

“Generosity And Your Neighbors”

August 19, 2018

Luke 10:25-37

SI: We’re looking at the theme of generosity through the lens of several stories in the Gospel of Luke.

Generosity is a quality of the heart.

It’s a spiritual virtue that comes from knowing the generous grace of God. I’ve made the point each week that there are different currencies of generosity.

It’s not just money. It could be generosity of forgiveness, hospitality, time. It’s possible to be technically generous with money but not generous in heart.

I’ll write a check, but don’t make me be personally involved.

Because you don’t want to be generous with your most valued currency. But a comprehension of God’s grace in Jesus motivate and empowers us to be generous with the most valuable currencies.

This morning I want us to consider the currency of neighborliness through one of Christ’s most famous parables, the Good Samaritan.

This parable is so familiar it’s easy to miss how radical and disturbing it was to Jesus’ original audience.

So I’m going to read it verse by verse and make comments.

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

This Bible version says: An expert in the law.

But a better translation is simply lawyer.

The law was the law of Moses, which governed religious and civil life of Israel. He addressed Jesus as "Teacher," a token of respect.

But was the respect genuine or a ploy to put Jesus at ease? He wanted to test Jesus. See if he could trap him into saying something disparaging about the law of God.

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

Jesus knew very well that the Judaism of his day no longer expected a Redeemer who would die for the sins of the world.

It had become a religion of self-salvation.

Jesus knew this man was coming from that perspective of self-salvation, so he began to probe the man's thinking by asking him a question.

²⁷ 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.'"

In both Matthew and Mark the Lord Jesus himself quotes these two commandments, Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, as the two greatest commandments.

These two commandments sum up all the rest.

So, in one sense Jesus did not disagree with the man's answer.

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

Most Jews thought the way to gain eternal life was to keep commandments.

The famous rabbi Hillel, said, "He who has gained for himself words of Torah has gained for himself the life of the world to come."

This lawyer believed eternal life was by keeping the commandments.

Remember a few weeks ago when we looked at the story of rich young ruler.

He believed the very same thing. Keep commandments and you are saved.

So what Jesus did in both those interactions is that in order to unmask the self-righteousness and hypocrisy of their view of salvation, he agreed with them.

Yes, that's how you get eternal life, by keeping the commandments of God.

Which is true hypothetically.

But then as Jesus expounds God's law and reveals questioner his own heart

the utter impossibility of keeping the law is revealed and the necessity of grace.

Jesus wants to show this man that you can't get eternal life by law-keeping.

Because it is impossible for you to keep commandments as God requires.

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

What does it mean he wanted to justify himself?

If you believe in salvation by law-keeping, then you obviously think it is possible to keep God's law. You think you can do it.

So, that requires defining the law according to a limited list of specific duties you can actually keep. That's what he wants Jesus to do.

Ok, tell me exactly who is my neighbor so I can prove to self I've done it.

He certainly expected Jesus to give the standard Jewish answer of the day.

Your neighbors are good, fellow Jews like yourself and nobody else.

Gentiles weren't your neighbors.

Standard Jewish teaching was that if you saw a Gentile drowning, you were under no obligation to try to rescue him.

Bad Jews weren't your neighbors either. Remember how appalled people were when Jesus spent time with prostitutes and tax collectors.

They were Jews, but they were bad Jews.

A saying among religious Jews in Jesus' day was:

"Give to the good man, and do not go to the help of a sinner."

This lawyer expected Jesus to define neighbor in the same way.

Doing a good turn for good, respectable fellow Jews. That's God's law.

But Jesus said something radically different. He told a story.

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

The seventeen miles from Jerusalem to Jericho was known in ancient times as a dangerous road because of the robbers and brigands.

"Half dead" meant unconscious and on the point of death.

³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

The priests of the Jews belonged to the upper class. He would have been riding.

He could have put the wounded man on his donkey or mule.

But for some reason he did not.

Maybe he said to himself, I can't be sure if this man is actually a Jew.

He's stripped of his clothing and unconscious, so maybe he's not.

And if you were unsure, the law certainly didn't require you to find out.

