

“Desiring to Justify Himself” – Luke 10:25-29

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Take a Bible and lets meet in Luke 10...

We began a new series last week. The heart of the series is a parable of Jesus. Maybe the most famous parable of Jesus. The Parable of the Good Samaritan. Last week I simply tried to whet the appetite for the series by attempting to demonstrate the relevance of where we are heading. Today, we are going to take a closer look at the setting of the parable.¹ In so doing, we will discover our own tendencies to try to justify ourselves before God and others.

So let's have a look at the text. I'll begin reading in verse 15. I hope you will follow along as I read. The most important thing I will say to you today, I am about to say right now. This is God's Word...

“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’²⁶ He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’²⁷ And he answered, ‘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, and your neighbor as yourself.’²⁸ And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ (Luke 10:25-29)

The exchange we just read was initiated by a “lawyer” or, as some translations read, “an expert in the law” (e.g., NIV), referring to the Law of God found in the Old Testament. As one theologian explains,

“He was not a lawyer merely in civil law. He was what we would call a *theologian* or a *Bible scholar*, but because the law was, in many respects, supposed to operate in the land, then he had some of the qualifications of what we would call a *lawyer*. He was sort of a lawyer-theologian or a lawyer-Bible teacher. In other words, not only a legal expert but a religious figure.”²

This man comes to Jesus and asks a question about “eternal life.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God “has put eternity into man’s heart,” so it’s only natural that we would find ourselves provoked by the lawyer’s question.³ He believes in the possibility of an afterlife with God. He wants to experience life to the full, everlasting life (same words in Greek). This lawyer, as with most Jews, rightly would have equated eternal life with living in God’s kingdom. He was also right to speak of such life as an “inheritance,” since the Old Testament itself does (e.g., Psalm 37:18 [36:18 LXX]; Daniel 12:2). He wants his share in that hope, so he asks a question about what he can *do* to make it so.

This is not a unique impulse. Sooner or later we all have questions about what comes after death. Usually these questions grow out of our fears and uncertainties. It reminds me of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, which so resonate with audiences because they play on the themes like never-ending life. “Arr ye fearin’ the hereafter?”⁴ Perhaps this lawyer was. In any case, he brings his question to Jesus. And who better to turn to with such questions than Jesus?

Yet, while it’s certainly not a bad instinct to desire and inquire about eternal life, the way the question is worded does seem a bit odd. The religious leader asks, “*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Luke 10:25). As many have been quick to point out, this lawyer has “inappropriately combined the idea of ‘doing’—that is,

working to gain a benefit—and the idea of ‘inheriting.’ ... One does not work to gain an inheritance; an estate already belongs to the inheritor and is guaranteed to become his or her property in due time.”⁵ So the phrasing of the lawyer’s question seems self-contradictory. You don’t earn an inheritance. You are freely given an inheritance. It’s a gift, not a reward. A matter of grace, not merit. If you inherit something, it’s because you belong to the right family. Asking “What must I do to inherit” would be like asking, “What must I do to belong to the right family?”⁶ It’s an odd question. You are either entitled to an inheritance or you are not. But you don’t *do* anything for it.

Still the lawyer’s question was right in line with the way many of his Jewish contemporaries thought. God’s favor and eternal life must be earned. One rabbinic saying, for example, said, “Great is Torah [the Law], for it gives to them that practice it, life in this world and in the world to come.”⁷ This assumption seems to stand behind the lawyer’s question. Proper adherence to the Law of God will lead to eternal life. And it’s the same mistaken assumption so prevalent in our day. People believe that salvation is something we earn. “They assume that if there is a heaven at all, they will gain entrance only if the good that they do outweighs the bad.”⁸ So they want to know, what to do to get or stay on good terms with God.

