

## “Who Is My Neighbor?” – Luke 10:25-37

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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](http://www.welovethegospel.com)]*

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

We have some ground to cover this morning, so I want to make haste and get into our text. We have been looking at this passage for a couple weeks already. Today will be the first week we will actually get into the parable itself. So far, we have simply considered its relevance and context. Today will be an introduction to it's content and then in the weeks to come we will be teasing out more of it's implications and applications.

So let me invite you to follow along as I read beginning in verse 25. 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?’<sup>26</sup> He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’<sup>27</sup> 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.’<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.<sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’<sup>37</sup> He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You go, and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:25-37)*

By now this is a familiar scene to most of you. An expert in God's Law approaches Jesus and asks about what he can do in order to inherit eternal life. We considered in previous weeks, how misguided this question was and how it was asked in order to make Jesus look bad.

Jesus responds with a question of His own to reveal the duplicity of the lawyer. *“What is written in the Law?”* That's a layup question for an expert in God's Law. Not surprisingly the lawyer answers well, drawing together two important Old Testament text that jointly have come to be known as the Great Commandments. The first is Deuteronomy 6:5, which shows that God expects us to love Him with a the total occupation of our heart, mind, and ability. The second command is lifted from Leviticus 19:18, where God's people are instructed to love their neighbors with the same enthusiasm and priority as they would love themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The lawyer knows the answer, but he seems to also sense that he has not lived up to his end of the bargain perfectly. When Jesus says, in verse 28, *“do this, and you will live,”* He's not setting the man on a legalistic path to somehow earn his eternal life. He's actually doing quite the opposite. He's giving the man an opportunity to confess his inability and the shortcomings of his self-righteous ways. Why would Jesus want the man to do this? *“Because to receive the mercy of God, we must all come first to the place where we despair our own moral efforts.”<sup>2</sup>* As Tim Keller explains,

“The law expert should have responded in the same way. If he had said, ‘I see! How then can anyone be righteous before God?’ then Jesus could have replied, ‘Only through the mercy of God,’ And the mercy of God is simply this. We must see that all of us are spiritually poor and bankrupt before God (Matt. 5:3), and even when we put on our best moral efforts for God, we appear as beggars clothed in filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Yet in Jesus Christ, God provided a righteousness for us (Rom. 3:21-22), a wealth straight from the account of the Son of God, who impoverished himself through suffering and death that we might receive it (2 Cor. 8:9).”<sup>3</sup>

That’s what we considered last week. This lawyer is trying to show himself worthy of eternal life—he’s trying to justify himself—but Jesus is trying to clarify that such an impulse is the fastest way to ensure that you will never inherit eternal life. He’s subtly guiding the lawyer closer to the conclusion that if perfect adherence to God’s Law is what is necessary for one to earn salvation, then the Law will never save any of us. As Paul put it, “*by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin*” (Romans 3:20; cf. Galatians 3:10). The Law reveals our guilt and need for a Savior. It never was intended to remove our guilt and give us a means to be our own savior. We considered last week how the surrounding context reinforces the point that salvation is an act of God’s grace, not our works.

But the lawyer doesn’t like where Jesus is going with all this. Seeing that he is exposed, the lawyer does what most are prone to do under the circumstance—he tries to “*justify himself*” (10:29). He doesn’t confess, but seeks to cover up his hypocrisy. He tries to save face. He grasps for loopholes. He searches for some way to come out sufficient in himself. And how does he do this? With a question designed to make the standard of God—perfect love for God and neighbor—more attainable. He employs a game of semantics to make the requirement more reachable. He asks, in verse 29, “*And who is my neighbor?*”

This is not an honest question. It’s self-serving. It’s “an attempt to evade the implications of his own summary of God’s law,” isn’t it?<sup>4</sup> Do you see what he’s doing? “Well, you see, Jesus, it’s not so easy to figure out who our neighbor is. Life is complicated. Which kind of people do we have to love? Who qualifies for being a neighbor in this command, ‘Love your neighbor’? Every race? Every class? Both sexes? All ages? Outcasts? Sinners?”<sup>5</sup> He wants to know the lines so he can live up to the expectation and he clearly doesn’t believe that when God’s Word talks about the his “neighbor” it meant everyone. He assumes there is a category of “non-neighbor.”

