

## Encounters with Jesus: An Expert in the Law Luke 10:25-37

--CEFC 1/13/19; 12/12/10

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Not all questions are really questions, if you know what I mean.

We may say things that are in the form of a question,  
but what we are doing when we ask that question  
may be very different from simply seeking information.

For example, I may come into the house at dinnertime  
and see my wife cooking in the kitchen  
and ask, "Are we having meatloaf again?"

That could be a simple inquiry about the dinner menu.  
Or it could be a exclamation of eager anticipation because I really love meatloaf,  
or it could be a bitter complaint or even an accusation  
because I really hate meatloaf.

Questions often do things unrelated to just getting a simple answer.

And taking a question in a straightforward, literal sense  
can sometimes lead to severe misunderstanding  
about what is really going on below the surface.

And that's important to keep in mind  
as we consider our story this morning from the Gospel of Luke.

The story is driven by the questions that are asked,  
and Luke the Evangelist helps us out  
by spelling out something of the inner motivations of this expert of the law  
who comes to question Jesus.

It's clear he wasn't really interested in getting answers—not at all.

Luke reveals that he posed his first question to test Jesus  
and the second to justify himself.

But Jesus uses questions, too.

And as we probe beneath the surface we'll see that  
Jesus' first question really puts this expert in the law to the test  
and Jesus' second question serves to justify himself—  
which is to say, it justifies what God was doing  
through Jesus' own life and ministry.

Through it all, this passage will convey a moral demand  
that is both challenging and convicting,

and ultimately this passage will point us to God's gracious gospel,  
which is both humbling and encouraging.

Let's go to this episode which Luke records for us beginning in Luke 10:25.

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First, let's consider the context—

Jesus has been engaged in ministry for some time,  
and not without some heated controversy.

He came to Israel announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God—  
but the presence of that Kingdom seemed to be centered on himself.

Jesus demonstrated the authority of kingdom in his teaching;

Jesus demonstrated the power of the kingdom in his acts of healing.

He even demonstrated the grace of the kingdom  
when he claimed the right to forgive sins.

Consequently, if you want to enter this kingdom,  
you must "**Follow me**," Jesus said.

And all sorts of people were answering that call—

including some of the more sordid types—the undesirables—  
the kind not well thought of in the proper circles—

the hated tax collectors and the contemptable prostitutes among them.

That certainly didn't go over well with the powers that be. /

More than that, Jesus seemed to have decidedly unorthodox views

regarding the law of Moses—  
particularly as it related to Sabbath observance.

Once Jesus directly confronted the Pharisees and the teachers of the law

by healing a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath

right in front of everyone in the synagogue.

Luke tells us that they were furious and began to conspire against him. /

That's the background for what we read in 10:25—

"**On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus**

"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now, let's be clear about who this "**expert in the law**" would have been—

don't think: "seasoned tax attorney" or "Federal prosecutor."

He was an expert in the law of Moses—

that is, the Jewish Scriptures that governed every aspect of life in Israel.

He would have been a biblical scholar—

one who could quote chapter and verse backward and forward.

He was, therefore, one who possessed great authority

in determining what was acceptable and what wasn't

in the religious, civil and moral life of the people of God.

In other words, he was regarded as an expert in what it meant to be a good Jew.

No doubt, he had heard of Jesus,

and surely, he didn't like much of what he heard.  
Jesus was popular with the people, but Jesus challenged the status quo.  
His views on the laws regulating the Sabbath were suspect,  
he seemed to question the role of the revered sacrificial rituals,  
and he even seemed to be expanding the very definition  
of who would be acceptable as a part of the people of God.  
After all, Jesus had commended the faith of a Roman Centurion.

This expert lawyer seems respectable enough in his approach to Jesus—  
he stood before him, we're told—that was honorable.

In the Middle East the student always stood to ask a question.  
and he addressed Jesus as "**teacher**" or "**rabbi**."

But behind that façade of courtesy and even deference  
was a more devious motivation—

In asking this question

Luke tells us that his real desire was "**to put Jesus to the test.**"

He was trying to trap him  
into saying something that would get him in trouble.

