

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Good Samaritan

Scripture: Luke 10:30-37

Code: 42-144

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Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 10, we're going to find a man on a familiar journey and learn some profound truth from our blessed Lord, Luke chapter 10. We come to the section from verse 30 through 37, Luke 10:30 through 37, and this is the story of the Good Samaritan. Before us then is one of the most well-known parables, one of the most well-known illustrations Jesus ever told. Jesus was the master of all story tellers. He could spin a tale, spin a story, a parable with meaning and significance that made it not only memorable but profound.

This particular tale, this dramatic tale of the Good Samaritan is so well known that it has actually become an idiom for unusual sacrificial kindness. We call people good Samaritans who find people in need and help them in unusual ways. To call someone a good Samaritan is to grant to them a noble compliment. And so we are very familiar with the story. Christians are all familiar with it and many non-Christians are familiar with it. And sometimes our familiarity may cause us to think we know what the story really is about and what it was intended to convey, when in fact we don't. And I...I think, I think we may have missed the point of this story. Hopefully we can correct that, this morning. Oh, we all know the story, but it's the point of the story that is the reason it existed, the reason Jesus told it. It is a story, for most people, about helping someone in need. That's not really the point. This is really a story about how one inherits eternal life because that is the question that initiated the entire conversation to which this story is the conclusion.

Go back with me to verse 25. Jesus is teaching. In the middle of His teaching, a certain lawyer, scribe, expert in the Law of Moses and the Jewish Law, stood up and put Him to the test saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This is the greatest question ever asked or answered, and it was on the minds and the hearts of the Jews all the time. They knew the Old Testament promised eternal life, a resurrection unto life, an eternal Kingdom in which they desired to live in the presence of God in all the fulfillment of divine promises. They wanted to inherit eternal life. That's why that question was posed so frequently to Jesus and appears so many places in the gospels. And Jesus Himself spoke about eternal life often because that was the issue. They were much more concerned about the next life than this life. They were much more concerned about heavenly life than earthly life, much more concerned about the Kingdom of God than the kingdom of men, not nearly so consumed with what happens here, as what will happen there and they wanted to be a part of it, they didn't want to miss it. And even though they counted on their Jewishness and their circumcision and their ceremonies and their traditions and all of that to qualify them for the

Kingdom, there was still a nagging sense in their own hearts, a nagging realization of their own sin, the accusing conscience that made them fear that in spite of all the external trappings, in spite of what it looked like on the surface, in spite of superficially keeping the Law and maintaining a front, inside they were not worthy to be a part of that Kingdom and there was a fear that they would miss it. Thus the question arose, "What shall I do," very personal, "to inherit eternal life?"

The answer Jesus gave is in verse 26 and it's a question. "He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?,' " or how do you recite it? What does the Law say? What does God require? You recite it twice a day, and Jesus is referring to the recitation that the Jews made two times a day, very familiar to all of them which was essentially a recitation of the summation of the whole Law. You can take all the Law of God and divide it into two categories. It either relates to man and God, or man and man. All of God's Law regulates the relationship between man and God, or man and man. It's all summed up in those two categories. You can squeeze it down and the summation of all of the Law of God given in the Scriptures is contained in the Ten Commandments. The first half has to do with our relation to God, the second half has to do with our relationship to men. Or you can squeeze it down even tighter into two commandments, the first one, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, the second, loving your neighbor as yourself...and if you do that, you don't need any rules. Perfect love precludes any rules.

Well this lawyer knew that. So he answered Jesus' question by saying what they knew to be the summation of the Law, they knew to be God's requirement because they recited it twice every day, "He answered and said, '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.'" Taken out of Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5 and Leviticus 19:18. And so he knew the Law. The verb here "love" is in the present tense, you are to constantly, continually in an uninterrupted way love God like this and your neighbor as yourself without ever a breach, without ever a violation. Verse 28, Jesus said to him, "You've answered correctly, that is the summation of the Law." And the He quotes Leviticus 18:5, "Do this and you will live." Live meaning eternal life. Do this and you will have eternal life. You want eternal life? You know the rule, love God perfectly, love your neighbor as yourself, do that and you'll have eternal life.

