

## **The Story – The Good Samaritan**

Turn with me to **Luke 10:25** as we look at one of the most well known parables of Jesus, the story of the Good Samaritan. Looking back I preached this message first in 1985, then in 1990, then in 1995. The ideas make up one of the chapters in my book *Without Spot or Wrinkle*. The truth in this parable is both inspiring and troubling to me as a Christian and as a pastor. To preach what the Lord showed me about this story thirty-one years ago, and what he continues to show me today, makes me anxious. To be honest, it makes my stomach hurt! But I have a responsibility to speak the truth as I hear and understand it. Let me read the parable.

Luke tells us what prompted the story. A “lawyer” asks a common Jewish theological question, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** That is a question we all should ask. J.C. Ryle was an Anglican bishop in England in the mid-1800’s. Concerning this question he wrote, **“It...deserves the principal attention of every man, woman and child on earth. We are all sinners – dying sinners, and sinners going to be judged after death. ‘How shall our sins be pardoned?... How shall we escape the damnation of hell?... What must we do to be saved?’ These are inquiries which people of every rank ought to put to themselves, and never to rest till they find an answer.” ...J. C. Ryle**

If you haven’t asked the question, you should. It’s the most important question you’ll ever ask. What do I do to be saved and escape hell and gain eternal life? Jesus responded as the rabbis and teachers of his day often responded with a question of their own. “What does the law say? How do you read it?” The lawyer then quotes two passages from the Old Testament, the law. He may have heard Jesus say this before, because he quotes the passages in the order that Jesus had quoted them at another time. **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.” Deuteronomy 6:5.** Then he added, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.” Leviticus 19:18.** Jesus said, “Good answer! Do this and you will live.” In another place Jesus quoted those passages and said, “This sums up the law and the prophets, the requirements of the law.” Jesus had a way of cutting through a lot of religious and even moral red tape didn’t he? It’s dangerous and radical but that’s what Jesus said: Love God and love your neighbor.

Does this mean that we can be saved and have eternal life by our good works and our best effort? All we have to do is love God and love our neighbor? Yeah, all you have to do is love God perfectly, with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and love your neighbor exactly

as you love yourself. That's what the law says. The law is perfect and keeping it perfectly leads to eternal life. The problem is not with the law. The problem is with us. None of us can keep the law perfectly. None of us have loved God and our neighbor perfectly! We've all sinned against God's law so we can't gain eternal life and be saved that way. The only way to be saved is to repent of our sins and place our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

It's like Jesus saying, "Sure, you can be saved, all you have to do is run as fast as you can and then leap up and land on top of the roof of our sanctuary, about forty feet in the air." It's silly and prideful, but somehow it seems the lawyer is thinking, "A forty foot vertical leap. I'm really close on this one. All I need to do is clarify a couple of terms." Talk about prideful! So he asks Jesus, "Now exactly who is my neighbor?" Luke says he was hoping to justify himself. Jewish teachers usually used the term neighbor to refer to their fellow Israelites. The Jews didn't consider Gentiles to be neighbors and they thought everyone knew God hated Samaritans so they couldn't be neighbors. So who is my neighbor? He should never have asked the question.

In telling the parable, Jesus flips the understanding of who my neighbor is. (This insight comes from Pastor Brian.) The lawyer expects "neighbor" to be defined by race, religion, or geographic proximity. Jesus defines neighbor by action. Those I treat with love are my neighbors. **"The expert asked 'who qualifies as a neighbor?' Jesus asked, 'Who behaves as a neighbor?' It is only in Jesus' system (where neighbor is defined by action) that a Jew and a Samaritan can be called neighbors." ...Pastor Brian White** The lawyer is saying "Who do I have to love" whereas Jesus is saying "Who can I love?" Jesus moves the discussion from "Who is my neighbor?" to a discussion of "To whom must I become a neighbor?"