Also, touching a dead or soon to be dead person, contact with his blood would ceremonially defile the priest.

Rituals to remove ceremonial uncleanness were expensive and time-consuming,

and to some degree they were embarrassing.

This priest lived according to a religious system of do's and don'ts.

The laws of the Old Testament had been categorized by the rabbis of that time and some laws, like the cleanness laws, were given more weight than others. Interesting because the OT itself said the Lord loves mercy more than sacrifice.

³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. Levites were also religious officials, but they were from a lower social class. The Levite probably knew the priest had already passed by the wounded man.

So he probably thought, if the priest passed by, I should too.

Also, as a lower class person, he was probably walking.

So stopping on the road would have put him in danger.

³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

Jesus' audience would have been expecting the third person in the story to be an ordinary Jewish layman.

First the priest, then the Levite, then an Jewish synagogue member.

That would be the natural progression of a story like this.

But to their shock and to their great offense, the third man was a Samaritan.

To the Jews the Samaritans were the dregs of the earth.

The Samaritans were heretics, their religion a mixture of Judaism and paganism.

The were racially mixed people, had Jewish ancestry but intermarried pagans.

And politically they were opposed to the Jewish state.

The Jews were the majority and they disdained the minority Samaritans.

The Samaritans hated the Jews for their superiority.

Centuries of animosity existed between the two groups.

There was a Jewish saying:

He who eats the bread of the Samaritans is like one who eats the flesh of pigs.

Actual synagogue prayers that Samaritans would not receive eternal life.

One recent commentator said:

Imagine an Islamic terrorist sitting around with al-Qaeda buddies, or ISIS buddies and telling a story in which the hero is a noble American soldier or Israeli soldier.

Or imagine someone telling this parable today and the priest is your pastor, the Levite is one of your church elders, the Samaritan an outspoken atheist and gay-rights activist.

³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.

A loyal Jew would have resented being cared for by a Samaritan.

Jesus' audience would have loved it if the man had said:

Don't help me. I'd rather die than have your help.

But he was unconscious and the Samaritan helped him anyway.

³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins 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.'

Jericho was a Jewish town. One commentator says:

Imagine a Plains Indian in 1875 walking into Dodge City with a scalped cowboy on his horse, who he had found on the trail, checking into a room over the local saloon, and staying the night to take care of him.

That Indian would be lucky to get out of town alive.

It would have been safer for the Samaritan to leave some money and go.

But he stayed and at great personal cost:

His safety, his time, his money—he cared for this man in need.

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The lawyer had asked Jesus: Who is my neighbor?

He fully expected a limited definition that he would be able to keep.

Good, fellow Jews. People like yourself. Doing a good deed for good people.

Do that and you've earned eternal life.

Jesus turned the tables on him by asking his own question:

Who was the neighbor to this man?

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Notice he didn't say the Samaritan. He couldn't spit that out.

But he did manage to say: The one who have mercy on him.

Which means your neighbor is any fellow human God brings across your path.

And being a neighbor, the neighborliness God expects, is meeting their needs

at cost to yourself. So this is what it means to love your neighbor as yourself.

Profound, radical generosity.

Then Jesus says: Go do this. Be a neighbor like this Samaritan.

Let's ponder this parable from two perspective.

Both of these will require you to look at your own heart.

1. The ways we try to limit loving our neighbor

2. The motivation and power to love your neighbor

MP#1 The ways we try to limit loving our neighbor

Three ways.

First, we limit the who.

It's natural to give and help people who are like you and who you like.

It's natural to give to people who you identify with.

But Jesus deliberately puts Jew and Samaritan together.

It's a profound example of enormous differences between people—

religious, racial, political, moral—think how those categories divide Americans.

So the neighbor in the commandment—Love your neighbor as you love yourself—

is any other fellow human being no matter how much he or she isn't like you.

Second, we limit the when.

When a good, responsible person is hit with a calamity and need,

When someone we know of as a hard worker and responsible individual
loses his job, we gladly help in that situation.

But not when person's problems caused by his own foolishness and irresponsibility

Don't mind helping when it's not their fault!

