jesus or to expose Jesus.

[7 : 54] He is, Jesus is the foremost authority on the very matter that he is asking. Jesus is going to pay the price for sin himself. He is the one that in his sinless life and in his death for sin, one can have sin forgiven and have eternal life.

And yet he's asking a question that is not sincere, but it is the most important question someone could ask. So Jesus responds with, well, you're an expert in the law.

He doesn't answer him directly with an answer. He gives him another question. Well, what is written in the law and how do you read it? In verse 26. But what is your understanding of the law?

Jesus is basically asking this man the question. And the man answers from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19. And he says to him in verse 27, you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And Jesus basically, my paraphrase of verse 28 is, Jesus basically says to him, well, good job. Congratulations. You've answered rightly. Do this and you will live. In essence, Jesus is communicating to this lawyer, obey God's commands perfectly.

- [9 : 19] You answered well, obey them perfectly, and you shall have eternal life. And that law of God and Jesus telling him, yes, go ahead, live perfectly and do this, and you shall live.
- But the lawyer knows that was the theologically correct answer to the question, but I know my life is altogether otherwise. And he's just been exposed.
- And so that's why we read in verse 29, desiring to justify himself. Notice, he's just been exposed.
- He knows his answer that he just gave Jesus theologically is good, but he knows he cannot live into what he just said. And now he wants to justify himself as if to say, I'm really a good person.
- Isn't that enough? I can't fulfill the law of God perfectly, but I am a good person. So, and he wants to justify himself, so he asks this question, verse 29.
- [10 : 25] And so who is it that is my neighbor? The man, notice what he is doing. He is trying to lower the requirement of what is expected of him so that he could follow it.
- And he thinks probably I am following it. For example, he probably is thinking, along with many other Jews of that day, well, the law of Moses tells us that we're to treat our fellow Jew well.
- And so my neighbor, he's probably expecting Jesus to say, well, treat your fellow Jew well. Well, to that he could say, fine, I probably am doing a pretty good job of that. But he's not expecting Gentiles to be in that same category, especially a Samaritan.
- And so he's thinking, I am a good person, and so maybe it's how you define neighbor that can help me justify myself.
- So, hey, Jesus, who is my neighbor? And he's asking to justify himself because he thinks he's a really good person. And that should just be enough. Oftentimes, when I was on college campuses, I would ask a question, and still do to this day to various people, suppose you were to die one day, and Jesus were to ask you, or God were to ask you, why should I let you into heaven?
- [11 : 47] How would you respond? And most everyone that I talk to says, because I'm a good person. And so when I press them on that, what naturally happens is a person will then compare themselves to somebody else.
- Well, I'm not a rapist. I'm not a murderer. I'm not a this. I'm not a that. And so they compare themselves. Their goodness to other people who are worse. Their perceived understanding of worse.
- So then I would say, well, have you ever used profanity? Have you ever taken the Lord's name in vain? Have you ever stolen? Have you ever lied? Have you ever? And I just give them the law of God, if you will.
- And inevitably, they will say, well, yes. And so I said, well, compared to the law, are you still a good person? And so then I would ask them a nasty question.
- I would say, well, then, okay, say that you just said I'm a good person and you tell that to the God. How certain are you of that? God would accept that answer on a scale of one to 10, that he would accept you and welcome you into heaven because you're a good person on a scale of one to 10.
- [12 : 48] And they would inevitably, no one ever answered with a number 10. They think my whole eternity is dependent upon how I answer, God, I'm a good person.
- And yet they know they're not confident even in the answer they just gave because they know they cannot live a perfect life. And this is the case which this lawyer finds himself in and he's looking to justify himself.

And this is one of the functions of the law of God. It's to condemn us to say you need a grace giver. You need grace given in your life and the law of grace is what you need that Jesus provides and salvation is only found in him, not your perfection or ability or not good works or being a good person.

You need the law of grace. You need Jesus Christ. That's what the law, it condemns a person. Martin Luther knew this all too well.