So in light of that, Jesus tells the classic story we read a moment ago. You go down from Jerusalem, situated about 2500 feet above sea level to Jericho, about 825 feet below sea level. It is a distance of about 20 miles. On his way the fellow is robbed, beaten, stripped of his clothing and belongings and left for dead. Along comes a priest. He had apparently finished his responsibilities in the temple and was headed to Jericho. It's possible he was riding a donkey since the priests at this time were well off. He sees the injured man but passes on the other side. He doesn't know if the man is dead or alive. Perhaps he wanted to do the right thing but he is faced with a moral dilemma. If the injured man is a Jew and still alive, he has a responsibility to care for him, but if he is dead the priest would be ceremonially defiled and would have to return to Jerusalem for a week to be cleansed. One source said Pharisees thought one would be defiled

by a corpse if even your shadow touched the dead person. Perhaps that's why Jesus said he passed by on the other side. Since the guy in the ditch was stripped of his clothing the priest couldn't tell if he was a Jew or a Gentile or Samaritan so he didn't even know if he had to care for him. The easiest thing was to put it out of his mind and cross on the other side.

A Levite comes along next. The Levites assisted the priest in the temple ceremonies. He faced a similar problem. But, if the priest didn't stop, who is the Levite to think he knows more than a priest. He shouldn't risk defiling himself with this poor fellow either and he passes on the other side.

The next guy happens to be a Samaritan. Without explaining all the history, let's just say the Jews and Samaritans did not like each other. Jews went out of their way to avoid having anything to do with a Samaritan and vice versa. What Jesus describes is unheard of. This is a Black Lives Matter protester helping a white supremacist. This is a Donald Trump supporter helping Hillary Clinton out of a ditch. This was totally unexpected. Unbelievable. Jesus then describes the astonishing actions of this Samaritan beginning in verse 33.

**He saw him.** You have to open your eyes and see the need. We pass people everyday whose lives are so broken. They are in the ditch, bleeding and dying and we don't even see them!

**He took pity on him.** When you start looking at the needs around you, prepare to feel something. Compassion.

**He went to him.** It's not enough to see the need and feel pity, it has to move you to action. This Samaritan went to him, climbing down into the ditch on the side of the road where he was. Listen, when you get in the ditch with broken people to help them, when you really see them and suddenly "they" have a face and a name, it will change your perspective. It's harder to hate someone who has a face and a name, someone you now know.

**He bandaged his wounds.** He stopped the bleeding and cleaned up the mess. You'll get messy.

**He poured on oil and wine.** This started the healing process, cleaning, disinfecting the wounds.

**He put the man on his own donkey.** He chose to walk in order to let this injured man ride. He was going far beyond just a good deed. I would have said, "I'll ride ahead and get help."

**He took him to an inn and took care of him.** He took him to a place where he knew he would be cared for. He again inconvenienced himself, spending the night there at the inn to watch over this injured man, to attend to him.

**He paid for his lodging and put him on his account.** He told the innkeeper, “Let him stay here a few days and take care of him and when I return I will reimburse you for any added expense.” This is outrageous generosity and concern, paying for perhaps two weeks worth of care.

Jesus said, “**Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?**” The expert in the law replied, ‘**The one who had mercy on him.**’ Jesus told him, ‘**Go and do likewise.**” **Luke 10:36**

The neighbor is the one who had mercy on the other. “Go and do likewise,” Jesus said. How can we be like the Good Samaritan? Can we open our eyes and see the needs? Can we love someone not like us? Can you be a neighbor to someone whose politics are different from yours? Can you be a neighbor and show mercy to someone whose religion or ethnicity or simply their worldview is entirely different from yours? Can you show mercy to someone who is totally undeserving of mercy? This injured Jewish man didn’t deserve mercy from a Samaritan. I’m sure the Samaritan had been mistreated by Jews. Remember, the question is not “who is my neighbor?” The question is “To whom can I be a neighbor?”

“Go and do likewise” Jesus said. Do we have to? I fail at this all the time. I’m not a good Samaritan. I’m not a good neighbor. I pass hurting people all the time. “Let someone else get in the ditch and help. Besides, I’m out of bandages. I don’t have any oil or wine.” But Jesus says I’m supposed to show mercy to others and help them. So, we do the best we can. We bind up the wounds and then what do we do? We take them to the inn. That’s what the Samaritan did. But what does that mean?

Here’s the part that still troubles me, the part I saw back in 1985. The good Samaritan took the injured man to an inn. This was not a motel or hotel. This particular Greek word for inn is used only this one time and place in the New Testament. The word means literally “to receive all.” **The Samaritan took him to a place where all are received.** He took him to a place where Jews and Gentiles and Samaritans were all received. What a powerful image for the church. Do you see this?