Now at this point the lawyer should have been honest. He should have said, "Look, I can't love God like that. I can't love God all the time perfectly with all my faculties, and I can't love every person around me with a perfect love the same way I love myself. I can't do that. I haven't done that. I'm not capable of that. I won't do that in the future. I admit my inability. I live in constant violation of this standard. I cannot be perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect. I cannot be holy as He is holy. I am therefore sinful. I am headed for punishment. I will miss the Kingdom unless I receive mercy and forgiveness." And he should have cried out for the mercy and forgiveness like the publican did in Luke 18 and beating his breast, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." He should have been ashamed. He should have been indicted. He should have felt deep conviction. He should have been penitent,

broken, contrite, confessed his sin, cried out for mercy. But rather he drowned out the fire of his conscience. He drowned out the fire of conviction with the water of self-righteous pride. He doused what was going on in his conscience with his own self-righteousness and it says in verse 29, "But wishing to justify himself..." That is a sad, sad purpose.

He wanted to convince people that he was righteous, though he knew he wasn't. He wanted to maintain the front, the facade. And so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" He jumped over the loving God part. "I'm okay with God, he was saying in effect. I'm okay with God, there's nothing there I need to deal with and I'm okay with my neighbor unless, cynically, You have another definition of neighbor." I mean, this is pretty mind-boggling, isn't it? That a man would think that he loved God perfectly and loved others the same way he loved himself, that he would try to convince people that that was true, that he would try to convince Jesus that that was true, that he would even try to convince himself that that was true shows you the profound depth of human depravity. So cynically he says, "Maybe You'd like to redefine neighbor for me. I've checked out all the people that qualify as my neighbor according to me and I'm fine with them. I'm certainly fine with God, I love Him perfectly. And I love my neighbors as myself."

Jesus at that point could have just dismissed him. He could have said, "Well, I can see that you are shut out from the Kingdom of God," and turned back to His teaching. He could have left him standing there in His self-righteous pride. He could have said to Himself, could our Lord, "His heart is so hard, his pride so resolute, I'm not going to cast any pearls before this swine." But we always remember, don't we, the compassion of Jesus. And even though this lawyer has managed to rebuff our Lord's attempt to bring conviction to his heart, He's going to give him one more opportunity. He's going to give him one more very gracious insight into his own wretchedness, into his own sinfulness to perhaps bring him to a true sense of his position before God as a violator of God's Law and one who neither loves God or his neighbor. How will the Lord do that? How will the Lord go deeper? How will He thrust the knife in more effectively? How could He penetrate the hard heart of this man?

Well the story unfolds to give us the answer. The story our Lord now tells is enough to shatter the pride of a sensitive person, to literally shatter the pride of a spiritually minded person, to destroy the pride of a true seeking heart. It is a crushing story. It is an unforgettable story that produces immense conviction and is designed not as a story to teach believers how to live, although it has implications in that direction, it is designed as an evangelistic effort. The story is told to a non-believer, a self-righteous man who will not enter the Kingdom of God. The story is told to him as an evangelistic effort to bring him to the true sense of his sinfulness and consequently to cry for mercy. On the surface the story seems like a simple story about being kind. It isn't. It is far profounder than that. Let's look at the story, verse 30.

"Jesus replied," and that in itself is an act of grace, "and He said, 'A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among robbers and they stripped him and beat him and went off

leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite also when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan who was on a journey came upon him and when he saw him, he felt compassion and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them, and he put him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.""

It's really a fascinating story, isn't it? Now there's no reason to outline this passage, you don't need to outline a story. And you also don't need an outline when only have one point, and there's only one point here, as in most all the cases of Jesus' stories and parables.

This is not a true story, this didn't happen. This is a tale Jesus spun, an illustration He made up to dramatize in an unforgettable way the point He wanted to drive into the man's heart and our's as well. It's a story about a journey on a very dangerous road. And let's pick it up at the beginning.