But a Samaritan seeing a Jew on the side of the road would have thought he

deserved it. Maybe not personally, but, Samaritans viewed Jews as oppressor.

Jonathan Edwards wrote a paper called the Duty of Charity to the Poor.

He wrote it to help his church members deal with their objections.

One objection: I don't have to help when they have brought it on themselves.

Edwards:

Christ loved you, pitied you, and greatly laid himself out to relieve you from all that want and misery you brought on yourself by your own folly. Should we not love others as Christ loved us?

If Jesus had looked down from heaven and said:

I only want to help deserving sinners with my blood he could have saved a trip.

Because none of us deserve it and we've brought it on ourselves.

Third, we limit the how much.

If I was doing well, I could help. But I can barely cover my own bills.

Jesus sets this parable in a specific place. He doesn't just say a man was on a road,

but the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. As I mentioned, historically dangerous.

There was even a pass called the Pass of Blood so many people attacked there.

When Samaritan stopped, he risked everything.

When he left the man at the inn he said, whatever it takes.

Jonathan Edwards also deals with Christians who say: I can't afford to help.

Remember Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens.

The Gospel obliges us to give to others when by doing so we suffer ourselves. How else is

that rule of bearing one another's burdens fulfilled? If we never are obliged to relieve other's burdens except when we can do it without burdening ourselves, how do you bear your neighbor's burdens if you only do it when you bear no burden at all?

I can't afford to help means I can't afford it without hurting my living standard.

There's no such thing as a Christian who can't afford to help.

Doesn't the magnitude of God's law overwhelm you?

Be a neighbor even people who are not only not like you racially, economically, but even those offensive to you in their religious and political views.

Be a neighbor even people who have brought troubles on themselves.

Help them to the place where some of their burden falls on you.

So you experience a measure of their trouble.

It's clear that you can't gain eternal life by keeping this commandment because there's no way you can keep it. You haven't kept it.

I have used every one of those arguments not to be a generous neighbor.

But isn't it interesting that Jesus ends by saying: Go and do likewise.

Loving your neighbor is not a way to get eternal life.

But it's a way of life Jesus expects of every one of his followers.

So how do you live this impossible command?

MP#2 The motivation and power to love your neighbor

Only two possible ways to get anybody to live like this:

One inadequate, one empowering and all sufficient.

First way that you can try to get people to live like this is through morality.

There are two versions of morality: religious and secular.

Religious version goes:

You must be generous and help the needy because the Bible commands it.

It's your duty. God expects you to do your duty.

Islam, Buddhism, other religions they say the same things in their sacred books.

Allison and I were at a restaurant in Huntsville Friday night, two Indian couples, one man was a Sikh, with turban and beard.

He said my religion says you must give to those in need. Do it. God commands it.

There's also a secular version of morality.

If you're an enlightened, progressive, liberal, decent person—

if you're a justice-minded person you'll be concerned for the poor, vote for policies that help them, give time and money to volunteer to help them.

Both motivate through guilt.

You have so much, they have so little, don't you feel bad? Give it away. And because the motivate by guilt, then inevitably you define neighbor and define showing mercy to your neighbor down to your minimum duty so that you can feel good about yourself and not give up too much.

Morality can't take you very far. It can make you feel guilty.

It can make slightly generous. But it can't change your life.

But there's another motive that's empowering and enabling.

It's the Gospel.

The key to seeing the gospel in the parable is to ask?

Which of the characters in the parable represented the lawyer himself?

Whenever Jesus tells parables, the characters stand for certain people.

And he expects the people hearing parable to see themselves in certain character.

Parable of Prodigal Son, Father stands for God.

The younger brother stands for people who are separated from God by their glaring moral failures and rebellion.

The elder brother stands for people who are separated from God by their morality, their self-righteous belief that God owes them.

Jesus wants tax collectors and sinners to see themselves in younger brother.

He want the Pharisees and religious leaders to see themselves in elder brother.

So what about this parable? Which character represents the lawyer himself?

Imagine if Jesus had told the parable this way:

A Jew just like you was riding to Jericho.

And in the road he saw a Samaritan, beaten and robbed, almost dead.