In effect, this lawyer was standing over Jesus as his judge  
to see if he measured up to his standard of orthodoxy.

So he asks, "**What must I do to inherit eternal life?**"

On the one hand, the question itself is misguided—  
what can you DO to inherit anything?—  
an inheritance simply goes as a gift to the legal heir.

But the language of inheritance is commonly found in the Old Testament  
to refer to Israel's privilege of inheriting the promised land—  
and it became extended to include the whole of God's promise to his people  
of life in the glorious kingdom of the age to come.

The inheritance was eternal life—life in God's kingdom—  
and the commonly held belief was that the way to achieve it  
was by keeping the law, the Torah.

One well known rabbi, Rabbi Hillel, who lived just before Jesus,  
famously said,  
"whoever has gained for himself words of Torah  
has gained for himself the life of the world to come."

So, Rabbi Jesus, what is your view on the matter?  
**"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"**  
What do I have to do to be a good Jew?  
Tell me what you think, Jesus."

This man was no doubt ready to pounce on any pronouncement of Jesus  
that didn't meet his approval.

I suspect, he was almost hoping for such a response.  
It would simply confirm his conception of this troublemaker.

But Jesus was not naïve.

He was wise to the ways of the world,  
and instead of falling into some theological trap,  
he turns the tables  
and responds with a question of his own.

He knew where the lawyer's mind was headed, so that's where he goes--  
**"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"**

This was a common feature of Jesus' interaction with people—  
and one I think we could imitate more often,  
especially in dealing with what we perceive to be a hostile audience.  
Jesus deflected the attack and turned it back on the attacker  
simply by asking a question.

v. 27—"the legal expert 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.'"**

Here this man gives a combination of Deut. 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18—  
and elsewhere in the Gospels this is just the answer Jesus himself gave  
when he was asked,  
Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?

**"All the Law and the Prophets  
hang on these two commandments,"** Jesus had said (Mt. 22:40).

This connection of these two commandments  
is a wonderful summary of our entire moral responsibility.  
Love of God and neighbor sums it all up quite well.

There is some evidence that Jesus was not the first  
to tie these two commandments together,  
but he certainly endorsed this summary,  
and here he commends this expert in the law for his answer.  
**"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied.**  
To which he adds, **"Do this and you will live."**

At this point, Jesus has no problem with this man's theology—  
the problem surely comes in his practice.  
He could recite the right Scripture verses,  
but did he really understand what they meant?

Yes, do this and you will live, Jesus says.  
Simply love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind  
and your neighbor as yourself—and you will live.  
But who is capable of such a thing?

Isn't that the problem?

We'll get back to that later.

It well may be that this expert in the law knew  
 that this summary of the law in loving of God and loving one's neighbor  
 was Jesus' own view;  
 he knew that this response would get Jesus' approval  
 so he was ready with a second follow-up question.  
 I'm sure you've seen the interviewer do this sort of thing on *Meet the Press*.

So he asks, "**And who is my neighbor?**"

Again, this utterance in the form of a question betrays this man's real intent.  
 Luke makes that explicit—  
 v. 29--He said this because "**he wanted to justify himself.**"<sup>1</sup>

Don't forget who he is—  
 he's an expert in the Jewish law.  
 He has it in his head that the law itself tells you just what it means  
 to love God and to love one's neighbor.

If you circumcise your sons  
 and offer the appropriate sacrifices,  
 and properly observe the Sabbath  
 and eat the right foods prepared in the kosher way—  
 then that's what it means to love God  
 and to be a part of his chosen people.

That's what the Torah is about—  
 it draws the boundary lines to establish who is in and who is out.  
 It tells you how to stay in—as a part of God's people—  
 the people who love God.

And that's true of loving your neighbor, too.  
 Surely, in this man's mind that command has to be understood in the right way—  
 your neighbor was your friend, your fellow Jew—  
 even a righteous Jew.

