

The terms

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[0 : 00] And behold, our lawyer stood up to him, put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, What is written in the law? How do you read it?

And he answered, You shall love the Lord your God with your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself. And he said to him, if you've answered correctly, Do this and you will live.

But desiring to justify himself to Jesus, and who is my neighbour, he replied, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed him, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a priest was going down the road, and went and saw him, and passed the other side. And likewise a Levi went and saw him in the other place, and passed on the other side.

And a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and saw him, and had compassion. He went to him, bound his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and set him on his own animal, and brought him to the inn, and took care of him.

[1 : 15] And the next day, he took out two denarii, and gave it to the innkeeper, saying, Take care of him. Whatever more you spend, I will pay you when I come back. Which of these three do you think is proven to be the neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?

And he said, The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, You go and do likewise. Well, our key verse today is verse 25.

Luke chapter 10, verse 25. And behold, a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

We've called this series of talks at the start of the new year, Jesus' call to discipleship. And today, we are looking at the terms of discipleship. We've seen that Jesus offers peace with God.

He offers the forgiveness of sins, being in a right, healthy relationship with God, both now in this life, but also in eternity. But how is it received?

[2 : 20] What are the terms? I guess we're familiar, aren't we, with the concept, the terms on which Harry and Meghan have changed their status within the royal family, or the terms the Radio 4 presenter, Sarah Montague, has negotiated with the BBC, having discovered that John Humphreys was being paid five times the amount that she wants for the same job, or the terms on which a footballer is transferred from one team to another.

The parable of the Good Samaritan, perhaps Jesus' most best-known parable of all, and yet probably his least understood. So you'll see there's an outline on the back of the service sheet. It's not the most helpful outline. We're simply going to look at the question, and then the parable, and then a couple of implications. So the question, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

It's a great question. It is, in fact, the most important question anyone could ever ask. It's the time of year, isn't it, when people are asking each other questions like, which school did your child apply for?

Did they get offered a place? It's hard to keep perspective. But this man helps us to do just that, because there's no more important question than asking the question that this lawyer asks.

[3 : 48] Jesus has been teaching, in this second half of Luke, about the age in which we live.

We've seen that over the last three weeks, how his coming into the world did not bring the moment of God's judgment.

That is still to come. Instead, how do you characterize, says Jesus, the age in which we live? Well, it's characterized by a universal proclamation of the message of forgiveness of sins.

The harvest is plentiful. The workers are few. And yet, that era is not going to carry on forever. I take it, our lawyer in verse 25, I take it, he knows God exists.

He knows he's accountable. He knows there's a heaven. He knows there's a hell. He knows that real people go to both destinations. And rather than asking Google, he has the sense to ask Jesus. That's Jesus, who as God on earth, is the great expert. But notice too, that although it's a good question, he asks it for the wrong reason.

[4 : 57] Verse 25. It's not an innocent question. He's wanting to trip Jesus up. Sometimes people ask questions or argue about the Christian faith for good reasons, because they are interested.

Perhaps even because they want it to be true. Sometimes they ask questions and argue about the Christian faith because they're not interested or because they don't want it to be true.

This man is no innocent inquirer. In fact, just turn back a few pages to Luke chapter 7. because we've already been given the spoiler alert for people such as our lawyer in Luke 10.

Have a look at Luke chapter 7, verse 30. Luke chapter 7, verse 30. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

It's a summary of how the religious establishment regarded the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. They rejected the purpose of God.

[6 : 10] In other words, when we come to Luke chapter 10, I take it that Luke intends us to respond to this lawyer in the same way that the audience responds to the Christmas children's pantomime when one of the baddies comes on stage.

That is, they boo because they've been primed beforehand. And therefore, we all know that when Captain Hook comes on stage or the Queen in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs or the Big Bad Wolf in Little Red Riding Hood when they come on stage, we all boo.

