

Luke 10:25-37.

There are so many stories of hatred in our world. Violence. Prejudice. Racism. Verbal attacks. You can start to get overwhelmed by it. And so I think it is all the more uplifting when we hear some good news – particularly acts of love shown toward others. If you're like me, you get drawn in. You feel a part of the joy when you hear a story of someone showing kindness. Think how moving it is especially when someone helps a stranger. They just happen to be in the right place at the right time. Someone is in need, and they jump in.

Check out headlines from the last few days, and you can find examples...

- A Greensboro man is grateful to be alive. Rising floodwaters overwhelmed his car and trapped him inside. A Good Samaritan broke through his windshield with an axe and rescued him.
- Further up north, the Coast Guard reports: a Good Samaritan rescued two individuals from a capsized boat in Long Island Sound.
- A Good Samaritan stopped an attack along a bike trail in Irvine CA.

“Good Samaritan.” You see it in all those news stories. It is a term that has gained wide usage. People know the meaning, even if they don't know that the origin for this description is found right here in Luke ch.10.

But even when people know this parable's chapter and verse, I wonder how many understand what Jesus is teaching here.

How many cite the parable of the Good Samaritan and say, “See, the main lesson of the Bible is that we should love each other. And so Christianity is pretty much like any number of other great religions. Love each other. Then God will be happy. Everything else doesn't really matter.” |That philosophy is everywhere in our culture. You've probably heard it countless times. It basically boils down to the thought: religion is just about LOVE. I'm guessing some of you have even had good friends express something like that to you. “It's all about love, man.” This very chapter of the Bible might be the place that you want to take them.

So let's dig in and make sure we look very carefully at the context in which Jesus shares this parable. Otherwise we will miss the whole point. In the verses that lead into the parable, we hear the biggest question a human being could ask. It is, in essence: *What is the way to eternal life with God?* An expert in the law of God posed this question. His words lead us to believe he thought he knew the answers. In his mind the way “**must**” involve something “**I do**” to have “*eternal life.*”

If a human being were to try to do enough good so God would allow them into heaven... Well, let's see, how much good would it take?

God's will is recorded right here, in the Scriptures. So what does the Law of God say here?

Love. | But don't miss all the detail of what that means. This expert in the law communicates an important point of God's law that many overlook. The issue of obedience to God's will runs deep. And it starts with one that is in many ways TOTALLY overlooked in our culture today. #1 Love God. Love God above everything - my thoughts, my will, my reason, my feelings. Yikes! Sound tough yet? Let's look at #2: Love my neighbor as much as I love myself. Do you defend yourself, protect yourself, when someone verbally attacks you? Well, then, defend your neighbor. Protect him or her from the same kind of negativity and hurt. Look out for your neighbor's good - their mental, physical, and social wellbeing – the way you look out for your own. And offer all this with kindness in your thoughts - not grudgingly, without a trace of bitterness or selfish motivation - but with pure love. Not just once a day, but all the time. Every hour, every minute, every second.

“So love God with all of my being? And then love my neighbor? Love even if... it's inconvenient? Love even when there is little likelihood that he would under similar circumstances show love to me?”

Jesus replies: “Right! Do this – right attitude & right action – all the time your-life-long-through, and you'll have earned yourself a ticket to heaven.”

Now we've got to be honest with ourselves and admit: Jesus' answer so obviously shows us we must abandon any hope of our own efforts getting us to eternal life with God.

But here's where the expert in the law attempts another go at this whole matter – he seems dead-set on trying to “do” something “to have eternal life.” We're told, “he wants to justify himself.” So he asks: “And who is my neighbor?” Maybe he thinks if he keeps his neighbor group small, he can possibly meet God's expectations and earn his way to eternal life with God.

Remember, that's what this exchange between he and Jesus is all about.

Jesus throws the expert and us into a crime scene. A group of robbers mark their target. They attack. They steal. They beat. They leave their victim, a lone traveler, on the road, dying for all they care. They've got what they want.

But Jesus doesn't leave the near-dead man lying all alone. Quickly, Jesus brings a Priest and a Levite into the scene. But – jaw dropping disbelief – a different type of crime shows up with the entrance of the Priest and the Levite. They see the dying man on the side of the road. But they walked right by. They fail to do the good God commands. Someone might imagine this kind of sin to be less ugly or less “violent.” But you tell me: doesn't Jesus

draw out how senseless and cruel and *wrong* their behavior is? They leave the lone traveler on the road, dying simply because they don't care enough.

