

10/8/23 Parable of The Good Samaritan – Practical Love

Luke 10:25-37

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Good morning! My name is Pastor David Pranga. I am one of the pastors here at Brewster Baptist Church. I am so glad that you have joined us today. Whether you are watching online from your living room couch or if you're here in our beautiful sanctuary, I am so glad that you have made the choice to be with us today.

I thought I would begin today by sharing with you one of the highlights from my summer. As many of you know, Christy and I are from Wisconsin. We both love seeing our family. This year, we had a reunion on my mother's side of the family. We had 55 family members attend a weekend gathering at my parents' house. Then my parents hosted their immediate family (my siblings' families) all together. This year, we had 22 out of 24 family members there.

What I really enjoy are the evenings. It is usually dusk when my dad will make a beautiful fire in the fire pit. Everyone will gather around the fire. We share stories and reminisce about events that happened in our lives together.

These stories bring laughter and joy to everyone who is listening. There are stories that get shared every year. That way nobody ever forgets.

Sometimes these stories are embarrassing – like my dad sharing with everyone about when I played basketball in elementary school. My dad will share how I was the leading scorer for both teams at halftime. Some of the grandkids looked puzzled. How can that be? My dad will explain how I made many baskets for our own team, but also, how I made the only basket for the opposing team. The grandkids would laugh and smile.

Some stories teach a point. My sister will never live down how she switched ingredients in making pizza crust. She switched baking soda for baking powder. The pizza crust just did not turn out. We had to throw it away. Then someone in the family will talk about something they messed up in cooking as well.

Sometimes stories can just be fun as we relive family trips, camping, or learning to drive.

Why do we love telling and sharing stories? Stories are easy to remember. They are personal experiences. They often bring laughter and a smile to our face. Sharing stories allows us to come together. Stories teach us about life, about ourselves, and about others.

Do you know who is one of the best storytellers there ever was? Jesus. Jesus was a master storyteller. Jesus was a master communicator. Jesus was a master of knowing what to say and how to say it at just the right time.

Jesus often would teach by telling stories or parables. A parable is a simple story to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. These parables would teach people a truth or challenge the hearers to change their behavior.

This week, we are continuing a series called “Important Choices”. This morning, I am going to be sharing with you the parable of The Good Samaritan, found in *Luke 10:25-37*. Jesus shares this powerful story to illustrate the foundation of what it means to live the Christian life.

I want to set the scene for you. Jesus is with his disciples. There is a crowd that is following Jesus. There stands an expert in the law, a lawyer. *This expert in the law was particularly skilled in the scriptures and in how the law was to be interpreted and applied in specific and often complicated situations.* This guy was very intelligent, and people looked up to him. He was also quite arrogant. He wanted to challenge Jesus and put him to the test.

What do we know from scripture when someone challenges Jesus? It never ends well for them.

Luke 10:25: On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Another way of saying this could be, “What must I do to for God to be pleased with me? What must I do to show God that I love him? What must I do to make sure God is happy with me?” These are questions that many of us ask ourselves at times. We want God to be happy with us. We want God to be pleased with us. Some of us are not sure what that looks like.

Instead of answering the question that the lawyer asked, Jesus turned the question back on him, since he was an expert in the law.

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” 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.’” (Luke 10:26-27)

The lawyer quoted *Deuteronomy 6:5*. It was a passage that every single Jewish boy and girl in the audience would have had to memorize. Everyone there listening would be nodding their head in agreement. Everybody knew the greatest commandment. This was not a surprise.

What was a surprise is that the expert in the law quoted, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” I believe the expert in the law must have heard Jesus’ teaching on this earlier. *As Christians today, we take for granted that these two commandments go together. In the first century, Jewish people did not combine these commandments.*

What does the law say?

Greatest Commandment – *God wants us to Love the Lord your God with heart, soul, strength, and mind.* I look at this as vertical love. It’s between us and God.

Second Commandment – *Love Your Neighbor as yourself.* I look at this as horizontal love. God wants us to share love with the people around us.

Both commandments are equally important to Jesus. Jesus was simply saying that the first commandment cannot be fulfilled unless you practice the second commandment. They go hand in hand with each other. They are on par with each other. God wants us to love Him (vertical love). God wants us to love our neighbor (horizontal love). By loving our neighbor, we are showing God that we are loving him too.