The assumption of the lawyer is not the only problem though. His motives behind the question are less than sincere. Notice that verse 25 says that he “*stood up to put [Jesus] to the test,*” when he posed the question. This lawyer is playing games. “He threw the question down like a gauntlet, challenging Jesus to a theological duel, as it were.”⁹ He’s trying to trap Jesus.¹⁰ But here’s a tip I once heard (this one’s free): “If you’re ever going to test Jesus, do it sitting down. You won’t have as far to fall when you fail.”¹¹ This lawyer may have thought that he was going to expose Jesus, but in truth Jesus is about to expose him.

How? He directs the Bible scholar back to his Bible. “Jesus thinks the place to find the most important answer to the most important question ever asked is in the most important book ever written.”¹² So Jesus asks, in verse 26, “*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*” Don’t you love the way Jesus so often answers questions with questions? Me neither. But in each case there is always a good reason. Here, he recognizes the lawyer’s faulty assumptions and Jesus wants the man to begin rethinking his categories.¹³ So He steers Him to God’s Word. That’s where we should always take the most important questions in life.

Still, does it strike you as odd that Jesus takes this approach? After all, the lawyer has just provided the perfect setup for a seamless Gospel presentation. Those are the kinds of evangelistic opportunities that don’t often fall in our laps. “Today, you’d expect Jesus to take him through the Roman Road, move through the Four Spiritual Laws, maybe even show him the Two Ways to Live [or some other famous evangelistic technique], then close the deal by asking him to pray a prayer.”¹⁴ But that’s not what He does. In fact, He doesn’t even answer the question initially. Does that seem odd? Jonathan Dodson is probably on the right track, when he writes:

“Why does Jesus turn down a great opportunity to teach, to explain, to make everything clear and obvious? Because Jesus knows that answers are not enough. He knows that there is another ‘god’ reigning in the lawyer’s heart, one that has to be removed before it can be replaced. So he asks questions to meet the lawyer where he is. He asks questions to expose where he finds his true worth: ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’ (Luke 10:26). Jesus isn’t dismissive of the lawyer’s knowledge of the law; on the contrary, he engages it... He steers toward the heart by addressing what is most important to the lawyer, the law.”¹⁵

But the questions Jesus asks are disarming for the lawyer. They would have seemed elementary to an expert in the Law like himself. He knew God’s Law backwards and forward. Not surprisingly then, the answer is on the tip of his tongue. “*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, and your neighbor as yourself*” (10:27). This is the correct answer (10:28). His answer is one of our “GCs.” What’s our mission statement at this church? “We exist to glorify God through Gospel-transformed lives” How do we engage in that mission? “By actively embracing 3 GCs—Gospel-

Centrality, the Great Commission, and the Great Commandments.” The lawyer’s answer in verse 27 is a summary of that last one, the Great Commandments.

The first half of his response—“*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*”—is drawn from Deuteronomy 6:5, part of the *shema*, a portion of the Law that a Jew would have recited daily. The second half—love “*your neighbor as yourself*”—comes from Leviticus 19:18. Together they are called the Great Commandments because they are essentially a summary of the Ten Commandments, which themselves summarize the entire Law of God (cf. Mark 12:28ff.; Matthew 22:37, 39). As Jesus said elsewhere, “*On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets*” (22:40).¹⁶

Interestingly, immediately after the verse from Deuteronomy, the text goes on to say,

“*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*” (Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

These words eventually led some pious Jews to adopt a custom of attaching a small, usually black, calfskin box or pouch that contained the words of the *shema*, known as “phylacteries” or “tefillin” to the forehead and arm/wrist. Some Jews continue the practice to this day. Today it looks something like this [show image]. Some have wondered if the lawyer in the text may have been wearing these symbols of obedience when he encounters Jesus.¹⁷ In that case, the answer to Jesus’ question (at least part of it) was literally on the man’s brain, right in front of him and the way the story unfolds is made all the more ironic by the man’s appearance.