After all, doesn't the passage in Leviticus 19 identify one's neighbor  
 as being one's "**brother**" and "**the son of your own people**"? (vv. 17-18).

In one Jewish book of the time we read,  
 "if you do a good turn,  
 know for whom you are doing it,  
 and your good deeds will not go to waste.  
 Do good to a devout man, and you will receive a reward,  
 if not from him, then certainly from the Most High. . . .  
 Give to a devout man,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 16:15.

do not go to the help of a sinner.  
 Do good to a humble man,  
 give nothing to a godless one" (Sirach 12:1-7).

This expert in the law asked Jesus, "**And who is my neighbor?**"  
 to justify himself as a good Jew—  
 one who could keep the law in the limited sense that he understood it.  
 Surely, he was among those who would inherit eternal life,  
 so he asked this question to justify himself.

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So how is Jesus to get through to this man,  
 who surely had a hardened heart?  
 All he wanted in this encounter was to put Jesus to the test  
 and to justify himself.

Jesus doesn't address him directly, head on, with a rebuke or a challenge.  
 Instead he tells a story, a parable—  
 and it's one of his most famous stories,  
 known by many people who know little else about what Jesus ever said or did.

And like many of Jesus' stories, it can be read on different levels,  
 and on its most profound level,  
 its meaning is only perceived by those with ears to hear. /

The parable begins in v. 30—"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,  
 when he fell into the hands of robbers."

Jerusalem is on the central ridge in Israel about 2500 feet above sea level—  
 the city of Jericho lies on the edge of the Jordan River  
 in a deep rift about 1000 below sea level,  
 so you really do go down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

It was about a 17-mile trip along the Roman road.  
 That route was notoriously dangerous in ancient times.  
 One ancient historian reported that the Roman general Pompey  
 had to wipe out "strongholds of brigands" near Jericho.<sup>2</sup>  
 Later the Crusaders built a small fort at the halfway mark to protect pilgrims.  
 That fort is now a rest stop—called, appropriately enough, the Samaritan Inn—  
 and when we were much younger—before kids,  
 Susan and I, with another couple, once took a bus there from Jerusalem  
 and hiked the rest of the way through the desert down to Jericho.  
 I remember the land being quite desolate  
 with lots of ravines and caves perfect for hideouts.  
 We were, shall I say, a little nervous  
 on that road going down to Jericho.

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<sup>2</sup> Strabo, *Georg.* xvi.2.41, noted in Plummer, 286.

This is the perfect setting for the story Jesus wanted to tell.

He doesn't describe this unfortunate traveler,  
but his listeners would surely have assumed he was a Jew.

Jesus continues:

**"His attackers stripped him of his clothes,  
beat him and left him half dead"—  
suggesting that he was unconscious.**

These details are critical to the story,  
because they mean that this man couldn't have been recognized  
by what he wore or by the way he spoke.

Anyone who passed by couldn't tell if he was a fellow-countryman  
or a foreigner;  
a Jew, a Gentile, or, God forbid, a Samaritan.

In the Middle Eastern world, then as now,—  
with its various ethnic-religious identities and animosities—  
such an identification would make all the difference in how one might react to him.

But stripped of his clothes and half-dead,  
he would have been encountered simply as a human being in need.

So what would happen to this poor man?  
Would anyone stop to help him?

First, "**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 were among the upper-class aristocrats of first-century Jewish society.  
One can assume that he would have been able to help this man, if he had wanted to.  
But he didn't.

And he may not have done so for any number of reasons.

If this man had been robbed, the thieves may still be on the hunt.  
Stopping could be dangerous.

Or, perhaps, it was the threat of becoming ritually defiled.  
The man was half-dead—and might well have appeared fully dead,  
and contact with a corpse, even getting too close to one,  
was on the top of the list of sources of contamination,  
which would prevent him from performing any of his sacred duties.<sup>3</sup>

His very status within the community as a respected religious leader  
may have kept him from helping this man.

**"So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him,  
passed by on the other side."**

<sup>3</sup> Against this threat of ritual defilement as a reason for the priest passing by, see Edwards, p. 311; n. 114.

