

October 18
Lesson 7 (KJV)

Love for Neighbors

Devotional Reading: John 5:1–15

Background Scripture: Leviticus 19:18, 34; Luke 10:25–37

Luke 10:25–37

25. And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26. He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27. And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30. And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37. And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Introduction

A. Good Samaritans at Altitude

Late in September 2018, Joshua Mason and his girlfriend, Katie Davis, flew from Texas to Colorado. The next day Joshua took Katie on a hike in the mountains northwest of Denver. After hiking about eight miles, they

reached the nearly 13,000-foot summit of Jasper Peak. Joshua was hoping to find an isolated and beautiful spot to “pop the question.” Jasper Peak provided such a location, and Katie said yes to the surprise proposal. But then things took a turn. Because they didn’t leave the trailhead till about noon and the trail to Jasper Peak isn’t clearly marked, the newly engaged couple became lost and disoriented when it started to get dark. Far from cell-phone service, they weren’t equipped or dressed to camp overnight in the cold of the high country, and they only had a little water. Coming to a cliff and unable to go any further, they began yelling for help.

About midnight, a camper who was hiking in the area heard their screams. When he discovered Joshua and Katie, they were showing signs of altitude sickness and severe dehydration. He led them to a group of his friends who were camping at a nearby lake. The campers provided the couple with water, food, and shelter in their tent, trying to help them get warm. But recognizing the seriousness of the situation, one of the campers hiked down to her vehicle and drove to where she could call 911.

Rescue crews reached Joshua and Katie about 4:30 a.m. Determining that they needed to move to a lower altitude immediately, the rescuers escorted them down to the trailhead.

This story includes several Good Samaritans who went out of their way to help Joshua and Katie. Today we will consider the Scripture passage that prompted that now-common term.

B. Lesson Context

In his Gospel, Luke recounts Jesus’ ministry in three major sections: (1) events in and around Galilee (Luke 4:14–9:50); (2) Jesus on His way to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44); and (3) the events of Jesus’ final week in Jerusalem (19:45–24:53). Luke’s Gospel is unique in its central section, which begins shortly before our lesson text. The majority of the parables found in Luke are located in this section, the first being the parable in our text. A primary theme of Jesus’ ministry in Judea was God’s love for the lost and lowly: sinners (example: Luke 15), outcasts (example: 14:15–24), Samaritans, and the poor (example: 16:19–31). Jesus’ countercultural teaching in last week’s lesson text, Luke 6:27–36, challenged us to demonstrate inclusive love even toward our enemies.

Today’s text calls us once again to practice inclusive love. In the passage just prior to our text (10:1–24), Jesus sent out 70 of His followers in pairs to proclaim, through word and deed, that “the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (10:9). Both Jesus and His 70 emissaries rejoiced at God’s power working through them (10:17–21).

Immediately preceding our lesson passage, Jesus spoke with His 70 followers at the conclusion of their fruitful mission (Luke 10:17–20). Although some commentators view Jesus’ interaction with this “lawyer” (10:25) as an interruption of His debriefing discussion with the disciples, the exact time and place of this scene is unspecified.

This parable is unique to Luke, but its subject matter and setting are similar to texts found in Matthew and Mark. Matthew 22:34–40 and Mark 12:28–34 are clearly parallel to one another, but the connection to Luke is less certain (compare Luke 10:27, below). The Lucan event appears to be a separate incident covering the same theme.

I. Questioning (Luke 10:25–29)

A. Regarding Eternal Life (vv. 25–28)

25a. And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him.

This man wasn’t a lawyer in the sense familiar to us, but rather was a scholar educated in the Old Testament law and the Jewish traditions surrounding it. The fact that the lawyer stood up indicates that Jesus was speaking and His listeners were sitting. This was a typical, respectful pose when listening to a rabbi teach.

The idea of tempting is the same as in Jesus’ temptation (Luke 4:1–13), which can be appropriately also considered a test. Evidently the lawyer wasn’t sincerely seeking to be taught by Jesus as much as he was interested in how Jesus would answer. We have to wonder if the lawyer was hoping to show up Jesus.

