

Luke 10:25-37  
Open Hearted Discipleship  
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7-10-16

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Last week, we began a new series of summer messages. Now, I know that for many, summer is a time when we break from our routines a bit. I hope you will stay current, because what we will be looking at this summer, I think, is of the greatest importance for our understanding of what it means to live with God.

Has anyone here ever thought to themselves: “What is the big picture in the Bible? What is the most important thing I need to know in order to understand this book?” Has anyone ever thought that? Well, you’re in luck.

Jesus came into the world sharing God’s *why* with the world. He refers to it in one way or another over 80 times in the New Testament. God’s purpose for sending Jesus into the world, for giving us the Scriptures as the revelation of himself, is to point us toward what Jesus called the *Kingdom of God*.

Throughout this series, we are going to be looking at the Scriptures to see what the arrival of the Kingdom of God means, namely, what life looks like in the Kingdom of God. This morning, we are going to be looking closely at one of the most well-known and well-loved stories from the entire Bible, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Through it, we will see that what the Kingdom of God means for the world, among other things, is the reality of God’s unconditional, unyielding, undiminishing, sacrificial love for the world. When we live in God’s Kingdom, by God’s Spirit, our lives will display in increasing measure this profound, unique, boundless love. Love is the primary value of God’s Kingdom economy.

Look with me at Luke chapter 10. Starting at verse 25, Luke recounts for us a time when Jesus is teaching his disciples and a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. Now, in Rabbinic tradition, students of the Rabbi, when they wanted to ask a question of the Rabbi, would stand to address him—it was to show deference for his position. But do you notice, the question this man asks lacks something; it’s a little confrontational.

**“Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** To which Jesus, in masterfully drawing out his motive for the question, says to him: “Well, what does the law say?” The man, quoting Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 says, “That’s easy, love God and love your neighbor.”

Jesus responds, “Do this and you’ll live.”

But then the man comes back with an evasive question. **“And who is my neighbor?”** Do you ever do this? There are two types of questions: those that are genuinely looking for an answer and those that attack, those that evade.

“Do you want to clean the garage?” It’s not really a question, it’s a statement: clean the garage.

This man, the Bible says, is wanting to justify himself. Like each of us, this man was being presented with teaching that could have dramatically deepened his love for and gratitude to God. But it was

going to involve pounding down some hard edges, so instead of having a teachable spirit, he got defensive, he wanted to justify himself. Does anyone else ever have this experience? I know I'm caught in something, but instead of facing the music, facing the fact that my wife is right, or that I'm culpable, I get defensive and want to justify myself. Has that ever happened to anyone else? The Bible is full of stories of men and women who try to justify themselves before God. Instead of allowing God to show him the vastness of God's mercy and love and hope for humanity, this man wants to keep things confined to his narrow, self-justified world.

To address his questions, Jesus tells this simple story.

**A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.**

Even in these first lines of the story, Jesus is telling us something about the man. In the Bible, when the author wants to use a metaphor for life, they will often use the image of the road. Life is a ... The road is synonymous with the journey, and we can all relate to this image that life is a journey. It's why I've called this series Discipleship on the Road. Faith has real world implications for our lives; this stuff matters.

A man was on the road going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers who beat him, stripped him, and went away leaving him half dead. Literally and figuratively, this man's life was going downhill. The journey from Jerusalem to Jericho is a difficult 23-mile stretch in which a person encounters nearly 3,000 feet of elevation change and very difficult terrain. It was the perfect spot for robbers and marauders to do their robbing and marauding. The metaphor that Jesus is employing here is that this man has a very difficult life, things are a struggle for him.

Can you relate to that? Have you ever gone through a rocky phase? Has your life spiraled? Has your life been difficult? Maybe you're thinking to yourself, this is exactly what my life is like right now, but look at so and so, they look like they're on easy street. Who can relate to going through difficulty in life? Everyone! What Jesus will teach this lawyer is that he has about as much chance in his self-justification of earning eternal life as this half-dead man on the Jericho road has at reaching his destination by himself.

Where are you on the road? What in life has come and beat you up and robbed you of your dignity, your hope, your faith? Work? Family? Friendships? All at once?

This man on the side of the road is completely helpless. This man is broken beyond his ability to repair himself. And Jesus wants us to know that in one way or another, we are just like this man. We are the broken, the miserable, the poor, the addicted and we can't justify ourselves before God, we need someone to come and rescue us, we need someone to come and help us, we need someone to love us.

Jesus continues with verse 31: **Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.**

Here two religious men, the Priest (who held the highest place in the Temple) and the Levite (who was his assistant) pass by this man... on the other side of the road.

