

## Acquiring Eternal Life (Luke 10:25-42)



### A. Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

1. Two of the best-known parables are both found in Luke, of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. What is Jesus' point in telling this parable? If everyone lived like this good Samaritan, then we don't need religion or the law? Or doing good to others is all that is required in life?
2. To understand this story we have to ask, 'Why did Jesus tell this story? and to whom did Jesus tell this story?'
  - a. Jesus told this story when He was challenged by a lawyer, i.e. teacher of the Scriptures, who stood up at the end of His teaching, and asked Him the most important question in life. Most people don't dare to honestly ask it because they don't believe a real answer exists. The lawyer's question was, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 'Eternal life' refers to both the quality and the quantity of this life. The lawyer was asking Jesus, "How can I really live this life? And forever?"
  - b. Many cultures have various legends of kings and emperors searching for magical plants that will give them immortality. The modern version would be sci-fi movies exploring cloning or gene-editing technology.
  - c. Now that one of the brightest Jewish teachers popped this ultimate question, everybody's ears perked up. Sadly this lawyer asked the right question but with a wrong motive. He was not sincerely seeking for answers, but 'testing' Jesus to expose His 'theological' weakness and unorthodoxy as the famous country bumpkin preacher without formal education or credentials. The lawyer was very confident about his own.
3. Jesus simply said, "Let's go to the Bible. What is your reading of it?"
  - a. In Jesus' days the Scriptures were just the Old Testament, composed of 39 books. In them were the Ten Commandments and 613 finer laws. And with unusual clarity the lawyer summed them all up in just two commandments: (1) "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind (c.f. Deut 6:5); (2) and your neighbour as yourself." (c.f. Lev 19:18) (10:27).  
Jesus absolutely agreed with him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." *In other words, your understanding is good, now you have to live it. You need to live out what you already know.* Note, the essence of Christianity is relationship.
  - b. The lawyer asked, "what must I do –" as in one act, something spectacular or heroic. Jesus' reply 'do' was in continuous tense, i.e. *continue to live this way*.  
But who can really say 'I have always loved God with all my heart, all my soul, all my strength, all my mind all the time?' Who can say 'I have always loved my neighbour as myself?' The lawyer should have known that he didn't *and* couldn't live this way, and he should have admitted it.
  - c. But he wanted to justify himself, i.e. prove himself right to everyone, that he is already right with God. He had a classic case of 'DIY religion'. Having a legal mind trained in the OT law, he moves to his next question to do with definitions, "who is my neighbour?" (10:29).  
Why is he asking this? When we define something, we set a limit and boundary to it. The lawyer was anticipating Jesus to define 'his neighbour' as 'his fellow Jews', which was the assumed Jewish understanding under the Roman occupation. And this lawyer most likely had a list of achievements, awards and medals for what he had already done for his fellow Jews.  
Notice the two minds in battle here: (1) The lawyer challenges Jesus with a question; (2) Jesus comes back with another question, and pokes a hole in the lawyer's self-righteousness; (3) The lawyer fights back with his next question of 'definitions' in order to prove his own righteousness; (4) Now Jesus' final reply is tell a story. And we will see that Jesus never defines the who our neighbour is.
4. Most of us know the story by heart. The road to Jericho is 27km journey of winding desert road with many caves along the way. It is a steep downward descent of more than 900m, and finishes below the sea level. It was known as the 'Bloody Way' because of the bandits and robbers even up to 1920's. The traveller who was

left half-dead by the robbers in the story is clearly a Jew, and the reactions of three different individuals are listed. The first two were the Jewish clergy, and the third - a despised Samaritan.

- a. Priest - If a priest touched a dead body, he would become ceremonially unclean. (Lev 21:1) The poor Jewish man was left half-dead, which means the priest could not find out whether the man was dead or not without touching him. So not only did the priest *not* help, but he crossed over to the other side of the road to avoid any possibility of contamination. Ceremonial cleanliness, religious purity and personal convenience won the day over actually loving the fellow Jewish man, their “neighbour”.
- b. Levite - A Levite was of the priestly tribe, but under less stringent ceremonial obligation than the priest, so we would expect him to help a dying fellow Jew. But this Levite too refused to get involved and passed by on the other side. He too was more interested in ceremonial purity and his own convenience.
- c. Samaritan - The lawyer would have expected a ‘Jewish layman’ to help the poor man, to deliver the anti-clerical punchline of the story. But along came a Samaritan of the impure half-breed Jews, whom the Jews despised and rejected more than even they did the gentiles. Remember John wanted to blow up a Samaritan village just a few days before? (9:54)

The Samaritan’s compassion on the dying Jew went far beyond what was expected. The wine he poured on the man’s wounds had antiseptic effect, and the oil was to ease the pain. Then he set the man on his animal, which means the Samaritan had to walk down all the way. He paid the innkeeper 2 denarii, about 2 days of working man’s wage, to look after the Jewish man and promised to refund the innkeeper on his way back should the money be not enough. Incredible!