We know which side they're on. Well, likewise, this man is no innocent inquirer. We also know that asking what must I do to inherit eternal life is the wrong question.

Because in the bigger context of Luke's Gospel, eternal life is a gift. We're told right at the beginning of Luke's Gospel that Jesus came as a saviour.

Remember what it is the shepherds were told by the angels. Luke chapter 2, verse 11, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour who is Christ the Lord.

[7 : 23] And in the immediate context of Luke chapter 10, what is it we saw last week about what happens when the message of Jesus is proclaimed? Do you remember? What is it that the Lord Jesus rejoices in?

Verse 21, in that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. You see, the Lord Jesus loves the fact that as the message of the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed and peace with God, two things happen.

It is revealed to those who are like little children, those who are teachable, those who come to Jesus and listen to him. and yet it remains hidden from those who won't listen to Jesus and to a wise in their own eyes.

Because eternal life is not something that can be earned or deserved, it is instead a gift. In other words, this lawyer is a prime example of how to miss the point.

[8 : 40] And therefore, in verse 26, the Lord Jesus invites him to answer the question on his own terms and he does so from the Old Testament. Verse 27, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.

A quote from Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 5. And then he adds, and your neighbour as yourself. A quote from Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18. I am to love God and the evidence for that, the expression, if you like, of that, is that I love my neighbour.

And the Lord Jesus answers, verse 28, you have answered correctly, do this and you will live. Now I wonder what we make of that.

I guess at one level there's something very attractive in this, isn't there? we all recognise that we could do with a bit more love in the world. Whether it's in international relations or whether it's in the office or whether it's between neighbours.

The Beatles sang, all you need is love. And I guess we hear that and we think, yeah, we could do with a bit more love around the place. At school, at work, perhaps in our family, perhaps in our neighbourhood.

[9 : 55] And yet I wonder if, while in a sense it sounds very attractive, I wonder if also we are as unsettled by that answer as the lawyer is.

That's the question. Let's think about the parable. Verse 29, But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbour?

In other words, he knows he has a problem. The critical question, just who is my neighbour? I mean, is my neighbour the delightful lady next door who is always a, you know, she's an absolute joy to go and visit despite her age and infirmity and so on?

Or is my neighbour also the old bag a few doors along who frankly is always grumbling? Is it just my family or is it also my extended family?

Families can be difficult. Does it include that particular individual in my family? I mean, are they also my neighbour? And what are my colleagues or people at school?

[11:10] I mean, how much of my day do I have to spend with someone for them to qualify as my neighbour? But how close do I have to sit next to them within the workplace or at school?

What about those who voted Brexit? Are they my neighbour? What about the person on the checkout at Sainsbury's? Or the person as I leave Sainsbury's who's selling the big issue?

Are they my neighbour? Perhaps we can see the problem. Potentially, you and I have a huge number of neighbours.

The law knows he has a problem because notice his motive in verse 29 is again to justify himself. He wants to justify himself before God.

There's something inside all of us, isn't there, that wants to know that at the end of the day we are right with God. He wants to hear he's done enough. But actually he knows that the only way he can do that is as if the bar which looks impossibly high is lowered to make it achievable.

[12:22] Rather like the high jump at school. Although I've got long legs I could never get the hang of that funny back flip thing that you had to do on the high jump. And so what would always happen absolutely without fail is that the people who could do the back flip thing the bar was high for them when they did it and then for those of us who couldn't do the back flip thing the bar was always lowered and we just managed to do it that way.

Well it's at that point that the Lord Jesus tells the parable. Verse 30 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.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho had been all too familiar to Jesus. Listeners, it's a 17 mile journey notoriously dangerous rocky country lots of places for bandits and robbers to hide.

The man is stripped he's left for dead and yet wonderfully it looks as if help is soon on the way.

Verse 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.

It's similar isn't it to what happens on the tube. I guess the person looks a bit of a mess that they stand up in front of everyone else on the carriage they have their kind of speech they make asking for money at which point suddenly everyone is looking down either at their phones or the shoes of someone else or something like that.