"A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho." You do go down. Jerusalem approximates three-thousand feet above sea level, Jericho approximates nine hundred to a thousand feet below sea level. It's a 4,000 foot drop in 17 miles, so it's pretty severe. Winding, I've been on that road a number of times, dangerous, almost frightening, precipices that plunge three and four hundred feet down into crevasses, very dramatic, filled with caves and rocks. It is legendary for being a dangerous road, dangerous because you could fall off, dangerous because it is so barren, dangerous because all the caves and rocks allow for hideouts for robbers and highwaymen. Even in the fourth century, four centuries after Christ, I read that it was a favorite place for Arab highwaymen to rob people and kill.

Going down that pass which is, as I said, a frightening thing in itself, especially in a bus when the edge of the bus is over the edge of the road and you're looking straight down. The pass was known as the pass of Adummim, it is so called in Joshua 18:17 and that's related to the Hebrew word for blood, it's bloody pass, a journey in a very, very dangerous place.

And so, Jesus casts the story in a familiar place, the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho. "And a certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and the predictable happened, and he fell among robbers." A group of highwaymen pounced on the man. They didn't just rob him, follow this, they stripped him. I mean, they didn't just take his purse, they took everything. They stripped him and left him virtually naked. And then they beat him. And the term for "beat" here has the idea of repeated blows. They pummeled him. And they left him half dead. We would say to day he was in critical condition, he was in the process of dying and he was already half-way there. Obviously this man in the story is in desperate need for help in this kind of condition on a lonely road. There could be a lot of time pass before anybody came along and there was no guarantee that someone would

find him or help him.

Jesus then in the story immediately introduces a little bit of hope. He says in verse 31, "And by chance, a certain priest was going down on that road." This appears on the surface to be the best of news. This is good news, here comes a priest, a servant of God, one who offered sacrifices for people in the temple, one who lifted the people up before God, one who was to be a paragon of spiritual virtue, the best of men, the godliest, the righteous, the personification of virtue. And this is ideal because a priest would know the Old Testament Law, he would know that Leviticus 19:34 says that if you see a stranger in need, you do whatever it takes to meet his need. Why he would even know Exodus chapter 23 verses 4 and 5 that says if you even find your enemy's donkey in a ditch, you make sure you rescue the man's donkey, let alone the man. And he would have taught this and he would have known this. He would have also known Psalm 37:21 that the righteous is gracious and gives. A priest...a priest would even know the wonderful words of the prophet Micah. And what did the prophet Micah say? He said on behalf of God, "He has told you, O man," Micah 6:8, "what is good. What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." He would have known that. He would have known what God expected of him. He would have known that judgment would be merciless to the one who didn't give mercy.

And so, with just that opening little remark and by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, we might have reason for hope. However, it is short lived because immediately Jesus said, "And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." And he uses a verb only used here in that verse and the next verse that has in it the word "anti" to strengthen it, he literally went the opposite direction. He saw him and went the opposite direction.

Now, this is about loving your neighbor. What can we conclude? The priest had no love for the man. Immediately Jesus has turned the question on its head. He asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus turned it around and said, "Let's talk about who is neighborly." Instead of talking about who qualifies to be your neighbor, let's talk about the quality with which you love. If you're even asking the question, "Who qualifies for me to love?" you can't fulfill that commandment. It's not about who qualifies, it's about the character of your love. So Jesus has already turned this upside down and now He's talking about the love of the individual toward someone in need, not whether the person in need qualifies to be loved.

So we know this, that loving your neighbor is not defining some narrow definition of love that belongs only to certain people. It's the same as loving God. You're to love God with all your faculties, heart-soul-mind and strength, and you're to love your neighbor as yourself. And it's not who your neighbor is, it's who you are that determines your love.