Levites were next on the official religious scale—  
 they assisted the priests in their sacred duties,  
 and attended to matters in the temple precincts.

The Levites were not under quite the same regulations as the priests.  
 He could have contact with a corpse without the same consequences—  
 but it was still an offence.

And the way Jesus tells the story,  
 the Levite "**came to the place**"—  
 suggesting that he actually approached the man.  
 But he, too, passed by on the other side.

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After the priest and the Levite,  
 the Jewish audience would have likely expected Jesus to refer to a Jewish layman—  
 a common Jewish laborer, a carpenter perhaps,  
 who does what these religious professionals refuse to do.  
 In certain circles, anticlericalism was as common then as it is today.

What they hear from Jesus instead must have shocked them—  
 the third man traveling on that road was a hated Samaritan.

To feel the force of this story you have to appreciate the animosity that existed  
 between Jews and Samaritans.

As John writes in his Gospel:  
**"Jews do not associate with Samaritans"** (Jn. 4).

In the previous chapter, Luke had recounted the incident in which a Samaritan village refused to welcome Jesus and his disciples  
 simply because they were headed toward Jerusalem,  
 and James and John said,  
**"Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"** (9:54).

A later Jewish rabbinic teaching declared,  
 "He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to one that eats the flesh of swine."  
*(Mishna Shebiith 8:10)*

Jesus could have told this story with a noble Jew as the hero, but he doesn't—  
 it's a Samaritan who appears as a model instead.  
 Might as well use a Palestinian member of Hezbollah  
 if you were telling this story to Jews in Israel today.

Here in America,  
 in certain circles he might be a Nazi White Supremacist,  
 or a member of the Black Panthers,  
 depending on the audience.

I think you get the idea.

In contrast to the priest and the Levite,

this Samaritan reacts to this wounded man on the road with compassion—  
 "he took pity on him."

The word used there is a strong one—  
 it comes from the word for bowels—  
 it was a deep gut reaction to this man's need.

The priest goes down the road,  
 the Levite comes to the place,  
 the Samaritan comes to the man.

**"He went to him and bandaged his wounds,"**  
 which is the least the Levite could have done.  
 Then he **poured on oil and wine**—  
 which as first-aid remedies  
 served as antiseptic and disinfectant.

But oil and wine are also elements used in the sacrificial worship in the temple—  
 perhaps suggesting that this Samaritan offered the sacrifice  
 that the priest failed to offer—in the form of mercy to a man in need.

Didn't Jesus like to quote Hosea 6:6:  
 The Lord says, "**I desire mercy and not sacrifice.**" /

**"Then [this Samaritan] put the man on his own donkey,**  
 took him to an inn and took care of him.  
**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.'**

Here the story comes full circle,  
 as this Samaritan undoes the robbers' deed.

They robbed the man;  
 the Samaritan pays for him.  
 They left him dying;  
 the Samaritan leaves him cared for.  
 They abandoned him;  
 the Samaritan promises to return.

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Now Jesus is prepared to return the lawyer's second question—  
**"Who is my neighbor?"**—  
 with a question of his own:  
 v. 36 "**Which of these three do you think was a neighbor<sup>4</sup>**  
**to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?**"

The expert in the law, he gets the point, at least superficially,  
 but he can't quite get himself to say the dreaded word "**Samaritan**."

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<sup>4</sup> τίς τούτων τῶν τριῶν πλησίον δοκεῖ σοι γεγονέναι

He simply replied, “**The one who had mercy on him.**”

“**Go and do likewise,**” Jesus told him.

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What are we to make of this man's encounter with Jesus?

What is this story of the Good Samaritan all about?

How can it apply to our lives?

As with many of Jesus' parables,

I think there are several layers of meaning here.

On the surface, this is a pointed moral exhortation—

Jesus is encouraging us to do good to people—

as in "Come on, be a good Samaritan—pitch in and help."