25b. Saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

By calling Jesus Master, the lawyer at least wanted to give the impression that he respected Jesus. His question conveyed a perspective of salvation by works. Yet his response to Jesus' own question showed that the lawyer knew that mere works without faith are dead (compare James 2:14–26; see commentary on Luke 10:27, below). The lawyer's question likely has its basis in the connection between obedience to the law and gifts of inheritance and life (see Deuteronomy 6:16–25). In the Old Testament, obedience to God is often associated with His blessings while rebellion against Him is similarly associated with curses (example: Deuteronomy 28). The lawyer may have wanted to be able to identify Jesus with either the Sadducees, who denied any resurrection of the dead (Matthew 22:23), or the Pharisees, whose emphasis on keeping the law frequently resulted in outward actions that did not reflect a heart yielded to God (example: 23:13–36). The lawyer would be well acquainted with both groups and likely had some level of affiliation with one or the other.

26. He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

Instead of answering immediately, Jesus asked His own questions. Given the fact that the questioner is a Jewish scholar, it is fitting that Jesus asked him how he read and interpreted the law.

27. And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

The lawyer's reply alludes to the great Shema of Deuteronomy 6:5, which Jews recited daily: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." To that the lawyer adds the law of neighbor love found in Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." These answers showed that the lawyer knew mere rule-keeping was not the path to life. Instead, love of God expressed as love for neighbor leads to life. This combination of loving the Lord your God and loving your neighbor as yourself has become known as the "great commandment."

28. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

Jesus' seemingly final word to the lawyer was this commendation of the man's right answer.

B. Regarding Neighbors (v. 29)

29. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

The lawyer found himself challenged (see commentary on Luke 10:25a, above) and so looked to justify himself. Although the lawyer acknowledged previously that Leviticus 19:18—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"—is a summary statement of the law (see Luke 10:27), he took advantage of the ambiguity of the word neighbour. In the original context of Leviticus 19:18, love for neighbors is love for fellow Israelites, although that love was to be extended to "strangers" who came to Israel from another land and lived among them (see Leviticus 19:33–34). The land of Israel in Jesus' day under Roman occupation was comprised of many who were not Israelites.

With his question, the lawyer clearly seemed to be trying to create a distinction, making the point that some people are neighbors (and thus required to be loved) and some people are not. The notion that some people are not neighbors is what Jesus addressed in His parable.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances, if any, should Christians ask questions regarding who should be helped and who should not?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 5:45; 10:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:3–12; 2 John 9–11; and 3 John 5–8 help frame your answer?

Won't You Be a Neighbor?

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood began airing in 1968 and ran for 895 episodes. Dressed in his signature cardigan sweater, Mr. Rogers invited children to visit his neighborhood with his theme song, "Won't You Be My Neighbor?"

Fred Rogers trained to be a Presbyterian minister but decided to go into television because he hated the medium of TV! While children's programming typically featured animation and frantic action, Rogers labeled those features as "bombardment." He did not play a character as did his contemporaries like Captain Kangaroo and Soupy Sales. Rogers believed that being one's honest self was one of the greatest gifts one person could give to another.

Fred Rogers was not afraid to expand his neighborhood. During a time of racial segregation, Mr. Rogers was shown cooling his feet in a pool on a hot day with Officer Clemmons, an African-American policeman. In addition, Rogers championed children with disabilities on the show, including having a young quadriplegic boy demonstrate how a wheelchair worked. Rogers did not ask, "Who is my neighbor?" He knew!

—J. E.

II. Storytelling (Luke 10:30–37)

A. The Victim (v. 30)

30. And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

Rather than answering the lawyer's question directly, Jesus told a story. Like other Jewish teachers in His time, Jesus used a parable to explain a Scripture text—in this case, Leviticus 19:18. Since the details of parables were true to life, we can increase our understanding of the parable by exploring the historical and cultural contexts supporting it.