Now it's possible that these men were on the road up to Jerusalem for their two-week duty, before returning home to Jericho—where many first century priests lived. One commentator by the name of Kenneth Bailey suggests that it may not have been a callous lack of sympathy that caused them to pass by.

The Priest had a special problem. The wounded man beside the road was unconscious and stripped. If the victim was a fellow Jew, and especially a law-abiding Jew, the priest would have been responsible to reach out and help him. But the victim was unconscious so there was no way to know. The wounded man might also have been dead. If so, the priest who approached him would become ceremonially defiled, and if defiled he would need to return to Jerusalem to undergo a week-long process of ceremonial purification. It would take time to arrange such things. Meanwhile, he could not eat from the tithes or even collect them. The same ban would apply to his family and servants. Distribution to the poor would also have been impossible. What's more, the victim on the road might have been Egyptian, Greek, Syrian, or Phoenician, in which case the Priest was not responsible under the law to do anything. If the priest approached the beaten man and touched him and the man later died, the priest would have been obliged to rend his robes, and in so doing would have violated laws against the destruction of valuable property. The poor priest did not have an easy time determining what was his duty.

The Levite, on the other hand, was the assistant to the priest, and thus his subordinate. So he had to ask himself, do I upstage my superior? Such an act would be an insult.

**The irony here is that these men were on the way to perform sacred religious rituals on behalf of the people, but missed the opportunity to do something truly sacred for this one man.**

No matter how hard we try to justify ourselves, no matter how much we try to do for God in worship, no matter how pure and sacred, no matter how faithful we are in our activities, we cannot bridge the gap. Religion will not save anyone.

These representatives of religion come along and they don't do anything to help this man.

So again, where are you? What are the strategies you've been employing that you've been using to justify yourself? Praying harder? Attending worship more frequently? A new relationship will make me better? A new house will make things better? More stuff?

So this man is dead unless he gets help. But here comes another person on the road.

**But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back."**

Here, a man who was hated by the Jews, a man who was considered a half-breed, traitor, less than, a man who was despised by religious Jews, approaches this wounded half-dead man. And do you see what the text says? **"He went to him."** This man was not trying to justify himself. He was honest

about his own estate, he knew what they thought of him, he knew his place among the righteous law-abiding Jews. This man sees more clearly than the others and he moves toward this man with love.

He comes to the man and pours wine and oil on his wounds. Oil was meant to soften the tissue and wine to disinfect the wound. Here this Samaritan man is right there, down in the dirt and grime with this man's blood all over him caring for him. And then he changes places with this man, putting him on his own animal and carries him to town where he gives the inn keeper 2 denarii, which were enough for as much as two week's stay there. Not only that, but he also told him, whatever additional debt this man incurs while he is resting and recovering, I will return and pay for his debt.

This is absolutely incredible. Who would do such a thing? Who would take the detour? Who would get off their animal? Who would get down in the dirt? Who would put their hands in the wounds and bandage them? Who would give up their ride, and take them to a safe place where they could rest? And who would pay the other's debt in full on their behalf?

Jesus tells us what kind of person would do this. In verse 33, he says someone who **was moved with pity**.

This Samaritan man was moved with pity. Literally, his insides were turning with agony when he saw the suffering of this other man. I know there are those among us who know this experience. To see someone else suffer, it moves you so deeply that it feels like your insides are turning in knots.

I know there are others who know this feeling of pity, to be moved with such compassion (the Greek word here is the word *Splankna*... when an animal was being prepared for sacrifice and its slippery organs, its liver, kidneys, spleen were taken out, that's the word *splankna*). In Jesus' story, that's the word that he uses to describe the compassion that he feels for the man.

In Christ, God has become the Samaritan who comes to help us on the road, our road. He gets down in our wounds, cleaning, disinfecting us, paying our debt. Jesus is the one who comes to us in complete sacrificial love and meets us. The Kingdom of God comes to us and we are invited to realize that God is the one who comes to us on the road when we are wounded and broken and needy, and cares for us, cleans our wounds, restores us, and loves us.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is not about being nice to others and helping others because that a nice thing to do. We're invited into this story because this is a picture of what the Kingdom of God is like. God meets us on our road, no matter what our condition, and he loves us, sacrificially, he even gives his life for us. Did you notice that we don't find out what happens after the man returns to pay the balance? This was such a scandalous thing for a Samaritan to do for a Jew that it's likely that this man could have been killed upon his return—but then again, that would be fitting for Jesus' expression of love for us. Jesus is the one who, as the Apostle Paul says in the book of Philippians, makes himself nothing, emptying himself and taking the form of a servant and giving himself for us.

Jesus does this because, above all, the Kingdom of God is ruled by the law of love. And the closing verse is instruction for every single person in this room, every single person in this community, every single person living on God's green earth...go and do likewise. Amen.