**"Good Samaritan"** has become a byword for someone who lends a helping hand—

and maybe even goes above and beyond what was called for—

you know, stop and help the person with a flat tire;

take some chicken soup to a sick neighbor—that sort of thing.

You should all do more of that, Jesus is saying.

That's what it means to love your neighbor.

On the moral level, Jesus is saying, "Be good, and this is what goodness looks like."

Helping those in need—that's what loving your neighbor looks like.

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That's the most obvious way of viewing the parable,

and if that's all you take away from Jesus' words this morning,

you'll be a better person

and the world will be a better place.

Here is Jesus' call not just to pious talk,

but to compassionate action—

We are not called to solve the problems of the world,

but to respond with compassion to the people God puts in our path.

I would say that each of us ought to have some way

in which we are engaging with people in need—

maybe it is helping deliver furniture with ACCA,

or helping the orphans in the Children's Home in Uganda,

or serving women in difficult circumstances through ASSIST.

We can't do everything, but each of us can do something, and we should.

What will it be for you?

Jesus gives us an exhortation to compassionate action,

and that is challenging.

But I have to think that there is more to it than that.

I say that partly because if that was all there was to Jesus' message,

I don't think he would have ended up on a Roman cross.  
No, there was something subversive about Jesus—  
something that challenged the status quo,  
something that upset the powers that be.  
In the context, Jesus is talking about our understanding of God's law  
and what God requires of us.  
This lawyer seemed to have it all figured out—  
he came to Jesus with a question,  
but really it was a test—  
But Jesus turned that test back on the lawyer.  
If seen in that light,  
we can't help but conclude that Jesus also wanted him and us  
to see something else--  
that is, that **the moral demands of God upon our lives**  
**are greater than we can ever imagine.**

You see, this expert in the law wants to justify himself.  
He thinks he knows what God requires—  
but does he?  
**"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind  
and love your neighbor as yourself."**  
That's what the law says.  
Seems simple enough.  
And if you define each of those two commands narrowly enough,  
if you translate them into certain legal prescriptions—  
if you make them spiritual or superficial--  
and if you confine them to certain achievable forms,  
then maybe you can do what the law requires.  
You can love God and love your neighbor.  
So long as neighbor means people you like,  
or people who treat you well,  
or people you're connected to by blood or affection  
or nationality.

And if we think of somehow winning God's favor by our obedience to the law,  
then we will engage in all sorts of self-justifying manipulations  
to defend ourselves and to make sure we're OK.  
Lawyers are especially good at that.  
We all have ways of diminishing what it really means to obey God's law.

One of the most common ways we often use  
is to define "love" as simply do no harm.  
We can love our neighbor as ourselves by simply leaving him alone.

But Jesus won't let us get away with that—  
the priest and the Levite-- they didn't hurt this poor man by the side of the road.  
They didn't rob him or beat him or leave him half-dead.

They just minded their own business  
and went along their merry way.  
"No harm; no foul" as the saying goes.

But Jesus doesn't see it that way—  
they weren't neighbors to this man.

They didn't sin in what they did, but in what they didn't do.  
Theirs was not a sin of commission but a sin of omission.

They simply neglected someone they should have helped.

"But it's not my problem," we might say—  
if that man had been my brother or cousin, I might have felt some obligation.  
Or even if he was a fellow-Jew.  
But he was stripped and unconscious—he had no connection to me.

Isn't that what we often say.  
And there is some justification for that.  
We do have a special obligation to care for those closest to us.<sup>5</sup>

But Jesus won't let us off the hook so easily—  
the word "neighbor" can't be so circumscribed;  
it can't be narrowed into a nice, neat little family circle.  
The person who you are called to love  
is the person in need whom God puts in your path—  
whomever that may be. /

But that can't be true, you say.  
How is that possible?  
How can I ever obey the law if that's what it means?

Maybe that's the point.

Jesus knows that we need to be  
shaken out of the shallowness of our moral complacency,  
by which we try to justify ourselves.

We need to see that the moral demands of God  
are greater than we can ever imagine.

