

The Good Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37
Key Verse: 10:37

"The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

In today's passage Jesus tells a story about a Samaritan. It has come to be called the parable of the good Samaritan. It has inspired countless people down through the ages to do good, especially to help the needy. Today we see many "Good Samaritan Churches," and so many "Good Samaritan Hospitals" that we cannot count them all. There are also "Good Samaritan laws" to protect people who help the needy from lawsuits. The story of the good Samaritan has had a powerful effect on humankind. Why? Because it reveals the compassion of God and the grace of Jesus Christ.

This passage can be divided into two parts. In verses 25-29 Jesus talks with an expert in the law. He was a brilliant scholar. However, he had a problem: he had no strength to practice what he knew. In verses 30-37, Jesus told him the story of the good Samaritan. Jesus wanted to strengthen him to do good for the glory of God. May Jesus do the same for us today.

I. "Do this and you will live" (25-29)

Look at verse 25. "On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" To become an expert in the law was not easy. It required rigorous study from a young age. This man must have memorized the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. He must have taken many tests. When he studied well he might have received ice cream. If not, he might have received a sharp rebuke. So he learned to study hard. While other boys played outdoor games, such as soccer and baseball, he spent time in the library reading, researching and writing papers. His hard work paid off. Now he was an honorable expert in the law. So he stood up with confidence to test Jesus. He does not seem malicious. But he was proud of his knowledge.

The man's question was, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Though his intention was to challenge Jesus, there was real substance to his question. It must have reflected his own desperate struggle. God made man to live eternally with him. Life is right, and life is good, and life should go on forever. We know this in our souls. But the reality is that all people die. This power of death drives people to despair, and to hedonism. It stifles the soul's cry for eternal life, and makes people stop asking about the ultimate questions. Still, however, this man was seeking the way of eternal life.

The man thought that by "doing something" he could "inherit" eternal life. This is rather contradictory. Generally, inheritance is given from love. It is too great to be earned; it is given freely to be received with gratitude. God wanted to give eternal life to humankind as a loving Father to his children. In return, he wanted people to be thankful, and to love and serve him joyfully. But man forfeited this inheritance due to sin. Since then, a sense of lost eternity resides in the souls of men. This caused the expert in the law to be very desperate. In his desperation, he wanted to do something to earn eternal life. However, eternal life cannot be attained by man's effort. This man needed to turn away from himself and look up to God.

To help him, Jesus first pointed him to the Law. Look at verse 26. "'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?'" The Law is the word of God. The word of God is a trustworthy guide to eternal life. New age mediums and spiritists promise answers to the problem of life. But they are dead (Isa 8:20). On the other hand, the Bible is God's word. God is the author of life. So the Bible can teach us the way to eternal life.

The expert knew the Law well. In verse 27, "He answered: '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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" It was not an interpretation, or his own opinion. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. He demonstrated a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the Law. Jesus said, "You have answered correctly, A+."

Then Jesus touched the man's problem. Look at verse 28b. Jesus said, "Do this and you will live." Knowing was not enough. The man needed to do what the law commanded. Herein was his problem. Though he spoke well he had no power to obey it. Though he was willing to do something, he felt powerless and utterly helpless before the demands of the law. He could not love God. He did not even know God. And the thought of loving his neighbor made his

head spin. In fact, knowing the Law did not help him live a better life; rather, it condemned him as a sinner who deserved to die. Historically, the nation of Israel had failed again and again to love God and love their neighbors. Israel's history was a repetition of falling into idol worship and receiving God's punishment.

God's offer of life to those who keep the law has always been valid. Romans 2:7 says, "To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life." God will keep his promise without fail. The problem is that no one can do this, for the sinful nature weakens man entirely (Ro 8:3). So the law that was intended to give life actually brings death. St. Paul explained the deeper purpose of the law in Romans 3:20: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." An honest study of the law, applied to our own lives, should lead us to admit that we fall short, the fault is ours, and we are without excuse.

It was time for the expert to surrender before the word of truth. But he did not. He wanted to justify himself. So he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (29) Instead of dealing with the major point of loving God, the man diverted the conversation to the secondary issue of loving his neighbor. His intention was to define the word "neighbor" in such a way that it excluded many people. To some orthodox Jews, "neighbor" excluded women, children and Gentiles. If the man could restrict the definition sufficiently, making the circle of people he had to love small enough, there might be a chance he could live up to this second teaching.

Though the expert in the law was knowledgeable and clever, he had failed to grasp something very important: the heart of God. God gave the law after his amazing grace of deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Ultimately, the people of Israel could live in covenant with him only by God's grace. God wanted them to remember this grace and live by this grace. So he commanded them to celebrate the Passover and other annual feasts. God provided the sacrificial system, inviting his people to shed animal blood for the forgiveness and cleansing of their sins. Trying to practice the law without the means of grace God provided was futile. No one can earn the right to eternal life by working in their own strength. God gives eternal life as a gift to those who trust his love and ask his grace. King David knew this secret. Though he had sinned greatly against God, he repented and pleaded for God's mercy. God forgave his sins and gave him eternal life. David had assurance of eternal life deep within his soul. So he said in Psalm 16:11, "You have made known to me the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." The expert in the law needed this kind of assurance in his heart. For that, he needed to know the heart of God and the grace of God. Let's see how Jesus cared for him.

II. Jesus tells the story of the good Samaritan (30-37)

Though Jesus had helped the man struggle with simple and clear Bible truth, the man had tried to escape. Jesus must have realized that theological argument was not going to be effective. So Jesus adopted a new approach. Jesus told the most beautiful story of the good Samaritan. In this way, Jesus appealed directly to the man's heart. Let's listen.

