

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion, an expert in the law 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 was moved with 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 donkey and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii<sup>[a]</sup> 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.”

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I think it’s possible that the parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most famous stories in scripture. Frankly, it goes right up there with David and Goliath, or Jesus ’walking on water, or with Cain and Abel as one of the most well-renowned passages in the Bible, taking with it

implications that permeate even into the secular world. And yet, for all of its fame, I think we still fail to properly understand what's lying in the parable. So, to fully illustrate it and where I'm going today, I'm going to need some help. Who remembers who all is in this story besides Jesus and the lawyer?

There's the man who was beaten, yes. There are the robbers! Right. The priest and the Levite, sure. And the Samaritan, and finally, the innkeeper.

Ultimately our man who is traveling is just like anybody else. It doesn't give us a lot of details, but we can assume that is part of the tribes of Israel. Therefore, probably just a common man. Robbers are nothing new. There will always be those who take advantage of others goodwill. But our priest is a holy man. They're someone who is set aside to do holy work in the temple. They'd be like the equivalent of Pastor Dan here. And our Levite is someone who might not be like a priest or a pastor, but would be closer to perhaps a liturgist here in the church. The Samaritan is the tricky one though. The Samaritans were religious and cultural rivals of the people of Israel. The, to us, might be like an extremist Muslim, or the kind of person who we might be prejudicious to say "looks like a terrorist." Yeah, that's a horrible thing to say, I know. But that's how extreme this parable is that Jesus is telling. He's saying that the people who you might trust most would leave you for dead, and that the person who you may be, wrongly or rightly, most afraid of or hateful towards, is the person who's helping you here.

But here's the deal: the question that the lawyer asks is "who is my neighbor?" And this is a fair question to ask! We find out in this particular parable that the "neighbor" to the traveller is the person you'd least expect, the Samaritan, who showed him kindness. It makes sense to say that, regardless of whatever social or political or religious background someone comes from, we should love them if they love us. There's a flaw to this though... elsewhere in scripture, we learn that we are to love even those who persecute us, who curse us, who hate us.

Because it's easy to love the people who love you, anybody can do that. But we are called to love any- and everybody.

I think, when we view the parable of the Good Samaritan, we look at it from the perspective of the man traveling, saying "the Samaritan is my neighbor because they had compassion for me." And I think that this is the wrong point of the parable: the point was to put ourselves in the shoes of the Samaritan. See, Jesus reminds us that we all too often ask the wrong question - it shouldn't be "*who* is my neighbor," it should be about "*how do I be the good neighbor?*" The Samaritan teaches us that we are to cross boundaries in order to extend the hand of love to whoever is in need of it. The Samaritan teaches us that we are called to be neighbors to everybody, and that by doing so, that love of God is extended to every man and woman without prejudice. The Samaritan teaches us that it is our duty to go out of our way, to be interruptible, and to be gracious with what we have, not being afraid to give out of our own wallet and time to care for the people around us.

I want to tell you a story to illustrate this. When I was living in Mississippi, doing my Biblical research program, towards the end of the year we went on an excursion that included hitchhiking, backpacking, rock climbing, and a 48 hour long solo. For the hitchhiking, you've got 72 hours to get from Jackson, MS to Roswell, NM, and after all the backpacking and the solo, you've got 72 hours to get back. So, it's my friends Nick, Chloe, and me, and we're stranded on the outside of Roswell going East, and it's scorching. I mean, it's the end of May or beginning of June, and we're cooking on the side of the road. Anyway, this couple pulls up headed INTO Roswell, Roy and Vicky Fort, to do a roofing job, and I'm telling you these folks are about as Texas as they come. Anyway, they tell us (it's about 10am) that if we're still stranded on the side of the road by the time they come back, they'll get us a ride to Lubbock, which was really as far as we could hope to make it that day. Anyway, a couple hours later some folks pick us up and we're hotdogging it at 75 in a 100° on a flatbed trailer holding on for dear life, and they take us about an hour east of Roswell before they drop us off

and head elsewhere. So we're waiting outside this gas station, it's about 4pm, and we head back to the high way. And what do you know, who shows up but Roy and Vicky Fort.

So this couple, they ask us a little about how and what we're doing, and we tell them about this Biblical research and leadership training program we're in, and that our hitchhiking was the sort of "practical exam" to really trust God in all that we had learned, and that He would provide for us. So this couple, they pick us up, and they take us to dinner, and I had these little steak frites, and oh man they were amazing. Deep fried and delicious, the way Texas does most things. But here's the deal - after feeding us, they take us into Lubbock and they take us to a hotel and pay for a room for the night. Then, they give us \$100 or \$120. *Then*, they say, if we're *still* stranded in Lubbock by the end of the following day, they'd let us stay in their home, and they'd take us to church the next day and find us a ride all the way back to Jackson.

Here's the thing, these weren't wealthy people. Roy and Vicky were older, working class folks, well into their 60's, with *absolutely nothing to gain* from helping us. There was nothing that any of us could offer them besides humble gratitude. But here's the other thing: Roy and I could not be more different politically. We come from different backgrounds and demographics, and probably would have been on opposite sides of a fence at a rally. In almost any other circumstance, Roy and I never would have even spoken to each other, much less become friends.

There have been countless theological seminaries, or Christian colleges or various religious institutions that have conducted experiments designed to imitate the circumstances of the Good Samaritan shortly after teaching these folks about it, and with almost 100% failure every single time. It's the religious people who have the hardest time meeting the standard that Jesus sets in this teaching, which is not to *identify* the neighbor, but to *be* the neighbor. And yet, it's simple disciples, like you

folks, who seek opportunities to serve like we plan on doing in Mexico starting tomorrow morning, that seem to get it.

The lawyer asks this question, “what do I have to do to gain eternal life?” Another way to phrase it would be, “what are the minimum requirements for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven?” And all too often, that’s our posture, is to do the bare minimum that’s required of us. And Jesus corrects this in two ways: first, he says that we are to be generous. We don’t necessarily let someone bog us down, but we give what’s needed, and we give it freely. The Samaritan paid the expert to look after the man, and he paid out of his own pocket. He knew where to draw the line, saying “I’ll take him as far as I can, then provide for him to be taken care of better than I can,” and he moves on, leaving the traveller in good care. The second way is by giving the lawyer a commandment: “go and *do* likewise.” He doesn’t send him away saying “go and *know* who is your neighbor and who to serve.” He commands the man instead to go and *do* as the Samaritan has done, by crossing cultural, religious, and political boundaries to serve with indiscriminate generosity.

If you do this right, it will cost you something. It will always cost you something. Of course, I mean it might cost you a couple bucks, whatever. But there will be a cost on how people see you because of your choosing to love people who look, act, think, and pray differently than you. There will be a cost to the image you’ve spent your life building up because you decided that being the good neighbor was more important than self-service. There will be a cost to willingly extending yourself and giving to someone who has absolutely nothing to offer in return. There is always a price to friendship with Jesus, and Jesus tells us that we are his friends if we do what he teaches us, if we take the time to let His words go from our heads into our hearts, to change our thinking and to change our actions.

This is the command - not to know your neighbor, but to *be* the good neighbor. Not to know what Christ commands, but to *go and do* likewise. So then: go and do likewise.