Isn't that what Jesus did to that rich young man who came to him  
with a very similar question—  
"Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16)  
... "If you want to enter life," Jesus says, "obey the commandments."  
"Which ones?" the man inquired.  
Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal,  
do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,"

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<sup>5</sup> cf. 1 Tim. 5:8; Ga. 6:10.

and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect [fully complete, lacking nothing], go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.  
Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth."

Do you see what Jesus does?—

he challenges this young man's moral self-assurance—his self-righteousness.  
How can he possibly say, "All these I have kept"?

Doesn't he need to see that the commandment not to murder  
means not even being angry with your brother,

and the command not to commit adultery  
means not even looking at a woman lustfully.

Didn't this young man need to see that you cannot love both God and Mammon.

And doesn't this lawyer need to see

that the command to love your neighbor as yourself  
means showing mercy to someone—anyone—  
whom God puts in your path.

God's standard can't be domesticated;  
it can't be abbreviated and lowered to our level—  
God's standard of righteousness is himself—nothing less.

That's what this story says to me—

The moral demands of God upon our lives  
are greater than we can ever imagine.

Who could ever justify themselves before such a holy God?  
And that is convicting.

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But there's still more to this story.

Jesus could have made the point about the moral demands of God  
using just any ordinary Jews as the bad examples in the story—  
but he didn't.

He used a priest and a Levite—why is that?

These were the central religious figures in Israel.

These were the ones who represented the religious ideals—  
they were the embodiment of sacredness in Jewish society.  
And who are they contrasted with?—  
a despised and unclean Samaritan.

And in using these characters,

Jesus was criticizing the way the Jews understood their religion.

The priest and the Levite dared not approach what could have been a defiling corpse,  
and so they left a half-dead man to die.

They were more concerned about their own ritual purity than with a human life.

Their religion had perverted their relationships—  
in appearing to show regard for God in heaven  
they were disregarding his image—  
the image of God in this needy human being right before their eyes  
here on earth.

They observed the outward form of the law but neglected its heart.

In a story recorded in chap. 13,  
their understanding of the law  
caused them to care more about the treatment of their animals on the Sabbath day  
than the healing of a woman who had been crippled for 18 years (Luke 13:10-17)

This was a perversion of religion in Jesus' eyes—  
and he railed against it repeatedly in his ministry.

Later he would say,

**"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!  
You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin.  
But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—  
justice, mercy and faithfulness."** (Matt. 23:23)

Beware, Jesus is saying,  
your religion can deceive you.

Jesus was bringing to Israel a new way of understanding what the law was about—  
the true way—  
for the law was meant to express a relationship with God—as a son to his father—  
that was reflected in new relationships with other people—  
relationships of love, grace and truth.

The law was meant to be an expression of the character of God  
that would result in blessing to the nations.

But the law had become a source of pride and self-righteousness  
that led to a sharp separation from and even a hatred of the nations.

Beware of your religion.  
And that's where the introduction of this Samaritan comes into the story.

Remember the lawyer's initial question?  
It was about who would inherit eternal life?  
Who would be a part of the glorious age to come—  
the kingdom God would bring—  
the kingdom that Jesus kept talking about?

The lawyer was all about justifying himself—  
drawing the boundary lines  
so that he would be in and various others would be out.

But Jesus makes the Samaritan the hero—  
This hated heretic, the outsider—he's in;  
while the revered insiders—the priest and Levite—they're out.

Jesus is announcing a kingdom that turns things upside down.  
And in the process, he condemns the religious status quo,  
and opens the way for a new covenant that will be good news for all nations.

If we do not see our gospel as good news for all nations,  
then we haven't understood the gospel.  
Jesus gives us a warning—  
there's no place for tribalism in his kingdom.

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And that leads to a final lesson from this story—  
and its perhaps the least obvious of all,  
though it has not always been that way.

Throughout the Gospel,  
when Jesus announced the Kingdom of God—  
he always ended up pointing to himself.  
Isn't that where he ends up with the rich young ruler—  
If you want to enter into life—  
if you want to be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing—  
Go sell what you have and give to the poor,  
then come, follow me, he said.  
“Only I can fill what you lack.”  
And the earliest Christian interpreters  
saw that happening in this story, too.