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead." The twenty mile journey from Jerusalem to Jericho is a sharp downhill descent from 2,400 feet above sea level to 1,300 feet below sea level. It is a barren desert area and was historically the haunt for robbers of various kinds. They could waylay travelers, rob them, and then disappear into the desert without being apprehended. This story was real to the people listening. In Chicago Jesus might have talked about someone being mugged by neighborhood gang members. The poor victim was left naked and wounded. Pain throbbed throughout his body. He must have felt terribly lonely and sorrowful as he laid on the roadside, left for dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road. Perhaps he had just finished his weekly duty in the temple. He might even have delivered the Sabbath day message. Then he came upon the dying man. He might have thought that touching a dead body would make him ceremonially unclean. Or that the danger of robbers was palpable, so it was too dangerous to stop. He might have been eager to get home to his wife and children, and said an emergency prayer, "God, save me from robbers on the way home." In any case, he passed by on the other side of the road. Then a Levite appeared. Levites were temple servants, entrusted with liturgy and music ministry. The Levite might have pulled out his guitar and sang, "I'm so sorry for your trouble; life is often so unfair. But it may be you deserve it; for the sin I guess you bear." Then he sensed possible danger from robbers, and hurried away.

Look at verses 33-35. "But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'" The Samaritan did well. What made him different from the priest and the Levite? We learn two things from him.

First, the Samaritan had the compassion of God. When the Samaritan saw the half-dead man, "he took pity on him." This is another way of saying that he had compassion on the man. Compassion means that he put himself in the half-dead man's place and felt the same thing he was feeling: pain, the awful loneliness and sorrow. This motivated him to help the man at any cost. Compassion made him selfless and sacrificial. The Samaritan did not hesitate, thinking about his own safety. All that mattered to him was helping the half-dead man to get well. So he went to him boldly. He sacrificed much to help him: using his oil and wine, his own donkey, and spending lavishly--even offering an open line of credit to ensure the man's complete healing.

Why was the Samaritan so compassionate? It is because he was made in the image of God. He was mirroring God's own compassion on the needy. When God revealed himself to Moses, the first thing he said about himself was that he is the "compassionate and gracious God" (Ex 34:6). Human beings have the capacity to bear the same compassionate and gracious image. Perhaps Jesus made the Samaritan the hero to underscore this point. Samaritans were known to be religious pluralists. They had a confused idea of worship. They did not follow the Law of God well. Jews looked down on Samaritans as inferior in their spiritual and moral life. And yet this Samaritan did a better job of loving his neighbor than the Jewish religious leaders. The Samaritan's compassion did not come from the Law, but from the image of God in him. By telling the story this way, Jesus illustrates that having God's compassion in one's heart is more important than superior knowledge of the Law. How then can we have God's heart of compassion? We must ask God for help. God can take away our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (Eze 36:26). Anyone can have a new heart by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Second, the Samaritan reveals the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps we can all relate to the half-dead man. The power of sin and the devil attacked us, wounding us mortally. We were dead in our transgressions and sins (Eph 2:1). Our souls were full of open sores; we were powerless. The law passed us by, unable to bring healing or life. But Jesus did not pass us by. Jesus came down from heaven to help us. Jesus did not condemn us for our wrongs. Jesus understood our pain and the anguish of our souls. Jesus came as a tender, understanding friend. Jesus was willing to pay the price to heal and restore us. Isaiah 53:4-5 say, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." By Jesus' grace we could be healed of all the consequences of sin and become healthy children of God. Jesus has also given us the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, care for us, and guide us, until he returns in power and great glory. Jesus has poured out his grace upon us in rich abundance to give everything we need to prosper spiritually. Jesus' grace is a fountain that flows without ceasing, an inexhaustible supply of the strength we need to love God and others. Hebrews 4:16 invites us, saying, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Jesus concluded by asking who was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers. Look at verse 37. "The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'" "Go and do likewise." With these words, Jesus urges the man, and all of us, to practice mercy as we seek to follow the Law of God. We can practice mercy when we share the compassionate heart of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This enables us to love God and to love our neighbor.

In doing this, we must answer the question, "Who is my neighbor." In line with the spiritual direction of UBF ministry, college students are our neighbors. They need shepherds. They look fine outwardly: handsome or beautiful, intelligent, and artistic. But on the inside many are broken or lonely. Many have no clear identity, and no real truth to stand on. They are insecure, anxious and feel lost. They need to know that God loves them and Christ died for them. They need to receive in word and deed through "good Samaritans." Then they can find their identity as God's children and his direction for their lives. We must not pass by them, but respond to their cry.

However, in light of this story, we should expand our neighborhood. We should be ready to serve anyone we meet who is in need of God's grace and compassion. It may be someone in our workplace, common life, or even a

stranger we meet while shopping or traveling. It includes those of other nations, like Russia, Muslim countries, North Korea and China. It may also be our literal neighbor. I pass one of my neighbor's houses several times a day going back and forth from my home to the center. He is an older Italian man who has lived here for over fifty years. He is the most diligent in shoveling snow, raking leaves and watering the lawn. He also guards the parking spot in front of his house as though it were his personal property. He leaves "no parking" notes on the car of anyone who tries to park there, and then yells at them if they don't move. So no one liked him. I did not like him because he yelled at two of my children. But the words, "Love your neighbor," came to me. So I prayed to love him. Strangely, he began to talk to me. He shared that he guarded the parking spot for the sake of his elderly mother. We began to make friends. Then he asked me to find a marriage candidate for him. I told him that I would pray for him. I thank God for this small victory. Still, I need God's mercy to care for the needy. We all need God's help. Let's pray to learn the compassion of God, remember Jesus' grace, and be like good Samaritans in this generation. Let's "go and do likewise."