Jesus, though, isn't through with the lesson. He doesn't leave the near-dead man to die. He brings a Samaritan into the scene. And what followed in Jesus' teaching story would have undoubtedly been more shocking to those listening than even the events up to this point.

You see, 700 some years before the day Jesus was teaching this, the Assyrian nation came and conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They carried off into captivity many of the Israelites from the Northern Kingdom. They imported colonists from other portions of the Assyrian empire who intermarried with those who remained. A new people arose with their own culture, the Samaritans. Historically the Jews despised the Samaritans.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is in the heart of Jewish territory. And yet... at great personal expense – the Samaritan helps the man who considers him an enemy.

Suddenly Jesus brings the parable to his point: He has shown God's answer to the expert's question, "Who is my neighbor?" It's anyone and everyone, even one who is considered an enemy. Show love to them.

And with that answered, the central issue is made crystal clear again: "*How do I get to heaven if I'm trying to make it based on what I do?*" You must show perfect love 100% all the time to *everyone* you encounter in life. Anyone who tries to justify himself by doing enough has run out of options.

Here's a place to pause. Every time we study the Bible we should not only search for the truth(s) that are taught. We should go on to apply the truth personally: what do I see revealed about myself? **[PAUSE]** Which one of us has filled the sandals of the Good Samaritan? Who has NEVER passed anyone by?

- Have you ever been so anxious to talk to your friends, that you just *walked by* someone else who was hurting? Beaten up by loneliness?
- Have you maybe had things in mind *you wanted* to do ... and you didn't want to be delayed, you didn't want to miss a moment of what you've got planned, and nothing was going to change that... even if it meant passing by someone in need, failing to show love.
- Have you ever seen someone who could obviously use a friend (just a few kind words might have sufficed to make a big difference), but you were so self-conscious of *what others might think*, you walked right by?
- Have you ever passed over someone who could use your help because you felt you were better than them, or you simply thought, "We don't have anything in common"?

We have failed. We have failed to love others as ourselves, as God commands. Yikes! Our failures have hurt others. We are the ones who deserve to be left broken, spiritually dead on the side of the road, with no hope and no help.

"There is no one righteous [among us], not even one..."

But Jesus! Jesus! Jesus is our Good Samaritan. Jesus didn't cross to the other side, or pass by when he saw us lying spiritually dead and broken by our sin. He stepped into our world and lived and breathed and spoke love every day, every hour, every minute, every second of a lifetime. The lifetime he lived and breathed and spoke perfect love in your place and in my place. He did all that work and He gifts it to our spiritual account. Think about that for a moment. He gave **us** the holiness that we need to obtain eternal life. And then to remove all our life's filth from us, He didn't think of his own safety, his own hurt, his own pain. He threw himself into the jaws of the hell we deserved. He suffered all that on the cross in our place. And so, His own blood washes us clean and brings us healing and life eternal. He carries those who die believing this to eternal life - a place forever in his glorious home.

"Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law" (Acts 13:39). To be justified is to be declared innocent and holy in God's sight.

God has brought you to know and treasure how Jesus has loved you in this way. We've got the love of our God poured into our hearts. We've got Jesus' love as our reason, as our strength, to love our God. And it's the reason to trust and love what He tells us.

When Jesus concludes this parable by saying, "Go and do likewise," we want to do just that. It's love for others flowing from the selfless, perfect love He has shown us. "We love because he first loved us." So with that in view, circle back to where we began in the sermon: the contrast between all the hatred in our world, and the impact from real life examples of showing love.

- Think of the Old Testament lesson from today and the references to the kind of kindnesses in Israel to be shown to aliens (the more formal/legal term for foreigners). The person doesn't have to live near you, or even be from the same country as you. They may be a stranger. Love them.
- The person doesn't have to look like you, or talk like you. Love them.
- Especially when you're in a place, at a time, by God's directing, and able to show love to someone in need – someone who could use a kind word, a helping hand, who has suffered loss, who is hurting – love them.

What a way to bring joy into our world, and in the process we get to point people to the One who is the source of all Love and healing. Since God so loved us – gifting us forgiveness, peace and eternal life in Jesus –, love. Amen.