Jesus, the Good Samaritan, finds people broken, beaten and bloody. He finds people that have been robbed of everything they had -- robbed by sin, by addiction, by abuse, by you name it. He finds them and he bandages them up, he pours in oil and wine and carries them up out of the ditch where he found them and brings them to the church, to the inn, the place where all are

received, the place where none are turned away, and he says, “Here. Take care of them. I told this guy it was all right. You would receive him and watch over him until I get back.”

It frightens me. It’s upsetting to me. We don’t decide who comes to the inn, Jesus the Good Samaritan does that. “Here, take care of this guy.” “Wait. Who is he? What’s his background? Where does he come from?” And Jesus says, “Does it matter? This is the place where all are received. Whosoever will may come, remember?” It’s heaven’s plan that everyone Jesus finds is brought to the church to be loved and disciplined and cared for.

Verse 35 says **“The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’”** Notice He gave the money to the innkeeper. Anyone want to guess what the word for innkeeper literally means? **“One who receives all.”**

Jesus binds up the broken and does what only he can do, but then he brings them to his church, to the place where all are received and he says, “Take care of them until I return.” We are to be the place where the poor, the broken, the hurting, the lame, the blind, the abused, the dying, the messed up, the hopeless, where they find all find hope. Where all are received.

Notice that when the guy gets to the inn, he still needs care. He isn’t well yet. We want everyone to come to church with everything straightened out. “Hey, get your life together and come join our church!” It doesn’t work that way. “Go somewhere and work this stuff out, hide your scars and your wounds and then come be part of us.” The good Samaritan brings this guy bandaged, still bleeding, naked, bruised, battered, traumatized, to a place where all are received.

He brought this human wreck to the inn. The guy might have been saying, “Where are you taking me? I can’t go anywhere. Look at me. I’m covered with blood and dirt. My face is battered and bruised. I can’t go where decent people are.” I’ve had people tell me they couldn’t come to church because of their past, because of their sin and failures. “I can’t go there. I’m so broken, my life is so messed up, my family is so messed up, I’ve failed, I’m broken and bleeding. I’m a mess.” And Jesus says, “Don’t worry. I know a place where all are received. I know the innkeepers and they receive everyone I bring to them. They won’t turn anyone away. They’ll take care of you!” Has he found an inn at Carbondale? Has he found innkeepers here?

Notice too, we can afford to be generous with our love and mercy because he has unlimited resources. The good Samaritan says, “Here is plenty, but I know you’ll need to spend

more. He's in pretty bad shape, so spend it all. Spend all I'm giving you and when I return, I'll pay you." There's plenty of mercy. It's new every morning so go ahead and be merciful.

Jesus said we were to go and do likewise. We are to be loving and bring others to the place where all are received. Understand what I mean when I say we receive all. We aren't lowering the bar or dropping the standards of God's word and allowing wickedness. We aren't welcoming sin, we are welcoming sinners to the saving love and mercy of Jesus. Look what Paul writes to the church at Corinth. **"Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."** 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

That's what some of you were, Paul says. And Phil can say that too. That's what some of us were. But Jesus saved us. That's why we are quick to show mercy. Because He washed us, he cleansed us, he forgave us of our sins and he brought us to a place where all are received and said to the church, "Here, take care of these folks. They may still be a little rough around the edges. They may still do and say things that will shock you so teach them, forgive them, be patient with them, disciple them, hold them accountable. They may be tempted to go back to the old ways, back to alcohol or drugs or sexual immorality or lying or cheating people so show them how to live a new life that pleases Jesus. If they fail, restore them in love."

Look around this morning. Welcome to the inn. Some of us are in better shape than others. Some of us still have the bandages on, and some of us are healed up and still living here at the inn, but we are going out in search of others that have been beaten and robbed and left for dead and we are doing our best to bring them to the inn, to the place where all are received.

As I mentioned, this word for inn and innkeeper is used only one time in the New Testament. There is another word translated as inn that's found earlier in the gospel of Luke. It refers to a guest chamber and is found in Luke 2. What kind of inn will we be? A guest chamber or a place where all are received? Before you decide, keep in mind, the innkeeper and guest chamber in Luke 2 didn't have room for Mary, Joseph, or Jesus. What kind of church and inn shall we be? Go and do likewise, Jesus said. "Lord, show us how."