He’s clearly not the first Jew to have felt this way. In the *Halakah*, part of the Jewish oral tradition, it states in no uncertain terms that the neighbor of a Jew was a Jew, not an unbelieving Gentile.<sup>6</sup> In the Jewish Apocrypha, a collection of books that Protestants do not consider inspired by God and legitimately part of God’s Word, there is a book called Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus) that contains a passage that captures the sentiments of many of the Jews of the first century (and the centuries that preceded them).

“When you do a good deed, make sure you know who is benefiting from it; then what you do will not be wasted.<sup>2</sup> You will be repaid for any kindness you show to a devout person. If he doesn't repay you, the Most High will.<sup>3</sup> No good ever comes to a person who gives comfort to the wicked; it is not a righteous act.<sup>4</sup> Give to religious people, but don't help sinners.<sup>5</sup> Do good to humble people, but don't give anything to those who are not devout. Don't give them food, or they will use your kindness against you. Every good thing you do for such people will bring you twice as much trouble in return.<sup>6</sup> The Most High himself hates sinners, and he will punish them.<sup>7</sup> Give to good people, but do not help sinners.”  
(Sirach, 12:1-7; GNT)

So the lawyer in Luke 10 could have called on Jewish tradition to demonstrate that there was precedent for distinguishing between neighbor and non-neighbor when it came to acts of mercy. The Jews often thought of these matters in ethnocentric terms. They had obligation to their own, the covenant community, but not to outsiders (like Gentiles and sinners). The lawyer could have even argued from Leviticus 19—where we are told to love our neighbors as ourselves—that “neighbor” in that context meant “fellow Israelite.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, C. H.

Talbert paraphrased the lawyer's question: "How can I spot others who belong to God's people so that I can love them?"<sup>8</sup> He's doesn't want to know who to love as much as who he could ignore.<sup>9</sup>

But before we look down our noses at this man, perhaps we consider how often we play the same game. We don't deny that God calls us to be loving and generous, we just like to talk to Jesus a bit more about the scope of God's demands. Indeed, this man might as well be present-day American, saying things like:

"Oh come on, now, Lord, let's be reasonable. We know we are to help out the unfortunate, but just how far do we have to go?"

"You don't mean we should pour ourselves out for anyone! Doesn't charity begin at home?"

"You don't mean every Christian must get deeply involved with hurting and needy people. I am not very good in that kind of work; it's not my gift."

"I have a busy schedule and I am extremely active in my evangelical church. Isn't this sort of thing the government's job, anyway?"

"I barely have enough money for myself!"

"Aren't many of the poor simply irresponsible?"<sup>10</sup>

We don't often see ourselves cast in the role of the lawyer, but I could easily imagine Jesus responding to any one of these statements from our lips with the same Good Samaritan parable. If you want to grasp the message of the parable, you have to come to grips with the fact that there is a little lawyer in you too. You have to see that you, like him, often want to "whittle down" God's commands to make them more manageable so that you, like him, can keep your "works-righteousness approach to life intact."<sup>11</sup> We too sometimes struggle to lay down our own "self-justification projects."<sup>12</sup> We may draw the lines a bit different when determining who is worth our compassion and who is not, but we too excel at drawing lines. As Phil Ryken, the president at Wheaton College, explains,

"Sometimes we draw the boundary along ethnic lines, excluding people from a different background. Sometimes we draw it along religious lines. We do a decent job of caring for other Christians, but we have much less concern for people outside the church. Sometimes we draw the boundary along social lines, making a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Sometimes we simply exclude people whose problems seem too large for us to handle. But wherever we draw the line, we find the lawyer's logic compelling. We have to make choices in life. Our love has to have limits. Since we cannot help everybody, only certain people qualify as our neighbors. Everyone else will have to go somewhere else to get whatever help they need."<sup>13</sup>