Now at this point the priest went the other way. It's really kind of humorous at this point because I read a lot of commentaries because I want to know how these things are interpreted through history,

old commentaries and even new ones. Many commentators stop at this point, have long discussions...why didn't he go over there? Well, he was a priest and he thought maybe this was a dead body and he couldn't touch a dead body. If he touched a dead body he was ceremonially unclean. And then some other commentators argue, "Well, it wouldn't matter because he was going from Jerusalem to Jericho, not from Jericho to Jerusalem. If he was going to Jerusalem he would have brought his uncleanness into the temple. But since he was going the other direction, he would have some weeks to go through the purification process before he came back," etc. And other said, "Well he didn't go over there because he was afraid of the same fate. He was afraid that the robbers might be lurking around and he'd be the next victim." Others have said, "He didn't go there because he didn't want to aid a wicked man that might be punished by the wrath of God."

You want to know something? You know what this man was thinking? He wasn't thinking anything. How do you know that? Because he didn't exist. There's n man here. This is a story. How can you write three pages on what a guy's thinking who isn't even in existence. This man didn't live, this is not anybody, this is a story. I'm reading and all of a sudden I'm saying, "This is ridiculous, trying to assume what a man thinks who doesn't exist, he had no brain." This man had no brain, this man was no one. It's a story. Don't worry about what his reason was, what his motive was, what his excuse was, what his thinking was, he didn't have any. The point is simple, you expect the priest who knew the Law, knew what was required to go help the man. You would expect the priest, of all people, who made sure that all the people recited twice every day that you're to love your neighbor as yourself, would do that which he required the rest of the people to recite, and himself also. You would expect a priest to go and help. Was this an indictment of the priesthood in general?

I think it would be safe to say that the priests in Israel lacked compassion, wouldn't you? In Matthew 23 Jesus says they bind heavy burdens on people and don't so much as lift a finger to relieve the burden. Jesus sort of casts the priests in Israel like wolves who come in and tear up the sheep and put heavy burdens on people, that's why He said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for my yoke is easy, My burden is light." I think it would be safe to say that the priests were externally legalistic and hypocritical but lacked compassion. They certainly lacked compassion toward Jesus and the apostles. But I don't think this is an indictment of the priesthood, this is just a story about a man you would expect to help because he knew the Law but he didn't help...he didn't help.

And then Jesus goes on in verse 32, "Likewise a Levite also," a Levite because of the tribe of Levi. The priests were from the tribe of Levi also, but anybody who was in the twenty-four courses of the priest was not just the son of Levi who was son of Jacob, but anybody who was in the priesthood was a son of Aaron. Levites came from Levi, but not from Aaron and they were given priestly duties, they were the lowest people on the ladder, the priestly service ladder. They were assistants to the priests, they were the temple police. They saw to the issues of the liturgy and they aided the priests. They had to know something about the Law. They were close. They were intimately acquainted with the function of Judaism with the studies of the lawyers and the scribes and so forth. And so, they should

have known what the priests knew as well.

And so, at the top of the sort of religious ladder is the priest, at the bottom is the Levite, he comes to the place, he saw him, verse 32, pass by the other side. Same verb, went the other direction, opposite direction. And you have again an illustration of a man who had no love.

You could say that these religious elite were the ones called in verse 21 "the wise and intelligent who didn't know the things of God." But we have to say at least this, neither of these men, if they were real people, would be qualified for eternal life. They didn't love God, first of all, because if you loved God you keep His what? His commandments. So they didn't love God to start with and also, they didn't love their neighbor because there's one right there and they have a perfect opportunity to demonstrate it and they don't. So being religious, doing all the ceremonies, being Jewish, being circumcised, being a part of the whole system, being as tightly connected to the religious system as you can get, being a priest and a Levite isn't going to get you into the Kingdom of God. And when you look at the character of these men, they don't pass the test. The test is to love your neighbor as yourself. They went the other direction, wanted nothing to do with it. This is the attitude we see in human life, human nature today even with ourselves, "I don't want to get...what?...involved. I don't know what they might do to me."

And then the twist. Verse 33, "But a certain Samaritan who was on a journey." I read at this point, by the way, in the footnote, one liberal commentator who likes to attack the Bible, said, "Well this isn't true, this couldn't be true because Samaritans didn't use that road." And I want to find that guy and say that this isn't the Samaritan and there's not really a road, this is a story. And if Jesus put him there, then he's there in the story. I don't know whether they used the road or not, but this one did. "So the certain Samaritan was on a journey, came upon him and when he saw him, he felt compassion.