5. Jesus was utterly practical: “So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?” (10:36).
  - a. Jesus turned the lawyer’s question, ‘who is my neighbour?’ to ‘to whom am I a neighbour?’ This was the question the lawyer should have asked. *Not, who is my friend? But who needs me to be a friend to him?*
  - b. Neighbour is not someone toward whom you entertain a warm feeling, but someone for whom you do something very practical. The respectable religious Jews chose ‘religious expediency’ over ‘human life’ even though there was a provision in the Law of Moses to recover from the ceremonial pollution. Why? Because saving a life was ‘costly’ and ‘inconvenient’ to them.

Jesus is telling the expert lawyer to ask himself, “did the priest and the Levite who scrupulously retained the ceremonial purity required by the Law, truly keep the Law?” This was the root of the problem with Judaism in Jesus’ days. They kept the letter of the Law, but missed the spirit of the Law.

*Since GI started the special food ministry due to the covid19 lockdown, we are discovering neighbours we did not know we had!*

- c. Jesus didn’t define ‘who is my neighbour’, but He defined ‘what it means to love my neighbour’.

There is something else in the story we often miss. Why would a Jew walk down this notoriously dangerous road to Jericho by himself? To avoid coming into contact with the impure breed of Samaritans, because this Jericho road bypasses the Samaritan villages. The very person this Jewish man wanted to avoid, was the one who actually saved him. It was a totally undeserved act of compassion.
- d. In Johannesburg South Africa, a white man was trapped in a gold mine by sudden collapse and knocked unconscious, and an African man jumped into the dangerous situation, risking his own life and carried the white man on his shoulder to safety. Later on in the hospital people asked the white man, “do you want to meet the man who saved your life?” He was very happy to meet him, “Yes, please!” But when his rescuer finally showed up, the white man turned his face to the wall and did not acknowledge him or thank him because he was African.

When Jesus asked, ‘who was neighbour to this suffering Jewish man?’, the lawyer could not bring himself to say the word ‘Samaritan’. He just managed to say, “he who showed mercy him.” (10:37)

- e. The conversation finishes abruptly when Jesus tells the lawyer, “Go and do (*keep on doing*) likewise.” We do not know what the lawyer’s response was. But what is the point here? We all have to admit, including this lawyer, that we are incapable of living like the good Samaritan.

This story is only about loving our neighbour as ourselves. What about loving God with all our heart? Mary and Martha answer that question.

## B. Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)

1. This story is not about the difference between Mary and Martha’s temperaments. Why would Jesus rebuke Martha for being made differently to Mary? The simple truth is, Martha got so busy doing things for people, that she failed to love the Lord. Loving the Lord comes before loving people. And loving people flows out of having our hearts connected to the heart of God in love.
2. Martha started out loving people in her own strength. And soon she gets resentful toward them. She is resentful of Mary, her sister and ‘co-worker’ in the ministry. Martha feels Mary is not doing enough. Martha doesn’t stop there. She ends up rebuking the Lord! She is disappointed at the Lord for not supporting her more. So subtle, but very real.

If you think life is about doing something good to others, remember this. Jesus is saying, “Martha, what about Me?” Martha’s attitude toward Mary was wrong. Her attitude toward the Lord was wrong. Her attitude toward herself was wrong. Yet it is the picture of all of us.

3. Jesus said to Martha, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” (10:42)

What is the “one thing” Jesus is talking about? Only one dish is needed? That “one thing” is that *the Lord Jesus* wanted someone to talk to. Jesus was making the final move toward Jerusalem to die there. And Jesus literally had no one to talk to. His disciples were busy arguing about who is the greatest among them. Jesus wanted to talk to someone about the most intimate matter in His heart, but the disciples were “deaf” to His voice.

What did Jesus talk about at the dinner table? That intimate conversation is not recorded, perhaps it was too sacred. But sitting at the feet of Jesus at that dinner table was Mary, and she heard Him. Mary understood Jesus was going to die very soon. And she prepared the alabaster jar of oil to anoint Jesus for his burial.

4. Even today the Lord wants someone He can share His heart with. Are you available for the Lord? Can He talk to you? Rather than you always trying to do something good to others for Him? It is important to do good. But it is more important to love the Lord and spend time with Him and listen to Him. This is worship.

Mary is the picture of the ‘true worshipper’. Martha is the picture of the ‘dutybound worker’. True work of God always flows out of the heart of worship. ‘A lover will always outwork a worker.’ ‘Martha’s always end up criticising ‘Mary’s. Duty-bound religious spirit will always accuse the people who have the ‘heart of devotion’. But the deep things in the Lord’s heart are only for the lovers for God. God’s heart is never understood by the performers. The secret of the Lord is for the true worshippers. And the Father seeks true worshippers today.

5. Going back to the Good Samaritan - it is impossible to love the Lord enough or do enough to get eternal life. Jesus was pushing this lawyer to come to a place of acknowledging that he cannot do enough to inherit eternal life no matter how hard he tries. There is only one person who qualifies - Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is the only One who loves the Father with all His heart, mind, soul and strength all the time. He is the only One who truly loves His neighbour as Himself to the point of laying down His own life.

This eternal life is in Jesus, and He is offering His Life to you and me freely. Jesus is that Good Samaritan.

## C. Reflection

1. From Jesus’ conversation with the lawyer, what is the true meaning of the Law? What was the religious people’s misunderstanding?
2. Life has few true necessities and much superfluity we can do without. What we do with Christ is far more important than what we do for Christ. True service is born out of a deep relationship (Jn 12:3-7). Are you a Martha or a Mary?