We may not want to admit it, but the lawyer's reasoning seems to resonate with us. This sounds like a guy many of us would follow on Facebook and retweet from time to time. Maybe even a guy we'd vote into office. But Jesus doesn't seem so convinced. He doesn't accept the distinction that the lawyer imagines or the exception he is seeking. He doesn't like the lawyer's question. He doesn't like the impulse that stands behind the question, "Carving humanity up into groups, some of whom are worthy of our love and others [whom] are not."<sup>14</sup> So Jesus doesn't even answer the question. He bypasses the question and tells a category-shattering parable instead. With the parable Jesus actually sets a reverse trap. And the parable, as we will see next week, actually changes the question in a profound way. It answers the lawyer's question indirectly, but brings to the surface a more important question that the religious leader was overlooking heretofore.

So we are going to proceed through the remainder of the text under three headings, but we will only get to the first one today.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan  
The Point of the Good Samaritan  
The Pattern of the Good Samaritan

So let's consider the content of the parable itself.

### THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

For some reason (and we can chalk it up to my own depravity), the way the parable unfolds reminds me of one of those “three guys walk into a bar” jokes. You know the jokes. I came across one recently that went like this (and if you're easily offended or have no sense of humor, close your ears for a moment):

“A priest, a preacher and a rabbi walk into a bar. This is where they would get together two or three times a week for drinks [or...umm...coffee...] and to talk shop. On this particular afternoon, someone made the comment that preaching to people isn't really all that hard. A real challenge would be to preach to a bear.

One thing led to another and they decided to do an experiment. They would all go out into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and attempt to convert it. Seven days later, they came together to discuss the experience.

Father Michael, who has his arm in a sling, is on crutches, and has various bandages, goes first. ‘Well,’ he says, ‘I went into the woods to find me a bear. And when I found him I began to read to him from the Catechism. Well, that bear wanted nothing to do with me and began to slap me around. So I quickly grabbed my holy water, sprinkled him and, Holy Mary Mother of God, he became as gentle as a lamb. The bishop is coming out next week to give him first communion and confirmation.’

Reverend Billy Bob spoke next. He was in a wheelchair, with an arm and both legs in casts. In his best fire and brimstone oratory he claimed, ‘WELL brothers, you KNOW that we don't sprinkle! I went out and I FOUND me a bear. And then I began to read to my bear from God's WORD! But that bear wanted nothing to do with me. So I took HOLD of him and we began to wrestle. We wrestled down one hill, UP another and DOWN another until we came to a creek. So I quickly DUNKED him and BAPTIZED his hairy soul. And just like you said, he became as gentle as a lamb. We spent the rest of the day praising Jesus.’

They both looked down at the rabbi, who was lying in a hospital bed. He was in a body cast with IVs and monitors running in and out of him. He was in bad shape. The rabbi looks up and says, ‘Looking back on it, circumcision may not have been the best way to start.’<sup>15</sup>

Now, theological inaccuracies aside, this joke (and the genre of jokes that follow this pattern) is not unlike the structure of Jesus' parable. Stories like this were common in the ancient world, so it's quite possible that when Jesus began the parable the hearers were expecting three characters, a lesson at the end, and some sort of a twist. So how does this “three-guys” parable work?<sup>16</sup> Well let's go through it. First consider with me...

### *The Road and the Tragedy*

We are told in 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 setting—the road to Jericho—is one that Jesus' audience would have immediately recognized. As one writer explains,

“When Jews traveled from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north, they typically traveled east, down the mountains toward the Jordan River basin. They did this in order to go around Samaria, which lay between Judea and Galilee. Such was their loathing of Samaritans that they preferred this longer, more

treacherous route. Jerusalem sits nearly 2,100 feet (630 m.) above sea level; Jericho in the Jordan River Valley 850 feet (260 m.) below sea level. The 2,950-foot (900 m.) drop in less than 20 miles (32 km.) made for a bad road. The path wound its way through terrain perfect for bandits to ambush unwary travelers; for centuries, people called it ‘the bloody way.’”<sup>17</sup>

It proved to be the “the bloody way” for the man in the story. What was that guy doing traveling alone in these parts? It would have surprised no one listening to Jesus that the man was mugged, stripped, beaten, and left for dead along this road in a pool of his own blood.

