

The Good Samaritan: Love Your Enemy
Luke 10:25–37

Turn to Luke 10. Today we're going to talk about the parable of the Good Samaritan. I'm doing this right after our covenant Sunday on purpose. You've heard much about how we treat one another, so it's time we took hold of the bigger picture. Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to a man that needed to take hold of that bigger picture. He needed to hear about loving his enemies. Let's read Luke 10:25–29.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "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.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" To answer, Jesus told him the parable.

The Three Love Commands

Before we go any farther, I want to say to things about three love important commands: love one another, love your neighbour, and love your enemy. Love one another, love your neighbour, and love your enemy. Two things about these three love commands. First, "love one another" and "love your neighbour" mean exactly the same thing. We covered this earlier in the Matthew sermon on the two great commands, but it needs repeating.

Moses gave the second great command, love your neighbour as yourself, in Leviticus 19:18. I will read the section in which we find that command. Listen to figure out who your neighbour is. *Do not spread slander among **your people**. Do not do anything that endangers your **neighbor's** life. ... Do not hate **a fellow Israelite** in your heart. Rebuke your **neighbor** frankly... Do not seek revenge against anyone **among your people**, but love your **neighbor** as yourself.* (Lev 19:16–18)

For Moses, your neighbour is your fellow Israelite, a covenant follower of God just like you. In the New Testament Letters, Paul quotes "love your neighbour" twice, and James once, and in each case your neighbour is your fellow believer. There is no difference between love your neighbour and love one another.

I recently read two New Testament scholars who both assumed that love your neighbour was wider than love one another. They did not defend it, they just assumed it, and they are wrong. Moses was clear, and so were the apostles. That's the first thing we need to grasp about those three love commands.

The second thing about these three commands is that the love of God's people for each other has never been exclusive. In the same chapter, Moses says "love foreigners as you love yourselves."

The foreigners living among them were not their neighbours, and but love your neighbour, love one another, is not exclusive. It flows over to everyone we meet.

In Exodus 23, Moses taught that if we see our *enemy's* cow or donkey wandering off, we will lead that animal back to our enemy, and if we see that the one who hates us needs help on the road, we must stop and help them. We think Jesus was the first one to tell us to be good to our enemies, but that's only because we don't read Moses.

In Matthew 5 Jesus said, "You have heard it said, 'love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Moses never said "hate your enemy," but Jesus knew that enough Jews in his day did say that. The law teacher was one of those people, one of the Jews who believed "love your neighbour and hate your enemy."

Jesus did not tell the story of the Good Samaritan to change the law teacher's definition of neighbour, Jesus told the story to change how the law teacher treated his enemies. When the man said, "and who is my neighbour," Jesus knew the answer, but Jesus did not like the question. Jesus can feel that the law teacher wants permission to be hard on his enemies.

Earlier, in Luke 6, Jesus taught this: *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.* Jesus told the parable to turn the law teacher toward his enemies.

The man asked, "who is my neighbour?" At the end of the parable, Jesus changed the question. He did not ask, "so who is your neighbour?" He asked, "who acted like a neighbour?" People who are good neighbours also love their enemies.

The difference between "love your neighbour as yourself" and "love one another as I loved you" is not *who* we love, it is *how much* we love. Loving you as I love myself is hard enough, but loving you as Jesus loved me means laying down my life for you, and that's another level entirely, isn't it. Jesus commanded a love that's even more costly than Moses's love command. And he did command it, though we don't do well, I sure don't. Let's read. Luke 10:30.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan – Luke 10:30–37

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.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Picture yourself driving in a fine Manitoba blizzard. It’s real cold, snowing, and blowing hard. It’s night time. Sometimes you can’t see the road at all, and one of those times, you go into the ditch. It’s pretty steep, you’re well into the ditch, no backing out. You don’t have a phone with you. When traffic goes by, you get out on the road to wave someone down, but there’s very little traffic. Most people have the sense to stay home. And when someone does drive by, they don’t see you until the last moment, and they keep going. It’s scary to stop on the highway in conditions like that, because someone can easily run into the back of your car.

Two different people who you respect as godly leaders come by, one after the other. You recognize their vehicles. They both just keep going. And then someone you actually despise stops to care for you. This person really feels sorry for you. They take you into their warm car, and they drive you straight to your home. And while they’re driving, they call a towing company and arrange for a tow truck to pull your car out of the ditch and take it to your home. They pay for this themselves.

The law teacher had asked Jesus, “and who is my neighbour?” And Jesus told him this story. Suppose you asked Jesus, “who is my neighbour,” and he told you this story. If we’re listening carefully, this story can be hard to hear.

Offense One – Is That Really the Way to Inherit Eternal Life?

Are the two great commands really the way to inherit eternal life? The law teacher asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life, so Jesus asked him a question: “what does the Law say? How would the Law answer that question?” The man quoted the two great commands, love God and love your neighbour. Good for him, and Jesus said, “that works, do that and you will live.”

We can be upset that Jesus thought that anything in the Law would tell the man how to inherit eternal life, and that keeping the two great commands would bring eternal life. But that is what Jesus said. The law teacher says he wants to *inherit* eternal life. He knows it’s a gift, he’s not going to earn it or deserve it. How can he receive this gift?