In any case, the Great Commandments—love God and love neighbor—was the right answer. So Jesus responds, in verse 28, “*You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.*”¹⁸ The lawyer wanted to know what to “do,” so Jesus tells him—“do this—love God with everything and love your neighbor like yourself—and you will have eternal life.” You can’t see this in English, but in the original Jesus switches up the Greek tenses to communicate that the lawyer can’t just “do this,” but must continually go on doing this. In other words, obey God *perfectly* and you will have eternal life. Is that true? Yes. Jesus is no liar. Perfection is the standard of God. Hit the standard and you will have eternal life. You won’t need grace. You won’t need forgiveness. You would deserve eternal life in God’s kingdom. So get after it. Do this and you will live.

But therein lies the problem and Jesus’ point. This is an impossible demand for us. We have not lived perfect. We are guilty of breaking God’s commands. We were born in iniquity. We have sinned against God by nature and by choice. So while it’s true, theoretically speaking, that if we obey God’s Law perfectly we will possess eternal life, practically speaking, perfection is unattainable for fallen sinners like us. That’s probably not the answer the lawyer was hoping for. “There remains a massive difference between answering correctly *theologically* and living perfectly *practically*.¹⁹ “But”, as Tony Merida explains,

“Jesus’ interest wasn’t in pointing out *the imperative* to love [God and] one’s neighbor. He wanted to show *the impossibility* of loving [God and] one’s neighbor 100% of the time. Jesus isn’t teaching ‘salvation by roadside assistance.’ He wants to crush this man’s self-righteousness, to expose him of his need for a Savior.”²⁰

And if God opens the eyes of our hearts, we will find ourselves similarly crushed and exposed. “If we have to *do* something, then we’re doomed to hell.”²¹ Who among us has loved God perfectly with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Not a soul. And God’s at least loveable. He’s altogether lovely. “There is no just reason for us not to love God, but there are plenty of reasons why we would find it difficult to love all of our neighbors as much as we love ourselves.”²² Amen, someone?

So how are you doing on that second command? Have you loved all your neighbors with the same intensity of interest and concern that you have for yourself? Do you live for their safety and happiness as much as your own? Absolutely not. And when Jesus expands the definition in the parable that follows to include enemies under the umbrella of “neighbors,” then we realize that we have a perfect track record of disobedience to the command of God when it comes to some people. We may not even think it’s possible for us to love a *certain* person in that way. And you know what? It’s not. John Piper hit the nail on the head in a book called, *What Jesus Demands from the World*:

“If this is what [loving your neighbor as yourself] means, then something unbelievably powerful and earthshaking and reconstructing and overturning and upending will have to happen in our souls. Something supernatural. Something well beyond what self-preserving, self-enhancing, self-exalting, self-esteeming, self-advancing, fallen human beings like me can do on their own.”²³

This whole exchange in Luke 10 illustrates what Paul said in Romans 3:20.

“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20; cf. Galatians 3:10)

The Law was not given to make us righteous. The Law was given to expose us as sinners and lead us to the Savior. The Scriptures proclaim in one voice that salvation for sinners like us is always a free gift of God’s grace, never as a reward for our good behavior. And the immediate context of Luke 10 reinforces this same truth.²⁴

At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus sends dozens of disciples out in pairs to do ministry in the surrounding area. Eventually they come back and are rejoicing greatly about everything they accomplished. In verse 17, they say, *“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”* Instead of joining the party, Jesus rebukes them. He says, *“do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven”* (10:20). Do you see His point? He doesn’t want their greatest source of happiness and security to be in what they accomplish for God, but in what God has done for them.²⁵

The next paragraph begins with Jesus reiterating that salvation is by grace alone. He says, *“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will”* (10:21). Then He says, *“no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him”* (10:22). What’s Jesus saying? Salvation is the gracious gift of God. It’s not earned. It’s given. Grace. Not effort. He hides and He reveals. And when He reveals it is God’s *“gracious will.”*