We are not told anything about the identity of the man. Yet, given the location of the incident and the lack of additional comment, the assumption of the lawyer is probably that he was a Jew.<sup>18</sup> But in the moment it would have been impossible to tell. Why? Because different groups of people in that day were generally identified by their language, accent, and clothing. Priests would speak Hebrew. Peasants, Aramaic. The Phoenician language would be a dead giveaway that you were from the coastal region. Roman government officials conversed in Latin. You might speak many languages, but your accent would give you away. This man, however, is half-dead in an alley, so he’s not talking and no one moans with an accent. Furthermore, he’s naked. He has no clothing to tell a passerby what echelon of society he was from.<sup>19</sup> Was he a man of great note or just some hick from the sticks? If it makes a difference to you who was entitled to your help, there was nothing to say that this man qualified. So perhaps that helps us understand what happens next...

### *The Priest and the Levite*

As Jesus continues, we discover that “*by chance*” there was a priest who was traveling the same road. Seeing the battered man, the priest decides to pass by on the other side of the road. Next comes a Levite, who responds in exactly the same way. To help modern readers, D. A. Carson likens the priest to “a great and learned, nationally famous theologian” and the Levite to a “Baptist minister”.<sup>20</sup> If you were the half-dead man on the road, you may have rejoiced to see them approaching. These are the kinds of people you would expect to come to your rescue. But that excitement would evaporate as it becomes clear that these religious leaders are keeping their distance. Keller reminds us that...

“We should not be too quick to scorn these men, or we may discover we are convicting ourselves. Consider how you might react if you were anxiously taking a shortcut through a dark alley. Imagine that you see a groaning man on the ground, conclusive evidence that a marauding band of thugs is watching you around the corner! Surely the wisest thing to do is to hurry to safety and send some official to look after the poor victim. So you run.”<sup>21</sup>

Plus what if the man was just playing possum? Maybe he was just a decoy to attract unsuspecting prey so his cohorts could ambush. Sounds a bit risky. Maybe we should just say a prayer for the man and get out of dodge. In the moment, I’m confident I could come up with a hundred justifications for why I should *not* intervene and you probably can as well. They may not be any good, but they just need to be good enough to assuage our conscience enough to keep walking. So it’s not hard to see why these men did.

In addition, they could have reasoned that it was their religious duty to not intervene in this situation. They don’t know who this man is. What if he was a sinner who had received the judgment of God? What if he was a leper or a dead man? Touching him would render a person ceremonially unclean according to the Law (e.g., Lev. 21:1-3; Num. 5:2; 19:11-16; Ezek. 44:25-27; cf. *Mishnah, Nazir* 6:5; 7:1). If made “unclean,” the priest and the Levite would not be able to participate in religious ceremonies for at least a week.

“How easy it would have been for these religious professionals to think, ‘This will get in the way of my discharging a higher calling!’ So they walked by the man. In the process, however, they also passed by the clear teaching of Scripture—to have mercy on even strangers in need (Lev. 19:34). The irony of this

verse is that the priests and Levites were the very officers of God's people who were charged with helping the needy. The priests were the public health official, along with their other duties; the Levites were distributors of alms to the poor. This was a priestly calling, and yet these two pit their *schedule* (full of ceremonies and other valid religious duties) against their *purpose*. Clearly they neglected the principle that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22).<sup>22</sup>