Jesus responds to the lawyer’s answer, **“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” (Luke 10:28)**

The lawyer was not done. The real question the lawyer wanted to ask was next. ***But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29)***

The lawyer was trying to do the bare minimum. The lawyer believed that only some people were worthy of the status of neighbor. He wanted Jesus to define who was and who was not his neighbor.

The lawyer was referring to ***Leviticus 19:18: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord.”***

How many of you have ever heard someone say, “one of my people”? Now you know where the phrase originated. When people use this term, they are usually referring to a certain group of people. Maybe it is their friend, race, ethnicity, or political affiliation. Most likely, in this case, the lawyer was looking at only the Jewish people.

The lawyer wanted Jesus to define who his neighbor is. The lawyer wanted a simple, clear answer. How does Jesus respond? Jesus responds with a story that can be passed on from generation to generation.

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho*, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. (Luke 10:30)

**This was a very dangerous path (17-mile path) that was known for people being attacked and robbed by bandits.*

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (Luke 10:31-32)

Jesus shares this story about a man traveling to Jericho who was robbed, beaten up, and left for dead. The first two characters, the Priest and the Levite, passed by the man as if he was not worthy of any attention. They just crossed the road to avoid the man.

This would have shocked the Jewish crowd who was listening.

We don't know why the Priest or Levite didn't help. Maybe they thought their work was more important. Maybe they thought it was not their right to interfere in the situation, or it would make them unclean. Maybe they thought it was somebody else's responsibility.

Jesus does not tell us why they chose not to help. All we know is that neither the Priest nor the Levite showed love or compassion towards the neighbor.

The crowd and lawyer are waiting to see who the third character will be for the story. Who would Jesus pick to be the neighbor?

Jesus introduces a character that nobody saw coming. Jesus picks the most hated villain to be a good neighbor and the hero in the story. Jesus picks a Samaritan. Today, when we hear the word Samaritan, it means something good, “the good Samaritan” or an organization such as Samaritan’s Purse. That was not always the case. Back in the first century, Samaritans were despised and hated. The Jewish people would not speak to or have anything to do with a Samaritan. Remember the saying, “nothing good could come from Samaria”? Samaritan people violated the Jewish laws, disobeyed God, and intermarried with people outside of Israel. There was an unspoken rule that everybody knew. These two people groups did not get along.

What does Jesus do? Jesus picks the Samaritan. As we continue in verse 33: ***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, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii 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.’ (Luke 10:33-35)***

I cannot imagine what the Jewish crowd was thinking. I cannot imagine what his disciples were thinking – “Jesus, how could you make the Samaritan the hero in the story? People are going to get up and leave.”

It was the Samaritan who showed practical love in the story. The Samaritan showed compassion and provided care to the half-dead man. The Samaritan stopped to see how the man was. The Samaritan touched the man and bandaged his wounds. He then poured oil and wine on the man to clean up his cuts and bruises. The Samaritan let the man ride his donkey, while he walked. Then the Samaritan took the man to an inn and had him cared for.

If that was not enough and over the top, Jesus said, the Samaritan came back the next day and paid for the man’s expenses – two denarii. The Samaritan then said he would return and pay any additional expense over and above that.

Jesus went out of his way by telling how a Samaritan was the neighbor that showed mercy, compassion, and practical love in the story.

I can only imagine Jesus turning to the lawyer and asking this question: ***“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”*** (Luke 10:36)

This was not a tough question for the lawyer, or for the Jewish crowd who heard the story. Jesus says, “Which of these three people was the neighbor?”

Which of these three people *loved the Lord your God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength*? Which of these three people loved a stranger like themselves?

The lawyer knew the answer. The Jewish crowd knew the answer. We all know the answer.

Why does Jesus want the expert in the law to answer the question? I believe Jesus wanted the lawyer to *personally acknowledge* who his neighbor was. It was far greater in scope than what the lawyer previously thought.

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:37)

I find it interesting that the expert in the law could not say the word “Samaritan”. He could not find it in himself to compliment a group of people that the Jewish people could not stand. The lawyer simply says, “*The one who had mercy on him.*”

Jesus responds with, **“Go and do likewise.”**

In the story, the expert in the law wanted to know who his neighbor was. Jesus’ definition of our neighbor is that *every human being who is in need is our neighbor*. We need to remember that every person is made in the image of God. It is up to us to show mercy, compassion, and practical love to people.