“If we back up a bit further in Luke’s Gospel to chapter 9, we read an extremely important verse for understanding the Good Samaritan story, and Luke’s entire Gospel. Luke writes [in 9:51] that Jesus ‘set his face to go to Jerusalem.’ The rest of Luke’s narrative is to be understood in light of the cross. Jesus isn’t setting His face to Jerusalem and then saying, ‘You can have eternal life by being nice to your neighbor.’ He’s going to the cross because no one completely loves God and neighbor the way the Bible demands. Except one: Jesus Himself! Jesus lived the life we couldn’t live and died the death we should have died. Luke is showing us that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ crucified alone.”²⁶

Luke 18 provides a wonderful illustration of this. Jesus tells us about two men who go to pray at the temple. One is a religious leader, a Pharisee, and the other a despised sinner, a tax collector. The Pharisee’s prayer was full of self-righteousness. *“God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get”* (18:12). The second man struck an entirely different tone. We read, *“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’”* (18:13). Guess which of these two

understood the Gospel? Jesus leaves us with no doubt. Singling out the tax collector, Jesus concludes, “*this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other*” (18:14). His point? “Justification is a gift of God’s grace, given to all who humbly cry out to Christ in humble repentance.”²⁷

The lawyer in Luke 10 was just as guilty and he knew it. He should have heard Jesus’ answer, bowed at His feet, and begged Him for mercy. He should have cried out, “Help me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. I cannot love God the way He demands to be loved, and I have never loved anyone nearly as much as I love myself. Tell me how a sinner like me can be saved.”²⁸ But that’s not what he does when faced with the knowledge that he has fallen short of God’s standard. Not at all. He does what most people do. What most of us have done. Instead of confessing, he covers up. He tries to save face. He searches for excuses. He looks for theological loopholes. And so we read in verse 29,

“*But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’*” (Luke 10:29).

In other words, he wants to change the standard without it looking like he’s changing the standard. He wants to redefine the terms so that the expectation becomes convenient. “Instead of embracing his neighbor, the lawyer wants to philosophize about what ‘neighbor’ means.”²⁹ And in so doing he’s trying to limit the size of his neighborhood. He thinking, “I can’t love everyone, of course, but if I can so narrowly define the word ‘neighbor’ to mean those who I like, those who I can tolerate, those who deserve my love, those who I’m comfortable loving, those who love me in return, those who respond nicely to my love, those of my social, ethnic, or political tribe...then maybe, just maybe, I can still come out of this looking good. Maybe I can prove to be good enough to get eternal life.” He wants to lower the bar so he can prove himself to be worthy. He wants to justify himself. Isn’t that just like us?

“This is what always happens when we try to be saved by our own works. Rather than upholding the law in all its perfection, we undermine the law by reducing it to something we think we might be able to keep. Thus the lawyer tried to make God’s second great commandment more manageable.”³⁰

That tendency goes all the way back to the Fall in the opening chapters of Genesis. When God confronts Adam for his disobedience and what was his response? “It’s not my fault God! It was that woman you gave me...” The woman didn’t fare much better under the weight of her guilt. “Don’t get mad at me God, see that serpent over there? He deceived me!” What is that? That’s self-justification. That’s trying to get off the hook by shifting the goalposts. And that’s us.

Yet how does that work out for us? If we can’t keep God’s commands, we just redefine them. But by necessity the new standards we adopt are by definition lower standards. How are those resolutions going? It’s not even February. So what happens when you can’t even live up to the expectations that you set for yourself, you know, the low standards you live by because you can’t live up to God’s standards? You end up feeling like you are a failure still. The lower bar didn’t help. Sure you may put on a straight face and fool the world. But you aren’t fooling God. And you aren’t even fooling yourself. That’s what happens when we try to justify ourselves. We sentence ourselves to a life of self-loathing and hatred or pride and self-deception. And that’s depressing. Who wants that kind of life. Not me. And the good news is—there’s a better life for you. And it’s found in Christ. It’s found in the Gospel.