An additional irony is that the priest and the Levite may have been returning home to Jericho after rendering religious service at the temple in Jerusalem. Jericho was, after all, "a town inhabited in the main by priests and Levites," so perhaps we are meant to imagine them returning home from a day of worship.<sup>23</sup> It would be like leaving church today after this sermon, seeing a man lying motionless a block from the church, and driving by with that shiny ichthus or witty Christian sticker—modern day, Evangelical phylacteries—on your rear bumper. What would you say to yourself as your drove by? "Church carried over today and I'm behind schedule. Besides I did my good deed for the day. I went to church. I've done my religious duty." Don't be deceived, friends. You have done no such thing, if you refuse to love your neighbor. "Self-protection, fear, and apathy are not excuses for passing by; they are indicators that reveal our hearts."<sup>24</sup> At what point does a sin of omission make you an accomplice to a crime?

In any case, like the identity of the victim, identifying the motive of the priest and Levite is impossible to diagnose with certainty.<sup>25</sup> The silence on these matters helps draw us into the story. It makes it easier to imagine yourself as the victim or your own excuses as those of the men who pass by on the other side of the road. Jesus is a brilliant storyteller. He knows exactly what to say and what to leave unsaid for maximum effect. Remember though that He is speaking to a lawyer, a religious leader among the Jews. The lawyer would have related to the priest and Levite most in the story. He may not have been surprised or troubled by their choice. He may have sympathized. But whatever he was thinking, there's no way he saw what comes next in the parable...

### *The Samaritan and the Surprise*

Verse 33 reads, "*But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.*" Jesus goes on to tell us in the next couple verses the surprising extent that this Samaritan goes to alleviate the suffering and assure the recovery of the victimized man. What's surprising about the end of the parable is not that there is a third man on the road or even that he goes out of his way to help. What's surprising is who the caregiver and hero of the story proves to be. It's not a religious leader. It's not, as we might have expected at this point, a Jewish layman. It's not a Jew at all. It's a Samaritan. A Samaritan!

Why is that significant? Because Samaritans were despised by the Jews. Remember how I told you that a Jew would rather take this dangerous road to Jericho and add hours to their commute just to avoid passing through Samaria? That's because they hated Samaritans. And that's putting it lightly. They viewed them as half-breeds, Jews who intermarried with pagans when the Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in the Old Testament. They were a people who practiced a syncretistic worship at sites that were not authorized by God's Law. So they were despised for their disloyalty and false worship, for racial and religious reasons. They were seen as "half-breed heretics." There was no love lost between the two groups.<sup>26</sup>

Do you remember the scene in the previous chapter when Jesus sends some of His disciples ahead to a Samaritan village to make preparations for Him as He passes through? The Samaritans did not receive Jesus well. They were inhospitable. I'm sure that just reinforced the prejudices of Jesus' disciples. But do you remember how James and John respond to these rude Samaritans? They don't go to Jesus and simply complain or suggest that they never come back through these villages again. No. They come to Jesus and ask Him permission and power to just murder those loathsome Samaritans. I kid you not! Verse 54 says,

*"And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?'" (Luke 9:54)*

That seems like a bit of an overreaction, doesn't it? Just saying. But that's the "sons of thunder" for you! Needless to say, Jesus rebukes His disciples. Fire doesn't rain down. They just move on to another village. What the story illustrates clearly though is that, from a Jew's perspective, a "good" Samaritan would have been like a unicorn, something that doesn't exist. It's an oxymoron. A contradiction of terms.<sup>27</sup>

When the lawyer heard Jesus say "Samaritan" did the right thing, he probably threw up a little in his mouth. It's a shocking twist.<sup>28</sup> Notice that when Jesus asks him the question at the end of the parable—"*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*"—the man answers correctly, but he can't even get himself to say, "the Samaritan." He simply says, in verse 37, "*The one who showed him mercy.*" That's how much he hated Samaritans. He couldn't even work up the nerve to say "Samaritan" out loud.

It's difficult to think of a modern equivalent. The best I've come across was a commentator who said that...