Although Jesus' audience likely assumed the opening character to have been a Jew, Jesus never specified his identity. The man remains anonymous throughout the story.

Since Jerusalem is about 2,500 feet above sea level and Jericho is about 800 feet below sea level, a traveler setting out from Jerusalem certainly would have gone down in order to reach Jericho. Winding its way through rocky desert, this 17-mile road was infamous for its danger. The caves along the way presented thieves with numerous opportunities to ambush travelers.

Jesus focused on the violent mistreatment the man received at the hands of the thieves. They were not content to simply take his raiment, or garments; the thieves left him for dead. One would hope that these evildoers were the only characters in the parable to show such callous disdain for human life.

B. Two Potential Heroes (vv. 31–32)

31–32. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

Priests, who were descendants of Levi and Aaron, served as God's representatives to the people; Levites served as assistants to priests (2 Chronicles 13:10). So, why didn't these servants of God serve the wounded man? Some speculate that they feared that whoever attacked the man was lurking nearby and might attack them as well. Or perhaps they feared becoming ritually unclean, and thus unable to fulfill their religious duties, by touching what appeared to be a dead body (see Leviticus 21:1–4; Numbers 5:2; etc.).

The latter argument has been countered by geography: to go down from Jerusalem indicated that they had completed their temple responsibilities and were heading home. In addition, the Jewish practice was to bury a dead person on the same day. This should have compelled both priest and Levite to investigate the victim's status with regard to that requirement.

But before getting too deep into the weeds of speculative mind-reading, we remind ourselves that this is a fictional story—a parable to make a point. Since no motive is stated by Jesus, there is no motive to be discerned. The characters of negligent priest and Levite serve as the stark backdrop to what comes next.

C. One Actual Hero (vv. 33–35)

33. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

When the northern kingdom of Israel was exiled to Assyria centuries earlier, some Israelites were left behind. The intermarriage of some of these Israelites with the Gentiles who were brought into the land (see 2 Kings 17:24) resulted in the population known as Samaritans. The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and asserted that God must be worshipped on Mount Gerizim rather than Jerusalem (consider the question in John 4:20). The Jews in Jesus' day despised the Samaritans and refused to associate with them (4:9). And of course the feelings were mutual. Needless to say, a Samaritan would be the last person a Jew would expect to show compassion to another Jew.

What Do You Think?

What has experience taught you about compassion that is reactive (sees a problem happen, then helps) versus proactive (anticipates a problem, then helps before it happens)?

Digging Deeper

In which type of compassion can you help your church improve most?

34. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

In stark contrast to the inactivity of the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan actively ministered to the needy man. Both Jews and Greeks appear to have used wine and oil widely for medicinal purposes. Wine would have been used to clean the man's wounds, the alcohol having an antiseptic effect. Olive oil would ease the man's pain. The Samaritan then set him on his own beast, likely a donkey, which means he himself now had to walk. Inns were places of potential danger, not just for theft but also potentially murder. But from beginning to end, the Samaritan considered the care of the injured man of greater value than the risk involved.

What Do You Think?

If you saw a car broken down on the side of the road, would using a cell phone to call for assistance be the same as stopping to offer help personally? Why, or why not?

Digging Deeper

If stopping to help personally meant risking your own safety in the process, would you do it?

35. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Some scholars estimate that two pence would have been sufficient for two months of room and board in an inn. By entering into such an open-ended arrangement with the innkeeper, the Samaritan was running the risk of being a victim himself—of extortion. As Jonathan interceded with his father, King Saul, on David's behalf (1 Samuel 19:1–7; see lesson 5), here the Samaritan interceded on the wounded man's behalf. Both Jonathan and

the Samaritan demonstrated faithful love—Jonathan in the context of an existing covenant and the Samaritan in his obvious regard for human life.

How Unexpected!