“We can’t keep God’s command to love our neighbor as ourselves perfectly. But Jesus has kept the Great Commandments perfectly for us. And only Christ can justify us. Only Jesus can make us ordinary citizens of the kingdom of God. Justification means ‘just as if I’ve never sinned’ and ‘just as if I’ve always obeyed perfectly.’ Jesus Christ can forgive you entirely, and give you His perfect righteousness. Justified people stand accepted in Christ. So, don’t look to yourself for salvation, but trust in Jesus alone.”³¹

That's how you inherit eternal life. You don't *do* something to get God to make you part of His family. You receive a gift as you trust Christ. Through a miraculous, spiritual, new birth God makes you part of a new family. The right family. His family. And now you are an heir. Now you have an inheritance. No amount of *doing* will get you that. But God will, but only through faith in Christ. So stop playing games. Stop trying to justify yourself. God is never going to say to you, "Okay, I guess that's good enough, good job." But that's okay because Jesus was more than just "good enough." He was perfect. And He bore your sins. He took your curse. And He will make you acceptable to God, when you bow the knee and say, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." So what are you waiting for?

Let's pray...

¹ Darrell Bock comments on the larger setting: "Discipleship is one of Luke's most important themes. Luke 10:25-11:13 focuses on this issue by highlighting relationships at three fundamental levels: with one's neighbor (10:25-37), with Jesus (10:38-42), and before God through prayer (11:1-13). The close juxtaposition of these relationships suggests the vertical-horizontal aspects of spirituality that Paul highlighted in texts like Philemon 6 and Colossians 1:3-5. Ethics is not a matter of abstract reflection on certain situations; it is a reflection of character that combines listening to God with sensitive service to people." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 298-299. Thabiti Anyabwile also notes, "The major idea of 'inheritance' runs through this section of Scripture. We see it in 10:25. We see it in another way in 10:42 ('choice'). We see the entire idea reflected in 11:1-13 in the Father's giving good gifts. The text reminds us that there is something we're meant to possess and enjoy as a gift from God." Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 180.

² D. A. Carson, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Lk 10:25-37.

³ Tony Merida, *Ordinary: How to Turn the World Upside Down* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 22.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (SNTI; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 275-276.

⁶ Carson, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan."

⁷ Mishnah *Pirke Aboth* 6.7, quoted in Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 36.

⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Vol. 1 (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 538.

⁹ Swindoll, 276.

¹⁰ "Religious leaders often sought to trap Jesus, but Jesus actually trapped them. When a different individual tried to ask Jesus about how to have eternal life, known as the Rich Young Ruler, he too received more than what he was anticipating. Jesus told the young ruler to sell everything and give it to the poor. In both stories, Jesus was trying to crush their self-righteousness." Merida, 23.

¹¹ Anyabwile, 180. Of course, the posture the lawyer adopts is actually one of respect, as D. A. Carson explains: "In those days, teachers sat and students who were around listening, when they had a question, stood up as a mark of respect for the teacher. Although he himself is a lawyer, he goes through the public courtesy of standing up to ask Jesus a question... In other words, he formally stands up and offers a certain kind of respect in so doing, not out of genuine respect but to mask his hypocrisy to test and to examine the teacher. That sort of thing happens often enough in real life. Sometimes you get students who are asking questions not to find an answer but just to show off or, worse yet, to try to embarrass the teacher. The aim is to try to trap him, and that happens often enough in Scripture itself." Carson, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan."

¹² Anyabwile, 181.

¹³ Carson, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan.”

¹⁴ Jonathan K. Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., 44.

¹⁶ For a good discussion on the relationship between these two commandments, see John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 249-268.

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), 391-392. “Particularly pious Jews wore on their wrists or head a small leather pouch or box containing selected texts from the Torah. They did this in literal obedience to God’s command, ‘You shall bind [My words] as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead’ (Deut. 6:8), and as a practical means of keeping the law foremost in their minds. By Jesus’ time, however, this practice had become a conspicuous sign of spirituality. Therefore, it’s quite possible the lawyer was wearing a phylactery when challenging Jesus.” Swindoll, 277.