"...it would be something like an Islamic fundamentalist helping an evangelical Christian who was injured in a terrorist attack. It was the last thing anyone would expect, and in fact if the injured man had not been so desperate, he may have refused the Samaritan's help altogether. These men were not neighbors at all; they were enemies. Nevertheless, the Samaritan stopped to help, giving us the superlative example of what it means to be a good neighbor."<sup>29</sup>

Oh that had to hurt the lawyer. Jesus is not just putting the knife into the conscience of the lawyer. He's twisting it violently. The Samaritan would have been in that "non-neighbor" category that the lawyer had in mind. But now he was confronted with the reality that a Samaritan, an enemy, proved more neighborly than he would have been. Darrel Bock makes an interesting point as well:

"By making the Samaritan the example, Jesus points out that neighbors may come in surprising places. The lawyer's attempt to limit his neighbors may actually be limiting where his fellowship might come from. Those who run people through a sieve limit their capacity for meaningful friendship."

If the lawyer had to pick a "friend" in the story, the logical choice would have been the Samaritan, his enemy. If he was beaten and left for dead in some ditch, he would need someone to consider him a neighbor. Why should he be more discriminating when defining his own "neighbors." Truly the neighbor is anyone who needs help and that we are in a position to help. Even if that person is an enemy. That's the unavoidable conclusion.

There's more to it than that and Jesus is actually trying to answer more important question than "who is my neighbor?", as we will see next time. But what I want you to see today is that the lawyer's enemy is the one who proved to be the model of Jesus' ethic. A few chapters earlier, Jesus gave His followers these instructions to His followers:

*"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. <sup>31</sup> And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. <sup>32</sup> If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."* (Luke 6:27-36; cf. Matthew 5:43-45)

No one likes those instructions when they consider their enemies. Already you're engaging in mental gymnastics to try to explain away what Jesus has said. But you know what it takes for you to start liking these instructions? It takes realizing that you are not the good guy in the story. You're the enemy. And more than that, you were God's enemy, yet Christ came to earth to save you. That's what Paul says clearly in Colossians 1:21-22 and Romans 5:6-11. And once you realize this, once it really starts sinking into your soul, then those enemies and nobodies, the underserving you see on the metaphorical "roadsides" of your life, start looking more and more like neighbors every day. And instead of excuses coursing through our mind, the Word of God begins to grip us and guide us—"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful...Go and do likewise."

But more importantly, what Jesus is trying to get the lawyer (and us) to consider is much more profound:

"What if your only hope was to get ministry from someone who not only did not owe you any help—but who actually owed you the opposite? What if your only hope was to get free grace from someone who had every justification, based on your relationship to him, to trample you?"<sup>30</sup>

In truth, that situation is not all that hypothetical. It's your story and mine. It's the story of the Gospel. So let me close with these words from a book called, *Generous Justice*:

"According to the Bible, we are all like that man, dying on the road. Spiritually, we are 'dead in our trespasses and sins' (Ephesians 2:5). But when God came into our dangerous world, he came down our road. And though we had been his enemies, he was moved with compassion by our plight (Romans 5:10). He came to us and saved us, not merely at the risk of his life, as in the case of the Samaritan, but at the cost of his life. On the cross he paid a debt we could never have paid ourselves. Jesus is the Great Samaritan to whom the Good Samaritan points. Before you can give this neighbor-love, you need to receive it. Only if you see that you have been saved graciously by someone who owes you the opposite will you go out into the world looking to help absolutely anyone in need. Once we receive this ultimate, radical neighbor-love through Jesus, we can start to be the neighbors that the Bible calls us to be."<sup>31</sup>

And with that, we are set up nicely for the next sermon...So let's pray...

