

**Glimpses of the Kingdom**  
***The Parable of the Good Samaritan***  
**Luke 10:25-37**  
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The New Testament begins with four biographies of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John's accounts share similarities in their presentations of Jesus' life, but each of them provides a unique perspective. Matthew was one of Jesus' 12 disciples. He was called to follow Jesus from his life as a tax collector, an occupation that was despised by Jews, because of its collaboration with the Romans. Mark wasn't one of the 12 disciples, but he had a first-hand view of Jesus' life, because his mother appears to have been a prominent member of the early church. When Peter was released from prison, he went immediately to the home of Mark's mother, Mary, where followers of Jesus were praying for Peter's protection. It's believed that Mark gleaned information he wasn't privy to from the Apostle Peter. John was also one of the 12 disciples, and as a member of Jesus' inner circle, along with his brother James and Peter, John had experiences none of Jesus' other biographers had.

That leaves Luke, the author of Luke's gospel and Acts, who was a missionary partner to the Apostle Paul. Luke was the only Gentile or non-Jew among the gospel writers, so he brought an "outsider" perspective that Matthew, Mark and John didn't have.

As I pointed out above, all the gospel writers brought their own unique perspective to writing about Jesus, but it's interesting to take note of what Luke, the Gentile author, included that none of the other gospel writers did. All the gospel writers highlight Jesus' conflict with the Jewish religious leaders, but Luke seems to point out Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees more than the others. It's Luke alone who shares the account of Jesus' sermon in the synagogue in his hometown. Jesus read from Isaiah 61 about the healing the Messiah would bring and this being the year of the Lord's favor, and then he said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke is the only biographer of Jesus who records the story we explored last week in which a "sinful woman" came to the Pharisee's house and anointed Jesus with oil. And Luke is alone in sharing the stories of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost or prodigal son. It's Luke who records the

familiar story of the tax collector Zacchaeus, and at the end of the account of Zacchaeus, it's Luke who quotes Jesus as saying, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."

Luke clearly had a heart for those who were viewed as outsiders, people on the margins, the ones who didn't feel like they belonged. Before I go on, I want to pause here to call attention to something important for all of us to acknowledge. The often glossed over secret is that we all feel like outsiders at times. Many of us, myself included, try and project an image that communicates we're part of the "in crowd," but we all struggle with insecurity, feelings of not measuring up, doubts about whether others will receive us. The great news of the Gospel is that Jesus came for every one of us. In fact, in the Apostle Paul's writing, he repeatedly points out that the heart of the gospel is that God's love isn't just for his people, the Jews. Jesus came to proclaim that God's love reaches to every one of us regardless of our ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, or religion. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:

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So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26–28)

Luke was passionate about communicating that God's love expressed through his Son, Jesus, was and is available to every one of us. It doesn't matter who we are or what we've done; Jesus reaches to us with his arms of love and says, "Come." God loves you, and He wants to heal you, save you, and restore you to relationship with Him.

It's no surprise that Luke is the only gospel writer who records the story we're focusing on today: Jesus' well-known story of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25–37. I'll break this passage into sections and make some commentary as we go along. I'll start reading at verse 25.

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup> 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.’”

<sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

Over the past two weeks, we’ve been focused on Jesus’ recurring conflict with the Pharisees. In this case, the person who came to Jesus is identified as an expert in the law. He may have been a Pharisee or a Sadducee, but he was a teaching lawyer and a scribe. These experts in the Jewish law frequently tried to engage Jesus in debate only to have Jesus tie them up in knots.

The lawyer’s question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” is a great question, and Jesus asks him a question in return: “How do you read the law?” The expert in the law answers with words Jesus Himself has used: “Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” He must have heard Jesus answer this question before, because loving God and loving neighbor wasn’t a standard answer. Jesus tells him that he has answered the question well and if he lives that out, he’ll inherit eternal life. But the legal expert’s next question gets at the heart of what he wanted to debate with Jesus. “But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (Luke 10:29).

The legal expert’s initial question was great, but now we see what really motivated him coming to Jesus. He wanted to debate with Jesus over who his neighbor actually was. He wanted to argue for a definition of neighbor that excluded people who were different than he was. In verses 30–35, we read Jesus’ response, which is one of the most iconic stories in the Bible...

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. 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. 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.'

When I realized the Good Samaritan story was my text to preach on today, my first thought was, "What am I going to say about this well-known passage that hasn't already been said many times?" All kinds of insights and unique twists have been written about this famous story, but for our purposes, I want to home in on what this passage tells us about Jesus' love for us and the love He wants us to have for others.

The route from Jerusalem to Jericho was a treacherous road, one where robbers frequently lay in wait for defenseless travelers. When I envision this scene, my mind goes to old Westerns where a narrow dirt path winds in and around rocky cliffs on each side. The travelers go around a corner and are attacked by masked bandits laying in wait to take their money and goods.