[13:51] And then a Levite comes along a priest's assistant and the same thing happens. Verse 32 So likewise a Levite when he came to the place and saw him pass by on the other side.

And then finally a Samaritan at which point we think hooray help is now at hand we know how the story finishes. But that's only because this parable has completely changed the associations we make with Samaritans.

To a first century Jewish person they are regarded as outcasts and traitors. Verse 33 But a Samaritan as he journeyed came to where he was and when he saw him he had compassion.

At which point no doubt the lawyer took a sharp intake of breath. This is simply unthinkable. The outcome of this story is highly offensive.

Imagine a Labour voting Guardian reader opening their newspaper tomorrow morning and reading the editorial. praising the first few months of Boris Johnson's premiership.

[15:07] Imagine a class of American school children sitting down for their story at break and their biscuits and hot chocolate and things. But today the hero of the story rather than being an American soldier is a Taliban freedom fighter.

And then the punchline verse 36 Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell amongst robbers? It's not a difficult question is it? Imagine the multiple choice paper. There are three possibilities. A. Was it the priest? B. Is it the Levite? Three. C. Is it the Samaritan? But notice will you that the lawyer can't even bring himself to answer the question.

The answer is of course the Samaritan but he can't even bring himself to say the words. And so he simply says the one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him you go and do likewise. At which point of course the lawyer rather than being justified as he hoped for is condemned. Because the Samaritan cared for the man without any regard to boundary of race or class or creed. [16:22] there was no limit to his generosity. And although perhaps the temptation is to hear the parable and think well this is how we should live. It would be great to live in a society like this or to be at a school like this or a place of work like this or a church like this.

And yet actually if that is what we take away from the parable it shows that we haven't really understood what Jesus is saying. Because if we're honest don't we also find ourselves saying to ourselves but hang on a moment I can't love like this.

I may like to I mean I may like to think that I could perhaps be like the good Samaritan I may desire to be like him but if I'm honest I haven't been and I never will be.

I guess we might ask ourselves well what was going on with the priest and the Levite? Well presumably like the lawyer they had so lowered the bar that in their own twisted consciences they were able to justify themselves.

Now there are two classic ways in which we might do that and the genius of the parable is that Jesus exposes them both. The first is the I don't do anyone any harm strategy.

[17:48] We turn God's positive command into a negative prohibition so love your neighbour is turned into don't do anyone any harm which of course is much easier.

We comfort ourselves that since we haven't stolen from anyone or murdered anyone and since we're not like the people who hit the front page of the headlines then we have succeeded in loving our neighbour. the second way in which we lower the bar is what we might call the charity begins at home strategy which involves setting limits boundaries on the extent of the application of this command to love our neighbour.

The lawyer no doubt would have assumed that loving your neighbour meant loving your fellow Jew or at the very most loving someone who had been a Gentile a non-Jew but had become a Jew and to put boundaries on the command to love.

And yet the parable far from restricting the number of people we're to regard as neighbours actually does precisely the opposite. Perhaps you can imagine the lawyer's conversation with his wife back home that evening.

How was your day? Well to be honest it was tricky. Why was that? I went to listen to Jesus. I was hoping to trip him up and so I asked him what I should do to inherit eternal life.

[19:19] He threw the question back at me. So I replied and I gave the answer we'd been taught at law school. But just to make sure I was on the right track I asked him who my neighbour is.

And he told a story. of a man who had been beaten up on the road to Jericho. And he was a Samaritan who came to his aid.

Frankly it was offensive. And then he said to me go and do likewise. To which we can imagine his wife replying well you really have got your work cut out.

You can't even bring yourself to love your mother-in-law. the question the parable what about the implications?

It's a subversive parable isn't it? Well two implications. Firstly it explains how anyone does inherit eternal life.