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<sup>1</sup> "How staggering these principles are! They reflect both the holiness of God and the fundamental debt we owe the one who gave us everything. Since he gave us all we have, we must give him all we are." Timothy Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Keller offers John Bunyan as an example of one who understood this. Bunyan described his own conversion thusly: "But one day...this sentence fell upon my soul, 'Thy righteousness is in heaven'; and methought withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, as my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could

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not say to me, 'He wants my righteousness,' for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, 'the same yesterday, today, and forever.' Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed.... Oh! methought, Christ! Christ! there was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes.... Now I could look from myself to him, and would reckon that all those graces of God that now were green on me, were yet but like those cracked groats and four-pence-half-pennies that rich men carry in their purses, when their gold is in their trunks at home: Oh! I saw my gold was in my trunk at home! In Christ my Lord and Saviour. Now Christ was all; all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption." John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. John P. Gulliver (London: Bradley, 1871), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Duane Litfin, *Word Versus Deed: Resetting the Scales to a Biblical Balance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 108.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 265. David Gooding conveys the reason like this: "Are we expected to treat every man jack in the whole of the world as our neighbor and love him as ourselves? And if that is impossible, where are we to draw the line? And are we to treat outrageous sinners and vicious tyrants and blaspheming heretics as our neighbors and love them, along with all others, as ourselves? Or may we with good common sense take the commandment as meaning by 'neighbor' the people in our family, or street, or synagogue, or at a stretch our fellow-nationals, but no more? Can we take it also that our political or national enemies, by being enemies, have ceased to be our neighbors?" David Gooding, *According to Luke: A New Exposition of the Third Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 203.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 229.

<sup>7</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 451; cf. Litfin, 109; Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 313.

<sup>8</sup> C. H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 122.

<sup>9</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Christians in the Age of Outrage: How to Bring Our Best When the World Is at Its Worst* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2018), 256.

<sup>10</sup> Examples drawn from Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, 14-15.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 66.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, vol. 1 (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 541.

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, "Love Your Unborn Neighbor," a sermon preached to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, on January 22, 2006, and accessed at the following website: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/love-your-unborn-neighbor>.

<sup>15</sup> Read in a sermon by Josh Black, called "Here Is Love," and accessed online at the following: <http://firstfreewichita.org/sermons/sermon/2017-07-16/here-is-love>.

<sup>16</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (SNTI; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 278.

<sup>18</sup> "Moreover, the point of the story demands it. The Old Testament was clear about the obligations Jewish brothers owed one another. Yet in violation of these duties, the victim was left to perish by his pious fellow Jews, in contrast to being accorded genuine neighbor love by a despised outside. This is precisely the contrast that makes the story so powerful." Litfin, 109-110.

<sup>19</sup> D. A. Carson, "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," in *D. A. Carson Sermon Library* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2016), Lk 10:25-37.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>23</sup> Sproul, 227.

<sup>24</sup> Raleigh Sadler, "The One Who Showed Mercy," a blog post created on March 9, 2015, and accessed at the following website: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-one-who-showed-mercy/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Jesus does not tell us why the priest and the Levite refused to help, yet it hardly matters. What excuse could possibly justify their refusal to save a man's life? If they were in a hurry, their families could wait. If there was a chance they might get ambushed, they should have died trying to save someone's life. Even if there was a chance that the man might be dead, their higher duty to try to save a life superseded any claim of the ceremonial law. These men had a righteous responsibility to stop and help, and when they failed to do so, they became accomplices to the man's murder." Ryken, 543.

<sup>26</sup> "The rabbis said, 'Let no man eat the bread of the Cuthites (Samaritans), for he who eats their bread is as he who eats swine's flesh.' The ultimate insult came in the arsenic-laced Jewish prayer that concluded, '...and do not remember the Cuthites in the Resurrection.' Add to this the fact that in Jesus' day some Jewish travelers had been murdered in Samaria, and that some Samaritans had defiled the temple with human bones, and you can begin to imagine the shock of Jesus' introducing a Samaritan not as a villain but as a hero! Indeed, if the Jew in the story were not half-dead, he would probably push away the loathsome Samaritan." R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 391.

<sup>27</sup> Ryken, 544.

<sup>28</sup> Even the Greek word order puts emphasis on the word "Samaritan."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

<sup>30</sup> Keller, *Generous Justice*, 76.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.