But that Jewish man got off donkey and took care of him, etc.

He overcame all those religious and racial and political barriers and was a neighbor to the Samaritan. Go and do likewise.

If Jesus had told the story that way the lawyer would have laughed in his face.

Are you kidding. I'm not a traitor to people.

What a ridiculous story. No self-respecting Israelite would do that.

If I came upon that Samaritan I would have ridden my donkey right over him.

But Jesus didn't tell it that way. He didn't put the Israelite the saddle.

He puts the hated Samaritan in the saddle and the wounded Israelite in the road.

Here's the question he's asking: What if you were in the road?

What if your life was ebbing out?

And what if your only hope was an act of free grace to you from an enemy

who doesn't owe you any mercy, in fact, owes you the opposite.
What if your only hope was an act of neighborly generosity from someone who doesn't owe you. Would you want grace?

If he had said: You're in the saddle and the Samaritan is on the ground—
Don't be such a judgmental person, don't put such weight on stereotypes—
and be generous. He would have just been giving this man a rule.
Even if he agreed, he would just comply and not change his heart.

But he's not giving him a rule, he's giving him a dynamic.
What if you were saved by grace of someone who owed you nothing but rejection?
Only if that happens to you, can you get up and start to look at everyone differently.
Only then will you become a generous neighbor to everyone!
Only then will you look at people who you don't like, who you find unpleasant,
people who have gotten themselves in trouble and who deserve it—
and say: But I was no different.

I was saved by someone who didn't owe me that.
I was saved by someone with whom I was an enemy.
I was saved by someone I resisted
and who I would have turned my back on if the tables had been turned.
Salvation by grace gets rid of moralism and pride that makes you look down.
Jesus is saying: You will never be a neighbor until you get a generous neighbor.
You can't do it until you've been the recipient of Jesus' grace.

Look how Jesus uses the man's question at the end.
The man asked: Who is my neighbor?
Jesus asks: Which of these three was a neighbor to the man who fell into
the hands of the robbers?
Man answers: The one who had mercy on him.
Greek word *elios*—mercy, pity, compassion. It's a word of deep feeling.
Elios is used more than any other word to describe Jesus' emotional life.
Over and over, Jesus saw him, had mercy on him. Looked at her, mercy on her.

Here's where I think this starts for each of us.
I must meditate on the amazing fact that Jesus saw me in the road, he looked at me.
And that look moved him to mercy, pity, compassion.
When Jesus saw me half dead in sin, unconscious to him,
stopping in the road wouldn't just risk his life, it would cost his life.
And he did it. For Jesus to come down, put us up in his place—

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Who is the Good Samaritan? He's Jesus Christ.

If you know Jesus as your Good Samaritan who saw you and bound up your wounds at great cost to himself, then that love for him is the motivation and power to do the same.

There are people who the Lord wants you to neighbor, neighbor generously. They are sometimes wounded, certainly by sin.

They may be people very different from you in unpleasant and disturbing ways. Ask Jesus to give you the ability to look at them, the patience, the attentiveness, the willingness to pause in the rush of your busyness and look this other image-bearer in the face and see their sorrows and needs with compassion. And then begin to show them a generous neighborly spirit.

Gresham Machen, Richard Hodges—wrote mother

“A good many people might think Hodges not worth working for — there is deceitfulness in him as well as his recurrent weakness — but in the providence of God I have been given absolute responsibility (so far as anyone has it) for the welfare of a human soul, and I cannot put the matter out of my mind.

The Lord had put Richard Hodges in Machen's way — in many ways a foolish man but a man who was in great need of the attention that Machen could provide. That sounds like the Good Samaritan and the wounded traveler doesn't it? So does all the money spent, all the inconvenience, and all the expectation of others that he needn't do so much for such a man.

To have and care for a Richard Hodges is right thing to do. It is to love your neighbor as yourself. But it is more than that. It is to confess and express your faith in Jesus Christ who was such a Good Samaritan to you when he might so easily have passed you by. It is to be a gospel man or a gospel woman.

It is to be to others what Jesus Christ was to you and to be so because of what Jesus Christ did for you.