



## **Luke 11:30–37**

30 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. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But

a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 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. 35 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.” 36 ‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ 37 The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’

## Reflection

Who is my neighbour? Jesus has his interrogator (an expert in Old Testament law and Jewish religious leader) on the ropes. He's trying to test Jesus, to discredit him in front of others. What must one do to inherit eternal life? But very quickly Jesus' turns the tables. You're the expert in the law, what do you think? A little sheepishly no doubt, he responds with the brilliant words Jesus' himself has used to sum up the entire Old Testament Law and Prophets. Jesus has seen through him. He knows full well the answer to the question he has just posed. He responds quoting Jesus from elsewhere,

“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 neighbour as yourself.”

Is that so, says Jesus? Well,

28 ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’

Because you don’t, and you won’t. In fact, no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law because no one other than Jesus has ever managed to keep the whole law. The law, in theory, should be able to save us. But because no one has even been able to keep it, the practical purpose of the law has become making us conscious of our sin and our desperate need of a saviour. Which is

where the conversation is about to go.

But the teacher of the law hasn't given up on his ability to please God and be worthy of heaven. With the crowds looking on and his reputation at stake he seeks to justify himself by minimising the target. I do love the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind and strength we hear him say to himself. So let's turn to my neighbour. Jesus,

‘And who is my neighbour?’

Surely it should be easy to love my good Jewish neighbours as myself?

Now before we launch into Jesus' famous response – the Parable of the Good Samaritan – it's really important to remind ourselves here of the Jewish religious

leader's original question. He did not ask Jesus the way of the Christian life; he asked Jesus the way to eternal life. And so while the Parable of the Good Samaritan does teach us the way of the Christian life, we mustn't lose ourselves so much in it that we forget about the question that Jesus is answering – the crucial question of what must one do to inherit eternal life. Not the way of Christian life but the way to eternal life. Let's read the parable together. Who is my neighbour?

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In order to fully appreciate Jesus’ parable we must first enter into race relations of the first century. In short, Jews had hated Samaritans for hundreds of years, a hatred that is still reflected, tragically, in the violent tensions between Israel and Palestine today. Imagine teaching this parable in an Israeli synagogue near the West Bank. Imagine teaching this parable in Hamas controlled parts of Palestine. Love your neighbour. Jesus very deliberately weaves his parable around two people groups who were not good neighbours. Two Jews leave one of their own on the street to die. Jews not even loving fellow



Jews. And then the arch enemy, a Samaritan, crosses the street to nurse him back to health at great personal expense and inconvenience. Expended on a Jew who no doubt, if he wasn't fighting for his life, would have fought the Samaritan off rather than accept his help.

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Notice, not 'who is my neighbour' but 'who acted as neighbour'. Not preaching, but practice. Not mouthing hollow Old Testament summaries but living them. Who was a neighbour to the man? The begrudging reply,

'The one who had mercy on him.'

He couldn't even bring himself to say the word Samaritan – whom Jesus then instructs him to go and be like.

Now Jesus' parables are notorious for being hard to pin down. Because that's the idea. Parables are meant to make you think. What is Jesus getting at? What is he driving at? Parables are metaphors or similes drawn from nature or common life, that pull us up short by their vividness or strangeness. They're memorable because they're curious, unexpected, even shocking. And they're designed to leave our minds in sufficient doubt about their precise application in order to make us think. To tease us into active thought.

So yes, we're to love our enemies as our-

selves. Yes, created in God's image every human being no matter race, creed, ethnicity, gender or background is our neighbour. Yes, we're to go out of our way to help those in need at a cost to ourselves and with no prospect of recompense (after all isn't that what Jesus came to do for us?) This is the way of the Christian life. But to the expert in the law's original question – the way to eternal life – well perhaps Jesus is saying that if you cannot recognise hated Samaritans as your neighbour (let alone love your fellow Jew by coming to their aid), then you proud expert in the law might end up being the one left for dead.

As we spoke about yesterday the expert in the law's opening question was based on a false premise. Because there is noth-

ing you can do to earn, merit or attain eternal life. However, once you have received Jesus into your heart as Lord and Saviour by faith, what flows out of a heart like this is acts like these. Christians are not saved by our way of life; but true Christians are known by their way of life. Our way of life proves that our faith is real; not the other way around as supposed by the lawyer's original question.

## **Think & Pray**

Do you see what I mean about parables? And especially this one? Why not read it again a couple of times now? Let Jesus' words tease your mind into active thought. What is Jesus teaching us about eternal life from this story? What does Jesus' mean when he says, 'Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy' (Matt 5:7)? Who is your neighbour? Do you love them. If they don't know Jesus and you haven't told them about him in your words, actions and witness are you really loving them?

Then close today in prayer. Why not pray for Israel and Palestine? For America's racial divide. For Sunnis and Shiites. For the way the gospel tears down all dividing walls of hostility because in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, rather all are one in him. Pray wherever the Holy Spirit leads you as you meditate over Jesus' parable this morning.