Martin Luther, it's interesting about John Calvin and Martin Luther, they both studied law, they both got law degrees before they studied theology. Martin Luther, before he was saved, one of the early ones that kicked off the Reformation, Martin Luther, before he got saved and he was very much, grew up in the Catholic influence and so when he was studying law, getting his law degree in 1511, he almost died because he was struck by lightning and he said then, and of that time, he said, help me, and notice his prayer, he's not saved at this point, he cries out to a saint, help me Saint Anne, I'll become a monk and so then that's when he began to study theology at a monastery, very much again in the Catholic influence, so he entered the monastery of Erfurt and then it went to confession every day and when he would go to the confessional to talk about the veil and then the priest, when he would do that, he would not spend two minutes, five minutes confession of sin, 15 minutes, on average every day he would spend four hours confessing his sin, the father running the monastery thought, is this guy not in his right mind and so the father went to him and said, hey Martin, maybe he called him Marty,

[15 : 23] I don't know, are you mad how many, the confessional is for grievous sins, you live in a monastery, what possibly could you be doing that's so wrong?

And so Martin Luther, he would say, I coveted brother Jonathan's extra piece of bread at dinner last night and then he would keep going.

I stayed up reading past, my Bible past, lights out last night and he would just be so convicted because he knew the law and he was living under the law and he knew he was failing all the time and he would spend four hours a day confessing his sins.

I wonder if we examined each of our lives, we could probably spend four hours a day just confessing all the sins that we have committed. On his way back to the room, after the confessional, Martin Luther would go into despair because he would remember he forgot something to confess and he was, so the question is, is he sick in the mind or is he very astute and reflective?

But the thing is, he was tortured knowing right from wrong that was given to him by the law and he was living under the law. He had not known Christ yet.

[16 : 48] And that's what this man, the lawyer, is doing in his own mind. He wants to justify himself because he knows he can't live into the answer that he just gave, so he wants to lower the standard by asking, well, who is my neighbor?

Who is my neighbor? Jesus could have answered the man plainly and said, well, everyone in the world is your neighbor, but he would have lost his audience and that would have been the end of the story.

So he said to the man, well, let me tell you a story. There was a man who is from Jerusalem heading down to Jericho and just to give you a visual image of this, Jerusalem sits around 2,500 feet above sea level and Jericho is about 800 feet below sea level.

It's down by the Dead Sea. And so there's quite a decline and it's only in about 17 mile difference. And so there is quite a decline. And so as a result, it's just rocks and it's rock and rocky desert area.

It's very dry. It's very hot. And so there's just the sun exposure. Everything is exposed, but because of the elevation gain and loss, there's been a lot of erosion. And so there's deep ravines.

[18 : 14] So it's easy for someone to hide as a robber. And it was very common in that day. This is a very real situation. Everyone would have been familiar with, oh, it's that road. You don't go on that road alone.

Everyone knows it. And so he tells this common story that everyone would have been able to relate to in that day. Oh yeah, that's the road. This is very common. Robbers stripped this man, beat him, depart him, depart, leaving him half dead.

And then he goes on. And now by chance, a priest was going down the road. And when he saw him, pass by the other side. And a Levite, he came down the same place, saw him, passed by on the other side.

Jesus does not tell us, does not let us in on why the priest or the Levite passed by on the other side. And so let us remind ourselves who these priests and Levites are.

The priests served in Jerusalem. And because of that, that was their duty post. It was in the temple. They are a direct descendant of Aaron. In order to be a priest in Israel, you have to be a biological direct descendant of Aaron.

[19 : 20] That's what qualifies you to be a priest, to serve in that capacity. They served in Jerusalem because the temple is there. And that's their duty post. They receive offerings.

And what are their duties? They receive offerings and sacrifices from the people. They were teachers of the law. They were mediators between God and the people of Israel. And of all the people who knew the law of God and should act on behalf of their fellow Jew, it should have been the priests.

Who are the Levites? The Levites are a tribe in Israel. And they are responsible for serving and assisting the priests in keeping the temple.

They are tasked with putting away gifts and offerings into the temple storerooms. They are teachers. They are also of the law. They serve sometimes as judges. They are temple musicians. They're gatekeepers.

They're guards for the temple. They fill the oil lamps for the temple complex and they keep the place looking good and clean. Jesus, again, does not share why they did not help.