The traveler was stripped of his clothes and no doubt his money, beaten and left half dead. And this is where the story gets interesting. First a Jewish priest and then a Levite came upon the wounded traveler and passed by. We're probably familiar with what a Jewish priest was, but I needed to do some research on what exactly a Levite was. Levites were assistants to the priests, serving as musicians, gate keepers, temple officials, and craftsmen. Priests and Levites were highly respected by the Jews, and both lived by highly regulated laws about ritual purity that didn't permit them to touch dead bodies or to come in contact with human blood. Their failure to turn aside and help the wounded traveler was likely due to their desire to remain ritually pure and holy. After all, uncleanness would have meant that they needed to be absent from their religious duties for a number of days until they could go through the necessary steps to regain ritual purity. Other reasons the priest and Levite failed to help the man may have included busyness and needing to hurry along to other religious duties, or fear that the wounded man may have been a ruse to lure them to help so they could be robbed by

the thieves. Apparently, it wasn't uncommon for robbers to lure people into a trap by having one of them pretend to be injured and then attacking the would-be helper.

It's safe to assume that the failure of the priest and Levite to help the wounded traveler wouldn't have come as a shock to Jesus' audience. There were good reasons for them not to provide assistance, but the person Jesus chose as the one to assist the wounded traveler in his story would have come as a shock to the expert in the law and to any Jew in Jesus' audience. Jesus' choice of a Samaritan as the hero of the story was as offensive as last week's story in which Jesus allowed the "sinful woman" to anoint his feet with oil.

Samaritans were despised by Jews. They were viewed as half-breeds who disobeyed Jewish law and intermarried with Gentiles. Yet despite their disregard for Jewish law, they insisted on viewing themselves as followers of God. Since it was inconvenient for them to travel to Jerusalem to worship God, and they weren't welcome there anyway, they constructed their own worship site north of Jerusalem in Samaria and encouraged their people to worship there. Jews would take long detours on trips at great inconvenience to themselves rather than going through Samaria. The enmity between Jews and Samaritans was what made Jesus' trip into Samaria and his interaction with the woman at the well so offensive. As a Jew, Jesus had no business being in Samaria let alone interacting with a Samaritan woman who was known to have had five husbands and to have been living with another man who wasn't her husband. Interestingly, in leading up to Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, we read, "Now he had to go through Samaria." No Jew "had to go through Samaria." Jesus was compelled to go through Samaria because the Holy Spirit had planned a divine encounter between this Samaritan woman and Jesus.

Jesus' choice of the Samaritan as the hero of this story was shocking, but it was consistent. Jesus seemed to take every opportunity to challenge the religious leaders' rigidity and exclusiveness around who was eligible to receive God's love and favor. The story of the Good Samaritan was yet another way for Jesus to proclaim that God's love and concern and care was available to everyone, not just Jews. I'll resume reading at verse 36.

<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

I believe Jesus’ response to the expert in the law may be the most significant insight for us. The expert in the law prompted Jesus’ story by asking, “Who is my neighbor.” Jesus concluded the story of the Good Samaritan by asking the legal expert, “Who was a neighbor to the man who had been robbed?” The Jewish legal expert asked, “Who do I need to love?” He viewed the definition of neighbor as exclusive, limited to good Jewish people. Jesus turned the question around and asked, “Who was a neighbor to the person in need?” Rather than following the legal expert’s definition of someone worthy of love being a narrow list, Jesus instructed him to be the kind of person who extended love and mercy to everyone regardless of their religion, ethnicity, or gender.

Our title for this sermon series is “Glimpses of the Kingdom.” Our staff and I are preaching messages from Luke chapters 2-15, which focus on excerpts from Jesus’ life in which He communicated the nature of the kingdom of God. Some have appropriately named the kingdom Jesus instituted as “The Upside-Down Kingdom.” Throughout the gospels, Jesus was constantly in conflict with the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders, and eventually this conflict cost Him his life. But Jesus didn’t tweak the Jewish religious leaders because it was fun or because He didn’t like them. Jesus was intent on communicating the heart of the gospel—that God’s love was for everyone—and the Jewish religious leaders were promoting a wrong and harmful view of God’s nature.

I’m hopeful the Holy Spirit has been speaking truth to your heart throughout this message, but let me try and bring this home for us. First, Jesus’ message to every person here this morning is that God loves you; He doesn’t hate you. He’s for you, not against you. He sent Jesus to heal and save you, not to judge and condemn you. Jesus’ message of love, grace, mercy and forgiveness is for each of us, regardless of who we are or what we’ve done.

Secondly, outside of his Word, the Bible, God's primary method of communication is his Holy Spirit working in and through those of us who have committed our lives to Him. How will most people who haven't experienced Jesus' love experience Him? They'll experience Him through you and through me. Jesus went so far as to tell us that after He was gone from the earth, we—his followers—would do even greater things than He had done because his Spirit would be at work in and through us.

At its core, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is a model for us. In this story, Jesus clearly defines that everyone is our neighbor, and that you and I as his followers are called to be neighbors to everyone we meet.

As we move to our time of response, I ask you to reflect on and respond to what Jesus is speaking to your heart. Whether you primarily identify as someone who is in desperate need of God's love today or whether God is challenging you about what it looks like to be a neighbor, understand God's love is for all. That's the defining characteristic of his kingdom that Jesus came to help us understand.