

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

Leviticus 18:1-5; 19:9-18

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:23-37

How many of y'all would like to be sized up by our Lord and then taught, like, directly? How many of y'all would like to be spiritually dissected? The Lord is omniscient. He sees your heart. He knows your motivations, the quality of your faith, the quality of your love – the good, the bad, and the ugly. How many of y'all would like to be sized up by our Lord and have Him create a parable that fits your character for all the world to read and ponder and embrace and internalize? Sounds pretty embarrassing, doesn't it? The parable of the Good Samaritan is the product of the Lord sizing up someone just like us. To be sure, this lawyer had his own quirks. He definitely "stepped in it" when he attempted to "put [Jesus] to the test" (Luke 10:25a). A "lawyer" was someone who was supposedly an expert in the Torah, an expert in the broader OT. A "lawyer" was one who had distinguished himself by mastering the content of the Scriptures – its major themes and its finer brushstrokes. This guy, you probably already know, was too big for his britches. In other words, he was just like me.

The Bible doesn't tell us what happened to this fellow after his encounter with the Lord Christ. I suspect that it stayed with him a very long time. Make him you. Take this story out of the abstract and make the lawyer you. *You're* the individual who asked the inartful question. "Inartful" is a synonym for "stupid" in my dictionary. Here's the stupid question: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25b). The nature of the question betrays his misunderstanding of God, his misunderstanding of God's Word, and his misunderstanding of the man's own spiritual state. He's cheeky. He's trying to put the Son of God to the test, and he's theologically inept to boot – he wants to save himself by his behavior. Do you suppose that Jesus loves those who are cheeky and theologically inept? Yes; yes He does. Jesus loves this guy enough to teach him – which ought to tell you something. How many of y'all believe that you're saved by what you do? How many of y'all believe that you can save yourself? How many of y'all believe that people are operating with false ideas about Christianity, that some believe that Christianity is just a religion for "goody-two-shoes" and "holier-than-thou" types – you know, those who see themselves as morally superior? Some do. Is Jesus interested in the unbelieving world understanding Christianity properly? Do you believe that part of the church's mission, a large part, is conveying the truth, the depth, the wonder of who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing now – clearly and persuasively – so that people genuinely *understand* it?

Jesus knew exactly where this guy was coming from. The Lord knew exactly what to say to him. Jesus asks a question in reply to the lawyer, a question that begs a particular answer. "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26). It's just as reasonable to translate that last line as "how do you *recite* it?" The question begs for the lawyer to recite the Shema, a twice daily Jewish prayer from Deuteronomy. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The lawyer is more than happy to demonstrate his command of the Scriptures and so he adds this important bit from Leviticus: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18). Love! That is the heart of the Torah! God's love!

God's love is a dynamic thing, saturating life itself, a resource unlike any other, a resource that puts life in its proper frame, a resource that puts your life in its true frame.

The OT is not a "how to" manual for earning God's favor, and if you read it that way then you're going to misunderstand who God is. The lawyer was reading the Bible as though it were a code that if you kept God would fall all over Himself for you, but if you foul it up then it's religious curtains. That's where the lawyer was coming from and, sadly, it's where half of the people in your neighborhood are coming from. Do you have something better for them? Christ certainly does. In reply, the Lord says: "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28). Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might and love your neighbor as yourself, do this and you will "inherit eternal life." Imagine Jesus cutting off the conversation right there. Imagine Jesus speaking to the lawyer directly, He answers the question and then He turns away from the lawyer as if the interaction was over. **But there's something hanging in the air.** "Do this and you will live" has a converse, a flip side, a theological negative. And it sits there, with the lawyer. The lawyer is smart. He perceives the implication. What sits there? Don't do this and you will die. And it eats at the lawyer. Like it eats at you. Do you love God with all your heart, soul, and might? Do you love your neighbor, perfectly, as yourself? No; you fail. On some level, you're hopelessly selfish because you have a sinful nature. What is the option? Can any of you change God's Word? Some try; it's dishonest, but they try. Can any of you change God's character, His standard, His judgment? Can any of you expunge your own sin? Can any of you justify yourself?

The lawyer is totally stuck. It's not a great feeling. His view of God's Word, his view of himself has been completely eviscerated. Which is exactly what Jesus wanted. But the lawyer won't let go of his legalistic approach. St. Luke is keen to tell us: "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" (Luke 10:29). Do you know what's he really asking? What he's really asking is "who do I *not* have to love?" Let's diminish God's command so that it becomes more realistic, more doable. Here are a few similar examples: Don't steal unless it's from someone who is richer than you. Don't gossip unless the scuttlebutt is totally juicy. Don't lie unless the person doesn't really deserve the truth. "Who is my neighbor?" Love didn't prompt the question from the lawyer. Who may I exclude, who may I ignore, who may I treat with casual indifference?

Comes now the story of the Good Samaritan. It is exquisite. It applies to you. Your vision for the life you are presently leading will be enhanced if this parable is in view. Christ's love, His cross, His church, His present ministry, and you – those are the living realities embedded in this parable. Jesus tells the story in order to claim the heart of the lawyer. He tells this story to claim your heart. A man falls into the hands of robbers. He is left half dead, in need, in need of a neighbor. A Levite and a priest, heroes of the self-righteous, they pass him by, too busy or too religiously elegant/pristine to soil themselves. By their inaction they are loveless, indifferent. An unexpected neighbor, a Samaritan, sees the man and is moved with compassion. His actions are expert and deliberate. He moves with purpose. He knows what aid to render. Love is in, with, and under everything that he does. Wounds bound, oil and wine poured on, a ride to an inn, a bed, resources spent and more promised. It is mercy. It is love.

It is Christ. “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?” (Luke 10:36). All of us have been there, in that ditch. Christ is our unexpected neighbor. We are justified before God by His work, His love. His love does not count the cost. He saw us in our sin and He came. Into *our flesh*, into *our poverty*, into *our disease*, into *our death* He came. The robbers who have abused you are lust and greed and indulgence and pride and laziness and a lukewarm spirit and rank, faithless disobedience. Your own sin has defiled you and left you dead in a ditch and there was none to help. Except One; except *the* One who always has His eye on you. This Messianic King is not willing for you to die. He takes your sin and He bears it. The robbers were unleashed on Him as He hung on a cross. A crucifix is the sign of your Neighbor’s love. That love is in you. You love, you become a “good Samaritan” because He first loved you (1 John 4:19). Knowing what He has done for you, you are moved to “go and do likewise.”

The inn of His church is where He has brought you. The pastor is the innkeeper. The oil of absolution, full and free, the wine of His blood which quenches your thirst for righteousness – that is how the Good Samaritan nurses you. “You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). “Do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). Jesus did this... and He died. Jesus died not to justify Himself, but you. You have an unexpected Neighbor – a Neighbor who, with great power, rules the universe... and who, with great tenderness, rules your soul. The Good Samaritan is with you wherever you go. His love is with you wherever you go.