In the context of Jewish/Samaritan relations, this could be the worst possible thing to happen. The man, we assume the man is a Jew because this is Israel and a certain man in Israel would be a Jew, there lies this Jewish man. Here comes this Samaritan. We would assume that this man is not going to be any help at all because the Samaritans and the Jews despised each other with the strongest vitriol imaginable. Samaritans were the offspring of Jews who after the Northern Kingdom was taken captive, some remained in the land. The land was then taken over by Gentiles. These Jews who remained after the Northern captivity from which the Jews were taken captive never returned, the ones who remained in the land intermarried with the Gentiles for which they were despised and hated cause they sold their birthright, they polluted the pure strain of God's chosen people. They were hated by the Jews. In fact, when Israel came back from Babylonian captivity, the Southern Kingdom later went into captivity, and after 70 years of captivity, they came back, Nehemiah came back, they wanted to rebuild the wall, remember that? The Samaritans showed up. You can read this in Ezra 4 through 6; Nehemiah 2 through 4. The Samaritans showed up and said, "We'll help you. We'll help

you. We'll reconnect with our Jewish roots. Now you're back, Jerusalem will be rebuilt, we'll have a temple again."

And they said, "Absolutely not. We want nothing to do with you." The bitterness was so deep. And so, the Samaritans then turned to be their enemies, and you remember the story? All the time they're trying to build the wall, who is trying to prevent them from doing it? The Samaritans, led by a man named Sanballat. So they were constantly in conflict. And, in fact, eventually the Samaritans built their own temple. They said, "Well, if we can't be welcomed back, we'll just build our own temple in a place called Mount Gerizim." They built their own temple. And the Jews who hated them and hated their temple, in 128 B.C., a hundred and twenty-eight years before Jesus' birth, went and destroyed the temple and killed some of the Samaritans.

The animosity was profound...profound. Whenever a Jew traveled from north to south, or south to north, the easy way would be to go through Samaria. They never did, they went around Samaria. The remarkable thing was that Jesus went He went on that journey and met the woman at the well, He said, "He must needs go through Samaria." Nobody went through Samaria, they wouldn't put the dirt of Samaria on their shoes the hatred ran so deep.

So here is a man who by the definition of the lawyer would be the blood enemy of this Jew lying there near death. The worst thing...if you wanted to say the worst thing about a person, the worst thing you could say, the worst epithet that you could ever throw at a person, here's what you would say, "The Jews...according to John 8:48...said to Jesus, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?'" The worst thing you could say to somebody is you're a demon-possessed Samaritan.

And so here comes a Samaritan. What is going to be the Samaritan's attitude toward this guy? If you're going to worry about who qualifies to be your neighbor, he doesn't qualify. Not only is he a stranger, but he's an enemy and there's a tremendous amount of racism between the two. Well, when the Samaritan comes along, the surprise. "He came upon him and instead of going the other direction, when he saw him he felt compassion." Wow! Some have said, do I need to say this again? "Was this man a believer? Was this man in the Kingdom?" This man didn't exist, again I say. So we don't need to worry about his spiritual condition since he had none.

What is Jesus trying to say? We're going to see that. Here's the simple point. Two man had no love, one man did. Can you get that? Two man had no love, one did. Two men were religious but had no love, therefore their religion did nothing to qualify them for the Kingdom. One man, on the other hand, was a heretic, an outcast and yet he loved. So this issue of loving is not a matter of one's religion. It's something else.