Did you notice the subtle shift from the lawyer's question to Jesus'—  
The lawyer asks,  
**"And who is my neighbor?"**

But then, in his counter question  
Jesus asks, **“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor  
to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”**

In other words, Jesus almost invites the man to put himself  
in the place of this man who had been stripped and beaten and left half-dead.  
For in Jesus' mind this legal expert was in the place of that man—  
beaten down by the devil,  
stripped of any righteousness,  
half-dead in his sin,  
and unable to do anything to save himself.  
And who is his neighbor?  
In the deepest sense, his neighbor was standing right in front of him.  
His neighbor is Jesus.

Wasn't Jesus seen as a religious outsider?—  
in fact, he was taunted by his enemies at one point—  
"Aren't we right in saying  
that you are a **Samaritan and demon-possessed?**" (Jn. 8:48).

The established leaders of Israel had failed;  
they passed by on the other side.  
But doesn't Jesus come in mercy to bind up our wounds,  
and in a costly demonstration of unexpected and unmerited love,  
he pays the price for our healing—  
pouring out his own blood,  
doing for us what only God himself can do.  
And doesn't he promise to come back for us?

Jesus is that Samaritan—  
he is the suffering servant sent to save.  
He is the neighbor we all need./

Yes, this parable speaks to us of our moral duty to help others—  
regardless of the race, color or creed of the one in need.  
We dare not pass by on the other side.  
Go and do likewise.

But Yes, at the same time, this parable reveals to us  
that our conception of the moral demand of God upon our lives  
is far greater than we ever imagine.  
Instead of fueling our self-righteous pride,  
if anything, what Jesus says here only reveals our moral bankruptcy,  
stripping us of all our self-justifications.

And Yes, in the process,  
we are confronted with the real danger that our religion itself may get in the way—  
distorting what it means to live a life pleasing to God.  
Instead of leading us into life,  
it may lead us away from it,  
passing by on the other side.

And ultimately, all that this parable teaches us should lead us to Jesus himself.  
For the eternal life that this expert in the law wanted  
is finally found in knowing Jesus Christ.  
He is the one who not only teaches us what it means to love our neighbor--  
He has become our neighbor—  
the neighbor we all need.

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Prayer:

Closing Song: *Let It Be Said of Us*

Benediction:

Acts 20:32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace,  
which can build you up  
and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

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**The Parables of Jesus**  
Jan. 13, 2019

**The Good Samaritan**  
**Luke 10:25-37**

Questions are not always really questions. In this well-known story of Jesus, we see the power of questions to probe our hearts, causing us to think deeply about moral demands and ultimately a gracious Savior.

**The Context:**  
**The Controversy Surrounding Jesus**

**The Questioning Character:**  
**An “expert in the law”**

**The Dueling Questions:**  
“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”  
“What is written in the Law?”  
“Who is my neighbor?”  
“Which of these was a neighbor to this man?”

**The Story—**  
**The Ravaged Victim**  
**The Priest and the Levite**  
**The Hated Samaritan**

**The Application:**

- I. An Exhortation to Compassionate Action
- II. A Demonstration of Our Moral Failure
- III. A Warning Against Deceptive Religion
- IV. A Pointer to the One Neighbor We All Need

**Sermon Response:**

**The Good Samaritan**  
**Luke 10:25-37**

- Why do you think Jesus uses a question to answer the question put to him by this “expert in the law”?
- Who are the people in need that the Lord has placed in your life? How have you “passed by on the other side”? How could you show compassion toward them and act as the Samaritan did?
- We all know we fail the Lord—not just in our sins of commission, but also in our sins of omission. Take time to confess your sin and express your need of a Savior. Turn to Jesus in prayer and receive his merciful forgiveness.
- How can your “religion” deceive you, keeping you from rightly loving God and loving your neighbor?
- How is Jesus the neighbor you need—as that Good Samaritan in your life?