[20:25] It explains how anyone does inherit eternal life. Jesus did not teach this parable to teach us our moral duty. To send us away saying to ourselves well it's pretty tricky to be a good neighbor but I'm going to give it the best shot and I'll try.

The point of the parable is to humble us. It's to show us our moral bankruptcy. To show that the getting right with God by doing good deeds routes to getting right with God is a dead end.

Now that of course is profoundly countercultural. From a very young age we are taught aren't we that we get things by working for them. At primary school there are sticker charts, there are traffic lights, all to encourage good behavior.

One of my children was reminding me just the other day of the occasion on which they won an award simply for making progress, which as they freely admitted is setting the bar pretty low indeed. the reality is that God is far too holy and our sinful hearts are far too hard to earn eternal life.

It's lovely wasn't it last week hearing Swindor talk about her Roman Catholic background and then how she had come to put her trust in Jesus and when asked what is the best thing about following

Jesus, what did she say?

[21 : 54] She said it's all by grace. Forgiveness is a free gift. Something of course the Catholic Church doesn't believe. It's not surprising that so many are burdened with guilt because we cannot be put right with God by law keeping, whether it's the law of God or the rules of the Church.

God is simply too holy. Our sinful hearts are too hard. God is the truth is of course that you and I actually are much more like the wounded man.

We need a good Samaritan, we need someone who is despised, rejected and outsider, someone who will rescue us, someone who will restore us, someone who will do so completely regardless of the cost.

It's very striking that the Lord Jesus tells this parable at exactly the moment when he's on his way to Jerusalem to do just that, to die on the cross, to take God's judgement for our sin.

Such that those who trust in him might indeed be forgiven and enjoy the very thing the lawyer asks about, eternal life. And the great thing is that if you have never received that for yourself, then the offer is still there.

[23 : 20] If you've never put your trust in Jesus Christ, you've never received a forgiveness that he speaks about, if you've never known what it is to experience the eternal life that the lawyer asks about, well do come and chat to me afterwards.

The second implication is that it explains why some people reject eternal life. It explains why some people reject eternal life.

Jesus told us why last week, didn't he? Verse 21, it's because they're wise in their own understanding. They won't listen to Jesus as he talks about the need to come to him for the forgiveness of sins and to follow him.

And this lawyer is a visual aid of why that is. It's because in their own eyes they are respectable. They've lowered the bar.

I've never done anyone any harm. Look at the way I've loved my family. it's been said there is a God we want and there is a God who is.

[24 : 22] There is a God we want and there is a God who is. And the two are not the same. What sort of God does the respectable person want?

Well a God who will be pleased with their respectability and their good works. I don't need Jesus, I'm a decent person, I've lived a good life. But of course you could only really believe that if you set the bar pathetically low, it explains why some people reject eternal life.

It means we shouldn't be surprised when respectable people reject Jesus. It may be the respectable morality of the traditional church goer or the respectable morality of the person who believes that God helps themselves or the respectable morality of political correctness or the respectable morality of I work hard to provide for my family.

Because remember you see Luke is writing to give us confidence and certainty, those of us who are following Jesus. Imagine how very unsettling it would have been in the first century that so many of the religious and political establishments, so many of the lawyers and the Pharisees rejected Jesus, very unsettling.

Just as they continue to do so today, how the establishment, not just the religious establishment, but the establishment generally rejects Jesus and it can be equally unsettling for us to find ourselves on the edge culturally, on the cultural margins, not just at odds with those we might expect to be odds with, but actually at odds with the respectable, the educated, the upright establishment people.

[26 : 08] parable. In other words, if we are disciples of Jesus, the purpose of this parable is to encourage us. Do you remember last week? The whole emphasis on joy and rejoicing that our names are written in heaven, Luke chapter 10, verse 20.

I take it that Jesus tells this parable to keep us rejoicing that our names are indeed written in heaven in the face of rejection and establishment and in particularly rejection and opposition by the establishment itself.

Thank you.