The Samaritan then takes center stage in the story and here comes the main point. Notice how this

man loves. First of all, he saw him, verse 33, and then he felt compassion. This is where it all begins, something in his heart just goes out to the man, a sadness, a grief, a sympathy, empathy pain, a driving need to rescue and recover the man. And so verse 34 says, "He came to him." It simply means he went up to where he was. This is the first thing he does. He evaluates, diagnosis, assesses his condition, his need, gives careful attention to what's going to be required for his rescue and recovery. You can just see him in the imagery of the story, there bending over the man and assessing his condition. And he discovered that the man had some wounds, the Greek word is trauma. He had some wounds which indicates he was perhaps bleeding. He was perhaps with some broken bones. We don't know because Jesus doesn't put that in the story. But anyway, he had been pummeled and beaten and wounded. And so it says that after he came to him he bandaged up his wounds, which indicates that the image here that Jesus wants to convey is that he had open wounds, he was bleeding. And now the man is naked, he stripped down to virtually nothing, so whatever this man used for bandages came out of his own bag, came out of his own clothing. So he starts tearing up his own clothes, if not the ones he was wearing, the perhaps extras that he carried in his travel bag and he starts putting a tourniquet on the man in places where he may be bleeding. This is the imagery of the story. Then he's binding up the wounds with bandages so that they don't get dirt in them and become worse. And he also in the process of doing that was pouring oil and wine on them. Wine was used because of its fermentation as an antiseptic. It was used to sanitize. It was used to cleanse whatever might have come in there that could create infection and oil was used to lubricate, to soothe and to soften the tissue. This was part of the healing. And here was...here was something everybody who traveled carried, you carried your own wine to drink, you carried your own oil to cook or to eat. And the man now is divesting himself of his own clothing, he's divesting himself of his own provisions. And the word "pouring" here has a...has a preposition on the front of it which intensifies it, literally he just generously washes over the man with this wine and oil. He's not dabbing it in there. It's the lavishness, it's the generosity of this that is being emphasized with the use of this...of this verb. He literally pours out the antiseptic, the disinfectant over the man, and then he pours out the oil. What you're seeing here is generosity, you're seeing a certain lavish care here.

And then it says, "He put him on his own beast." I read one little paragraph about what kind of animal it was and again the same thing comes up, the word *ktenos* means beast, it could be any domesticated animal, we don't know. The man was unable to get on his beast so the Samaritan picks him up and flops him over the back of perhaps a donkey or a mule so that he can get him somewhere where he can get some food and some water and some care and some rest.

This is amazing. This is not a minimal care, this is maximum. Compassion led him to come and examine and then he bandaged up his wounds. Then he poured oil and wine. Then he put him on his own beast. And then he brought him...we don't know how far away the place was, but he takes a hold of the beast by whatever rope was attached and he walks while the injured man is draped over the animal. Takes him to an inn, walking beside his living transportation, holding the man on to make sure he doesn't come off. Well he finally gets him to an inn, *pandocheion* in the Greek, starting with

the word *pon*, all, a place for everybody. This would be the lowest level. Inns were meager places at best. They were corrupt places normally. They were places of prostitution, graft, robbery. You really didn't want to be in one of those places unless you had no choice. Innkeepers were unscrupulous, evil, without compassion. But there was no choice here. We don't need to get into all that. He took him to an inn which would be a place where he could find a mat to lie on and some water and some food and some rest.

And then it says wonderfully, "And took care of him." Having negotiated the place to stay, took the man in, put him down to rest, continued to work with him with his bandages, with his wounds, providing food, sleep, comfort, water, cleansing. And he did it all night.

You say, "Well how do you know that?" Well Jesus made the story say that in verse 35, "And on the next day..." He stayed with him all night. He set his whole agenda aside. He gave up his own clothes, his own supplies, his own time. This is amazing for a stranger who was his worst enemy. And he stayed all night by his bed, making sure he was cared for.

And that wasn't all either. Look at verse 35, "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him.'" Wanting to go on his journey he now put him in the care of an innkeeper, gives him two denarii. What would that sort of be in terms of inn care? The lowest would be that an inn would cost one thirty-second of a denarii. So he gave him enough for 64 days room and board. Now as I said, it's not a fancy place, but it's a place of shelter and food and rest. Probably the other side of the spectrum, some would say that an inn would cost one-twelfth of a denarii which would be 24 days worth. So somewhere between a month and two months room and board. That's pretty amazing, pretty generous. Never met the man, total stranger, doesn't know how he got in the condition he got into, doesn't ask how he got into that condition and Jesus doesn't put that part into the story, it doesn't matter. All that matters was here was a man whose heart was so full of love that when somebody came across his path, it didn't matter who he was, there was never a question of qualification, there was never a question, "Is he my neighbor or is he not?" The only issue was how can I love that man to the full extent of his need? Whether he was a friend or an enemy had no bearing.