[20 : 28] But of all the people in Israel who should feel the most compelled, who know the law of God, are the priests and the Levites. Hope rises for this half-dead man because these are the people who walk by.

The priests and the Levites are the paragon of spiritual virtue. They are Israel's best, the godliest, the most righteous. Today, if Jesus was trying to solicit the same effect for this audience, Jesus may have said those who passed by were the pastors and the elders and the congregation members of the church.

It would have had the same, like, your hopes were in these people. They should have done something. They know better. But they were unwilling to be inconvenienced or bothered.

Jesus then says, but a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was and when he saw him, had compassion, he went to him, bound him with, poured oil and wine, sat him on his own animal, brought him to the inn, took care of him.

The next day, took two denarii, paid the innkeeper, asked him to take care of him and whatever overage, cost there was, he would come back and repay the innkeeper.

[21 : 47] And the passage begins with, but a Samaritan. And the lawyer there standing, remember, he's trying to lower his standards and of all the people that he is not to consider, probably in his mind is a Samaritan.

And this Samaritan has mercy on this fallen Jewish man in the ditch. There was a racial, a religious bias, and a hatred for Samaritans.

The only good Samaritan would have been a dead Samaritan. In their view, there was no such thing as a good Samaritan. Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. When this Samaritan saw the man, it says he had compassion.

And the word compassion means with feeling. How we cheapen the concept of compassion in our culture today when we say, oh, I feel your pain.

And that's about all that we, it's just lip service. True compassion never stops at a feeling. If a person has compassion, he not only feels it, but he's moved for sacrificial concern and action for this person.

[22 : 57] Look at the nine things that this man did. He went to him, not away. The Samaritan went toward the man on the side of the road, not away. He bound his wounds. He poured oil and wine.

He put him on the beast of burden that he owned. He brought him to an inn. He personally took care of him through the night, paid four weeks to three months worth of lodging, recruited an innkeeper for further care, and he opened his checkbook for whatever expenses that were going to be incurred.

But this compassion moved him to sacrificial action. Who would leave a half-dead person on the ditch?

Those of us who maybe have an appointment somewhere else. Those of us who have strict boundaries on our lives in order to honor God with already the responsibility that we have.

I've got work responsibilities. I've got family responsibility. I have priorities, and so I don't have room in my schedule to have compassion right now. Those of us who have grown indifferent, we see the needs all the time.

[23 : 59] It's just another guy. Those who would leave a half-dead person are the religious who are not moved to action by compassion. Consider the Gospels.

How God had compassion for his children, and that compassion took Jesus to the cross. He did not just feel bad for us.

Jesus took action to care for us. He died a death for sin, and he rose victorious three days later and now is seated at the right hand of the Father.

But he demonstrated this compassion by doing everything he could to heal us and redeem us and make a way for people to know the him and have sins forgiven. The term Good Samaritan I find interesting.

It's so interwoven into our English vernacular that many people may not even fully understand where it comes from. Maybe many may not even know it's a story or an account in the Bible. There are Good Samaritan laws on the books that if I, as an untrained medical professional, show up to a scene and do CPR on a person and the person ends up dying in part because of my ill ability to do CPR correctly, I am protected by Good Samaritan laws that say, hey, my good intention and trying to help in a dire situation precludes me from being sued and being civilly liable.

[25 : 28] We have Good Samaritan laws and aren't we glad they're there? But it's funny that in my mind that we have all these vernacular in our English language Good Samaritan laws and things like this that have woven themselves into the English language and this is the text from which they come from, they are derived from.

In my mind, Jesus then asks the easiest question he has ever asked in the biblical text. He asked the man, which of these three do you think prove to be a neighbor to the one who fell among the robbers?

That has got to be the easiest question Jesus ever asked. There is only one obvious answer and thankfully the lawyer got it right and he said, well, the one to whom, the one who showed him mercy and Jesus said to him, go and do likewise.

But let's remember the original question. He desired to justify himself and he asked, who is my neighbor? That's where we started.

We actually started with what does it take to inherit eternal life? The second question is, who is my neighbor? And now this man said, and Jesus, notice the genius of Jesus.