The English language doesn't have a word that completely captures the idea of an "unexpected hero," such as we see in the case of the Good Samaritan. Various words have been proposed—words such as antihero and picaro—to only partial success. The problem is that those words and others bring with them nuances that may not apply to the unexpected hero who is under consideration. A picaro, for example, is a societal outcast, but that status is due to his or her own roguish behavior. The Good Samaritan was a societal outcast as well, but that status was due to no behavior of his own! Rather, it was an issue of bloodline.

Jesus used unexpected heroes in parables to challenge contemporary thinking. In addition to that of today's text, we are drawn to the parables of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), the shrewd manager (16:1–12), and a penitent tax collector (18:9–14). We have a choice when we read these: the unexpected hero in each can be a model for us or we can be the contrast to the unexpected hero in each. It's our choice.

—J. E.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances is it better to help others through efforts of group ministries rather than personally?

Digging Deeper

How do the changing procedures of Acts 2:45; 4:32–35; 6:1–6; 1 Timothy 5:3–11 inform your response?

III. Directing

(Luke 10:36–37)

A. Short Review (vv. 36–37a)

36. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

Having finished His parable, Jesus countered the lawyer's question with one of His own. The lawyer had asked "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus changed the question and shifted the focus to, "Who acted like a neighbor?" In Jesus' view, trying to identify whom one is called to love is an obvious attempt to relinquish responsibility. To do so is to reveal one's motivation of trying to find ways to avoid obeying God rather than embracing the call to love as God loves.

37a. And he said, He that shewed mercy on him.

The lawyer cannot bring himself to say the word Samaritan! As a Jew, he couldn't fathom the notion of a good Samaritan. But at least the lawyer grasped the point of Jesus' parable, recognizing the mercy and action that set the Samaritan apart from the priest and the Levite. Just as the lawyer "answered right" in the first exchange (Luke 10:27–28), so he answered correctly here. However, his avoidance of saying the word Samaritan likely revealed that the lawyer still considered some people neighbors and others unworthy of that designation.

B. Lifetime Call (v. 37b)

37b. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Here is Jesus' final word (compare Luke 10:28). The lawyer appeared to be hoping that he could limit his responsibility by being a neighbor to only a select few. With this profound parable, Jesus conveyed that rather than calculating who is a neighbor and who is not, the lawyer should heed Jesus' call to be a neighbor to

whoever crosses his path.

This is the only reference to this lawyer in the Bible. We don't know how he responded to Jesus and the gospel later on. He heard Jesus' message. Did he embrace it and act on it? Did he remember it whenever a foul joke was told about Samaritans or he encountered one on the road to Jericho?

Conclusion

A. Looking for a Loophole

By asking the question "Who is my neighbor?" the lawyer in our lesson text was looking for a loophole—a loophole of being able to choose whom he was responsible to care about and care for. Surely God didn't intend for him to love all people. Surely some people did not merit his time and resources.

What Do You Think?

Case study: Your next-door neighbor, who is a single mother, calls you from jail asking you to post her \$5,000 bond. You have the money, but discover that that's only the 10 percent cash portion required. The other 90 percent must come from the court's putting a lien on your house. What do you do?

Like the lawyer, we can be guilty of looking for a loophole. When we hear the Bible's teaching about loving our neighbors as ourselves, we can grasp the meaning in principle that we are to love and serve people everywhere in need. But it's tempting to embrace that as a theoretical concept in a way that leads to no tangible action. Or we can be tempted to care for those neighbors who look like us, speak like us, or share our social status, and we fail to care for those who are different. How could Jesus possibly mean that every single person is someone we should strive to love?

If we are looking for a way out of loving that person who is too difficult, or in too much trouble, or frankly probably wouldn't help us if the tables were turned, then we betray our hearts that do not love as God loves. Instead of looking for loopholes, let us search for opportunities to use what God has given us to bless all our neighbors.

B. Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for giving us the great commandment for Your glory and our fulfillment. We want to love You with all that is within us. And we want to love our neighbors—whomever You place before us—in the same way we love ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.