And that's not all. He said to the innkeeper in verse 35, "Take care of him and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you." Now he has now exposed himself to serious extortion. He's left an open account. And he's saying, "I'm going to where I need to go, and you spend whatever you need to spend, give him whatever he needs for a full recovery. And when I come back, I'll pay you for that."

Now what comes across in this? Generosity, would you say? More than generosity? This is sort of over the top, would you say? You say, "Well, I saw a stranger one time in need and I gave him five bucks." Think that deserves applause? Did you ever see a stranger in need, somebody you didn't

know, better yet somebody who was your arch-enemy and you went over, ministered to all his needs, gave him everything he needed, stayed with him, took him somewhere, put him to bed, fed him, stayed all night to make sure that he was recovering appropriately, then paid for his care for up to two months and said if it's more than this, when I come back I'll give you all the rest? Have you ever done that for anybody?

I'll tell you, there's somebody you've done that for and it's you. That's how we care for ourselves, isn't it? Give me whatever I need. Whatever I need, get me to the best doctor, get me to the best place, get me the best care I can get. Take care of me as long as I need it. We buy insurance policies, we get in HMOs, we do whatever we need to assure ourselves the best care. This is over the top for a stranger, over the top for an enemy. You might somewhere get close to this with a friend, or a family member because you love them and the family. But we're not talking about family, we're talking about somebody outside of that. This is just not done.

You say, "Well, are you saying nobody's ever done it?" No, it could be done and some have done it, and perhaps you've done something very generous like this on an occasion in your life. That's not the issue. The issue is have your whole life loved strangers like this? Answer: Of course not...of course not.

Now we make sure WE, when WE have physical problems or deprivation or caught in a dangerous situation, we make sure we do whatever we need to get the best attention, the best care, have all our needs met, all our comforts called for. And we are...we are basically without limit in taking care of ourselves as much as we're capable of. People will actually go into debt and sometimes bankruptcy in order to make sure they don't deny themselves anything they think they need. But who else do you love like that? Yeah, nobody.

This is about limitless love, see. This is about a man who said I will care for this man with no limit. I will love this man though he is my enemy and another stranger to me, whatever it is that this man needs, I will give to this man and there are no limits. He has an open account. When I come back, you just tell me what it took and I'll take care of it.

Let me tell you something. That's what it takes all the time to earn your way into God's Kingdom. Anybody qualify? No. That's the point. It's the point about eternal life. And sometimes we teach children, you know, share your lunch, be a good Samaritan. No. Share your lunch is fine, but don't confuse that with the good Samaritan. A good Samaritan didn't share his lunch, he basically expressed limitless love to a man he never knew who was a stranger and an enemy.

Verse 36 then, Jesus after the story then says to the lawyer, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor? Forget who is your neighbor and let's talk about who's neighborly, which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robber's hands? You've

been following Me through the story, who was the neighbor?"

"And he said, 'The one who showed mercy toward him.'" He was right, wasn't he? "And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do the same.'"

Can I add something? "And you, if you do that, will earn eternal life." Only the catch is, you have to always do that. Go and do the same. What's that supposed to do? Produce what? Conviction. Anybody in your path, any stranger in your path, even your worst enemy, love him lavishly, sacrificially, generously, tenderly, limitlessly, kindly with an open account. That's the way you love yourself.

And so the man before the whole group of people says, "Well, the one who showed mercy," that's what Jesus meant to say. Now you understand what the Bible means when it says you have to love your neighbor as yourself? Is this how you love anybody in your path with a need? Go do the same.

You want eternal life? How you going to get it? Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Your neighbor as yourself.