[26 : 43] He doesn't answer him who he is to consider his neighbors. He answers him by saying, you be the neighbor.

Who was the one who showed, who is it that proved to this man to be the neighbor? Well, the one who showed mercy. Yes, you then be the neighbor.

I'm not going to define for you who are your neighbors. I love that that's the genius of the response that Jesus gives him. The law of God had exposed him.

He knew he was guilty. And so notice what he was doing this whole time and this is where I want to try to get us to a point of application today.

Don't miss what he was doing in trying to justify himself and trying to minimize the requirement for him. I say it this way. This man, the lawyer, he is looking for the minimum requirement.

[27 : 44] He's asking, who is my neighbor? And rather than maximizing love, and Jesus is flipping it, and he's saying, I want you to maximize love. You go and be that person.

You go and do likewise. Go and show mercy is his command. The thrust of the passage is God will not bestow the kingdom on those who reject the command to love.

A couple of illustrations came to my mind this week. There's a man in the church who on Thanksgiving Day a few years ago heard there was a need of a man that was tacitly associated to the church.

And this man on Thanksgiving Day went to go spend time with this man. And there was some surrounding circumstances I don't want to get into, but can you imagine, because this man needed compassion, he needed at that hour to be shown mercy, how many of us would say on Thanksgiving Day when the family has gathered, I need a few hours to go spend time with someone.

How many would do that? Another person in the body, instead of allowing the frustration of the homelessness in the city to take root in his heart, he began to have compassion for the homeless and now serves at the mission.

[29 : 24] He should be paid for as many hours as he gives in volunteer service down at the Union Gospel Mission. But I love that compassion now fuels his service.

So I think just like the lawyer, if not careful, we too can be looking to minimize the requirement rather than maximizing love. What gets in our way?

For some, it is just indifference. It's just indifference. We've seen the needs, they're before us all the time, and so we're just, we become indifferent.

For others, it's selfishness. It's just raw selfishness that we see needs, but we think, I'm not getting involved. That we see a situation that requires compassion, I'm not doing that.

For others, we live well-partitioned lives. We go to church, we love people, we go home, and then that's me time. I go to work, I'll do my best there, but when I get home, that's me time.

[30 : 39] And so anything that interrupts my me time, I'm not serving there. For some, it's in an effort to keep God-given priorities.

we're, we may serve as, we're husbands, we're fathers, we're mothers.

We have work responsibilities, and all of these are God-given responsibilities. We serve in the church, and so we have these, we have these strict boundaries and definitions in our life in order to be responsible for what we're responsible for.

I don't have time to be interrupted with something that requires compassion. We're just, another one, I think the last area of sanctification for many is seeing that God owns your time.

That your time is not your own. it's a resource given to you, and time, the very gift of time is the Lord's to be used. But often, it's, it's, it's the most valuable resource for many of us, and we can't not protect it.

[31 : 56] And so, anything that requires, that interrupts our personal time, we have a hard time relinquishing that. God's so, who is this lawyer?

It is just merely someone who can be just like us, who is looking for the minimum requirement instead of maximizing love.

And Jesus shares with him, I'm not going to define for you who your neighbors are, because then you'll just try to use that as your definition of requirement.

I'm going to encourage you to be the one who shows compassion. You be the neighbor to everyone. So I encourage us, church, to be the neighbor.

Let us not be caught trying to minimize our requirement and maximize our love. Let's maximize our love. When the opportunity presents itself to demonstrate compassion, may we be first in line.

[33 : 11] Would you pray with me? Father, thank you for this day. You are good. Lord, I know this is a familiar text, but I thank you that it provides for us an attribute of your disciples.

your disciples are people who abide in the vine, and your disciples are people who are selfless toward others. Lord, I pray that we would be a people who would be selfless toward others, that we would be a people who show mercy on those who are in need.

We would be a people who are of compassion, whose feelings are moved, not just moved to action. Lord, help us just not to feel, but to be compelled to act.

Lord, we love you. We want to grow as a disciple of yours, and thank you for this encounter with this lawyer.

I thank you, Lord, that you didn't define who a neighbor was, but encouraged all of us. Be the neighbor. We love you, Lord, and it's in your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.