¹⁸ “We can learn from this answer as well. There is great power in affirmation. It’s in rare supply today. We all want it but few give it. Take time to encourage people, affirming the things that are good and true as you talk with them about life. Affirm their desires, their thoughtful skepticism, their sincere objections, and their truthful answers.” Dodson, 45,

¹⁹ Anyabwile, 181.

²⁰ Merida, 23.

²¹ Anyabwile, 181.

²² R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 226.

²³ Piper, 250.

²⁴ The next few paragraphs were influenced by the contextual observation of Merida, 24-25; cf. Carson, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan”; Bock, 299.

²⁵ In a sermon, D. A. Carson gave a beautiful illustration a man who grasped this point: “Some of you may know the name David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He was probably the most famous preacher in the English language in the twentieth century after Billy Graham. From a local church perspective, preaching with a thorough theological understanding to thousands in his pulpit in London across decades, he became a model for an entire generation of young preachers. When he was dying of cancer himself and relatively few people had access to him, the man who became his family authorized biographer, Iain Murray, would visit him pretty often, and on one occasion, he asked him this question: ‘Dr. Lloyd-Jones ...’ He was always referred to as the doctor, because he was a medical doctor first. ‘Dr. Lloyd-Jones, over the decades you have preached the gospel of Christ to countless tens of thousands. You have been instrumental in founding with others entire institutions [Tyndale House, a center in Cambridge] rejuvenating the British equivalent of InterVarsity which served as a mother to so many, the Westminster Fellowship for Ministers, starting the Banner of Truth Trust [a publishing outfit], and your own sermons are still being transcribed and being put into books that bless people all over the world. Now you’re an old man and you’re dying of cancer and it takes all of your energy to get up, put on your three-piece suit ...’ Which he continued to do. ‘... and sit in a chair and edit a manuscript for a while before crawling back into bed. How are you coping now that, basically, you’ve been put on the shelf?’ Wasn’t that a great question? Do you know what Lloyd-Jones said? He quoted this passage from the King James Version, of course, because he was from that vintage. “Do not rejoice that the demons are subject to you in my name but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” I am perfectly content.’ Because, you see, here was a man whose self-identity was not bound up, in the first instance, with his work, even gospel work. Here was a man whose self-identity was not bound up in the former fruitfulness of his life, even though that fruitfulness was very large. Here was a man quite unlike some older men who actually begin to tear down what they have built up because they’re a little resentful now of a younger generation coming along behind them. His self-identity and, thus, his contentment were bound up, in line with Jesus’ own instruction, with the fact that his name was written in heaven. Chosen by God, known by God, saved by God, accepted by God, secured with his name written in heaven. ‘I am perfectly content.’ That, too, you see is in Luke’s gospel in chapter 10 before you get to the parable of the good Samaritan.” Carson, “The Good Samaritan.”

²⁶ Merida, 24-25. If I had more time, I would have also explored the story immediately after the Parable of Good Samaritan, at the end of Luke 10. Here’s how D. A. Carson draws on that passage to make the point I am making: “Then after the parable of the good Samaritan (immediately after, in 10:38) we read, ‘As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”’ If you constrain everything in the Bible by the parable of the good Samaritan ripped out of its context, then what Jesus should have said was, ‘Hey, Mary! Stop listening to me. Show that you love your neighbor as yourself. Go help Martha.’ But what does Jesus answer? ‘Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’ What had she chosen? To be enraptured by the teaching and presence of Jesus. Now tell me in the context of Luke that the parable of the good Samaritan, ripped out of its context, really has as its primary point just to say how to become a Christian by being nice to people.” Carson, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan.”

²⁷ Merida, 25.

²⁸ Ryken, 539.

²⁹ Merida, 23.

³⁰ Ryken, 540.

³¹ Merida, 25-26.