Okay, you say you love God like that, you don't even want to talk about that, now you want to talk about loving your neighbor. You think you love your neighbor? Is this how you love your enemy, the stranger?

Well the man knew it wasn't true. "Go and do the same," He says. This isn't a command to a Christian. These are fictitious people. This isn't a command to a believer to love like this. This is an indictment of the whole of fallen humanity. You can't and you don't and you never will love like this. There may be a rare occasion when such love is expressed here and there. But what He's calling for here is a kind of limitless lavish love toward anybody and everybody that is beyond our capability. We love ourselves like this. We don't love others like this. And he's giving this lawyer one more opportunity to say, "Jesus, I don't love like that. I can't love like that. I never will love like that. I'll never get in the Kingdom, if that's what's required. And to tell you the truth, if I don't love him like that, if I don't love my neighbor like that, then obviously I don't love God with all my faculties either. Why don't I quit the game and just admit it."

That would have been...that would have been wonderful, wouldn't it?, if he had said that. If he had just said, "I can't love like that. I can't love God perfectly. I certainly can't love my neighbor. If that's what it means to love your neighbor and there's nothing about qualification, it's anybody who has a need, even if it's your worst enemy, if that's what it means, I am so far from that limitless kind of love."

And so are we, aren't we? If this is what it requires for me to get in heaven, I'm not getting there. I not only couldn't earn my salvation by loving like that, even as a Christian in whom the love of Christ

has been shed abroad, who has a capacity to love like an unconverted person doesn't have, I still don't love like this. So we were saved by grace and we are kept by grace, are we not? The Lord not only forgave me for my lack of love toward God, and love toward others when He saved me, He continues to forgive me for my lack of perfect love toward God and others which is a part of my fallen life. I'll never be able to love God perfectly until I'm in His presence and I'll never be able to love others perfectly until I'm in His presence either and then they won't have any needs. So it will be a different kind of expression of love.

See, what Jesus was doing here with this man was driving the same sword right back into his heart to convict him of his total inability to deserve the Kingdom of God and eternal life on his own. If he thought his Jewishness, his circumcision, his law-keeping, his sacrificing and all of that was enough, Jesus ended that by his own admission that it was loving God and loving others. If he thought he qualified there, then he's going to have to say that I've always loved everyone in my path the way the Good Samaritan loved that man with that same kind of limitless, open-ended, lavish, generous, sacrificial care and he knew as we all know we don't love like that.

By the way, that's how God loves us. This is not an allegory about that. But that is how God loves us. And there stood Jesus before him, ready to offer him mercy, ready to offer him grace, ready to offer him forgiveness if he only would repent and admit what he knew was true. But as we move through the life of Christ toward the cross, the hearts get harder and harder and harder.

The end of the story, the end of the encounter is Jesus saying, "Go and do the same." Did he? No. Could he? No. Would he repent? Apparently not. Will he inherit the Kingdom of God? Of course not. Who will? Those who repent of their lack of love toward God and others, cry out for mercy and forgiveness from the Christ who has paid the penalty for that forgiveness through His death on the cross.

Father, we thank You for the richness of this story. And we acknowledge that when we receive Your mercy and when we receive new life in Christ, we are given a divine enablement to love You and to love others. But that love is not perfect. We don't love You perfectly. We don't love others perfectly. And so we not only were saved by grace, we stand in grace, we live in grace. Even if we were to break our alabaster box and wash the feet of Jesus with our tears, we would not love Him or You the way You deserve to be loved. Even in our most magnanimous acts of kindness and our greatest acts of generosity and mercy toward others, we never really get to the place where we love them the same way we love ourselves. We always put limits on how much we love someone else, particularly a stranger and an enemy. And so we all fall short, we all are guilty. We repent, we ask for mercy and forgiveness. Lord, help us to get to the point where we turn to Christ for our salvation and then having been given a capacity to love, even though it's not all it should be, may we increase in our love for You and our love for others as measured by our limitless devotion to give to You what You deserve, to give to others what they need. We pray in our Savior's name. Amen.

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