Do you know who demonstrated for us what it means to be a neighbor? Jesus. Jesus was the ultimate example of showing people mercy and compassion. Jesus made a choice to love each one of us. We are like the man in the story, beat up and left for dead, unable to help ourselves, and Jesus is like the Samaritan who came along and went above and beyond to save us.

Jesus left his heavenly realm and came here to earth. Jesus knew we were sinners, but He chose to have mercy and compassion for us. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, so that we can have eternal life with the Father. Only Jesus could do this, since he was perfect and without sin.

This series is called “Important Choices”. There are some of us in this room who need to make a choice. For some of us, we have been trying to live a good life. We have been trying to do it on our own. No matter how hard we try, we never feel at peace. We know something is missing.

What you’re missing is Jesus Christ! It’s when we put our faith and trust in Jesus that God can grant us forgiveness for all the times we have messed up and sinned. Trusting in Jesus is the only way that we can experience the peace, joy, and love we are looking for in life.

For many of us here today, we have another choice to make. We need to love our neighbor as ourselves. That can be one tough thing to do. God knows that may not be easy for us.

Let me tell you why we need to love our neighbor. When we love our neighbor and show compassion and mercy on them, we are showing God that we truly love Him. This week, I was reminded of **James 2:14-17**:

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Many of us as Christians have head knowledge. We know the right thing to do. Yet, many of us lack the motivation to move forward and put what we know into action. This verse reminds me that my faith and actions go together.

How many of you have a friend or acquaintance that is going through a tough time? How many times do we say, “I will pray for you”? This verse reminds me that maybe God is wanting me to be a better neighbor. Maybe God wants me to help this friend or family out. Maybe I need to ask God, “How can I help this person now?” Does this person need a listening ear? Does this person need encouragement? Does this person need me to watch their kids for an afternoon or bring them a meal?

Praying is important, and the best place to start, but part of praying is the act of listening and discerning how God is calling me to a specific action.

Another verse that came to mind this week is **Matthew 5:43-44**: ***“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”***

Sometimes our neighbor is someone that causes us a lot of stress. It could be someone you have difficulty getting along with or seeing eye to eye with. It might be a sibling, co-worker, or relative.

How do we show love and mercy to this person? It might start by acknowledging to God that you have a struggle with this person, and you need some help. Second, maybe we need to start praying for this person. Sometimes being a neighbor to this person means we need to go beyond ourselves and do something nice for this person, not expecting anything in return.

I believe that God will see when we try to love our enemies, when we try to go the extra mile for that person. God knows that we are trying our best. Why? Because that is showing God love.

I can go on and on with Bible verses.

My prayer this week is a simple one. I pray that God gives us the eyes to see the needs of the people around us. I pray that each of us will act, and show mercy, compassion, and practical love. May we help the person in need this week. May we show love towards our enemy. Let us not walk right on by and think it's someone else's responsibility. Let's not say, "We will pray for you." Let's do something more.

Imagine our church if each of us helped one person who was in need this week. Imagine the difference we would make in our community.

I believe that when we show mercy, compassion, and love, God is looking at us as people who love their neighbors. This is how we demonstrate to God that we love Him, by loving the people He's created.

Let us pray.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. When has someone gone out of his or her way to help you? How did it make you feel? What did it cost them? What do you think motivates most people to be kind to their neighbor?
2. The expert of the law asked the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Every one of us wants to know what God expects of us, how we can do what’s right in God’s eyes. How does the expert in the law answer Jesus’ question, “What is written in the Law?”
3. We are to love the Lord our God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength – this represents vertical love. Loving our neighbor represents horizontal love. Why are they both equally important to God? Why can loving our neighbor be so challenging?
4. The expert in the law asked Jesus to clarify who his neighbor is. Why was he really asking this question? Did he get the answer he was expecting? Why do you think Jesus shares a parable or story to answer the question?
5. Jesus shares a parable about a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan – how are the ways each one sees, feels, and acts in the parable different from the others? How might one justify the actions of the priest and the Levite? What are the ways the Samaritan shows love and mercy?
6. Why is the Samaritan chosen to exemplify brotherly and practical love? How does this parable highlight the difference between knowledge and action? Does Jesus get his point across of who our neighbors really are? Who is our neighbor?
7. How has Jesus shown you love and mercy? What are some practical ways you can show God’s love and mercy towards your neighbors this week?