We should assume that Jesus meant this just as he said it. Keep the two great commands. If we have ideas about receiving eternal life that don’t line up with this, we should probably adjust our views, because Jesus said often spoke like this. This conversation with the law teacher is ultimately about inheriting eternal life.

Offense Two – Jesus makes our Enemy the godly Model

We could take this parable as if Jesus described a godly Jew stopping to take care of the evil Samaritan who lay half dead on the side of the road. Other Jewish teachers told stories like that. And if we as believers stopped to take care of our evil enemy lying half dead on the side of the road, that would be a good thing. But that's not the story that Jesus told.

Who makes your blood boil? Who makes you angry just thinking about them? Who is it that in your mind opposes everything that's right? Is it Muslims? Is it the leaders of GBLTQ pride march? Is it the crowds who throw stones at the pride march? Who makes *you* fume? Is it some government policy maker? For some believers I've listened to, it would be the Prime Minister of Canada himself. Perhaps you have a personal enemy, someone who repeatedly goes after you and has done you great harm.

What infuriates me has to do with the Bible, preachers and writers who in my mind are inexcusably sloppy in reading their Bibles as they loudly use the Bible to support a message that's not from the Bible at all. There are also people who love to discredit the Bible, and they also make my blood boil.

In the story Jesus told, you are the half dead person on the side of the road, and your godly leaders won't help you, but the enemy you despise sees you, and recognizes you as their enemy. The Samaritan knows the half dead person is a Jew. Your despised enemy sees and knows you, and feels sorry for you, takes you into their car in the blizzard, and drives you home, and pays to have your car towed to your doorstep. And then Jesus says to you, "go be like that person."

Why does Jesus do that? Why does Jesus make my enemy the hero of a godly compassion story, and then tell me to be like that person? I don't like the story that way. A story of me being good to my enemy is hard enough, but this story goes after something else.

Jesus wants us to see that our sinful enemy has more of what God prizes than we think. Jesus does not like how quickly we divide people into good and bad. We need more humility when we think about the people that make us angry. We're not as good as we think we are, and they're not as bad as we think they are. Some things they do might be very bad, but there's more to them than that. There are things in our enemies that God prizes, and he does not want us to dismiss them so quickly. When you come across your enemy, lying half dead on the side of the road, don't feel too superior. There are things in your enemy that God really likes. That is the second offense of this story.

Five Applications

(1) Think more kindly about your enemies. The law teacher did not like this story. It would have been bad enough if Jesus had told him to care for a Samaritan, but Jesus went farther, and told him about a Samaritan that took care of him.

Let's watch what comes out of our mouths about the people we don't like. We speak as if we have God's license to condemn them with our words. We don't. Jesus calls us to the opposite: bless them and pray for them – that's what should come out of our mouths. Our Father in heaven is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Jesus said we should imitate our Father. I need this as much as anyone. Let's think and speak more kindly about our enemies.

(2) When you see your enemy in need, help him, help her. This I think we already do. If we saw someone in need like this, we would stop and do what we could. Let's keep doing that. It's important to God that we are that kind of people.

(3) This story is not meant to be a burden. I'll mention few things this story does *not* mean. It is not meant to be a burden. People can take this to mean God calls us to rescue every needy person we meet. That's not why Jesus told this story. The Samaritan found himself alone on the road with one needy person. Jesus did not tell this story so the law teacher would now help every needy person he met. Jesus told the story so that the law teacher would not refuse help to someone who was his enemy. In a crisis situation, would I refuse to help my enemy? That's what Jesus asks us.

(4) This story is not a call to mission, either. Some believers devote themselves to street mission and helping the homeless on the basis of this story, and in the process have little connection to any church. They say they live by the parable of the Good Samaritan. But the Samaritan in this parable did not devote himself to helping wounded travelers, and Jesus was not calling the law teacher to devote himself to helping wounded travelers. Street missions are good, and they are from God. But this story is not a call to that.

Of course we should help a person in need if we come across them. But the Samaritan was just going about his business, and came upon his enemy who was in distress and needed help. What this parable teaches is difficult enough. Let's not make it say more than it says. It's not a call to mission, it's a call to love our enemies.

(5) This parable does not change the definition of "neighbour" or change the mission of the church to love one another. If we don't read carefully, we could assume that at the end, Jesus asked the law teacher, "so who do you think is your neighbour?" If Jesus had said that, then every needy person would be our neighbour. Jesus did not ask, "so who do you think is your neighbour?" Jesus asked, "so who do you think acted like a neighbour?"

Jesus knew very well that for Moses, Samaritans were not Israel's neighbours, they were not covenant people of God. Jesus was not trying to change that. The mission of the church is still to love one another. But love for one another always spills over. Loving our neighbour always overflows, it is never exclusive.

The law teacher asked about the rest of the world, and he wanted Jesus to divide the world into those he should care for, and those he could ignore. Jesus wanted to ask a different question, one aimed at the law teacher himself: “Are you a caring person, even with your enemies?” Amen.

PRAYER: Father, fill us with the knowledge of your will. Fill us with knowing what you want. We want to live lives that are worthy of the Lord, and to please him in every way. We want to bear fruit in all kinds of good works, and we want to grow closer to you. We need all kinds of help from you in these things, Father. Thank you that you promise this, and that you forgive our failures. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.