

Reading: Luke 10:30-37

- A. This story is one of Jesus' most familiar parables.
 - 1. I can still remember the pictures from the lesson book of the Good Samaritan lifting the wounded man onto his donkey – even from 40 years ago when I was in Bible class.
 - 2. The Bible class teacher would always remind us that, just like this man, we ought to be kind to our neighbors and help people in need.
 - 3. It's a great story with a great lesson.
- B. While lots of people know this story, few know about the circumstances that caused Jesus to tell it.
 - 1. Many of Jesus' parables were spoken in response to a specific situation or some crisis. In Luke 12:13 Jesus tells the story of the rich fool in response to two brothers who were disputing about their inheritance. In Luke 15:2 He shares three parables to respond to those who criticized Him for eating with sinners.
 - 2. The same is true of this parable of the Good Samaritan. There is another story here – a back story that provoked Jesus to tell this parable. Getting the bigger picture, knowing about the story behind the story will not only help us better understand this parable, but this part of the story is loaded with some powerful applications for followers of Jesus.
 - 3. This morning we want to take a closer look at the story behind the story. Before the parable of the Good Samaritan, there was the story of the lawyer who came to Jesus with a question about the law. Let's learn about His story (**vs. 25-29**).

The Story Behind The Story

- A. This encounter between Jesus and this lawyer comes just a few months before Jesus' crucifixion.
 - 1. His enemies are becoming intense in their opposition to Him. They will stop at nothing – including murder – to stop Him. It is this intense hatred for Jesus and this determination to do whatever they can to discredit Him that brings this man to Jesus and provokes this exchange.
 - 2. The man is a lawyer. This would not be a lawyer as we would think of one. This man was an expert in the Law of Moses. Lawyers spent their time studying and interpreting the law. They taught the law to young men. They were called upon to decide questions and make judgments about the law. No one knew the fine points of the law better than they did.
 - 3. It is one of the lawyers who comes to Jesus with a question. And not just any question. He poses a profound question – perhaps the most important question (**v. 25**).
 - a. Keep in mind that this is not a sincere inquiry. He's not really looking for the answer, at least not from Jesus.
 - b. Luke says that he came for the purpose of testing Jesus (**v. 25**). So what was the plan?
 - 1) Perhaps this man and his lawyer-buddies had debated this question many times.
 - 2) Perhaps he had heard many arguments by many different teachers defending what they believed was the right answer.
 - 3) Perhaps he believed that, no matter how Jesus answered, he would have a crafty response that would discredit this would-be Messiah.
 - 4) Perhaps he had carefully thought through every potential answer Jesus might give and carefully planned his reply. He may have had the entire conversation already worked out in his mind.
 - 4. What he did not realize is that Jesus knew everything that He was thinking.
 - a. Jesus' response to this lawyer's trick is brilliantly simple. He puts the ball right back in the lawyer's court (**v. 26**). In essence, Jesus asks, "How would you answer this question?"
 - b. The lawyer actually gives a pretty good answer (**v. 27**). This is actually a pretty good summary of God's law - Love God and love your neighbor. Jesus commends the man (**v. 28**).
 - c. But now this lawyer has a problem. He had come to Jesus pretending to have this pressing question, and he's just proven that he already knew the answer and the answer was pretty easy. Now he looks foolish.
 - 5. So, he comes back at Jesus with another question, trying to justify his first question (**v. 29**). This follow up is designed to suggest that the answer is not as simple as Jesus makes it out to be. Yes, we should love our neighbor, but can we really know who that is?
 - 6. This leads Jesus to tell the story of the Good Samaritan (vs. 30-35). He follows with another question for the lawyer (**v. 36**). It is interesting that he would not even say, "The Samaritan" (**v. 37a**). It must have pained him to admit that the Samaritan was the good guy, because Jews hated Samaritans. But the answer was obvious. Jesus tells him that he must go and do what the Samaritan had done (**v. 37b**). Instead of arguing about who his neighbor is, this man should go and be a neighbor to anyone who has a need, without a thought of nationality or race.
 - 7. There are no more questions recorded from the lawyer after this. His plan to discredit Jesus had actually caused him to look foolish. I don't think he was in the mood to ask Jesus anything else.
- B. As we dig into the details of the story behind the story, what we discover is sad. Here is a man who was supposed to know the law better than anyone; a man who should have respect for the law. And yet, consider what this story reveals about his attitude toward the law. What was God's law to him?
 - 1. First, it was something you could use to attack your enemy. This is why he came to Jesus. He was not sincerely seeking an answer from the law to his question. He came to test Jesus, to find some way to trip Him. The law was simply the tool he used to accomplish his mission. This becomes clear after Jesus helps the lawyer find an answer to his question.

2. Rather than accepting the answer he knew to be right and doing it, he quibbles about the words. Yes, we are supposed to love our neighbor, but can we really know who our neighbor is? Perhaps this man had quibbling over questions like this with his lawyer-buddies. This is what the law was to him – just something to argue and debate about. But this question about the neighbor tells us something.
 3. This man was more focused on getting around the law than he was on obeying the law.
 - a. These guys didn't argue about who their neighbor is so that they could obey this command. They argued about it so they could get around loving some people they did not want to love, like the Samaritans.
 - b. This was not an uncommon practice. Jesus condemned them for creating their own loophole to avoid helping their own parents (**Matthew 15:3-6**). They would claim that whatever resources they had that might be used to help their aged parents had been devoted to God, even though they got to hang on to it. They were not concerned about the law's requirement to honor their parents. They were looking for a way around the law.
- C. To a man with this kind of attitude toward the law, Jesus had one message.
1. In fact, he says it twice. When the lawyer summarized what the law required to inherit eternal life, notice what Jesus said (**v. 28**, "...do this"). When he identified the one who showed mercy as the true neighbor, notice what Jesus said (**v. 37**, "...do the same").
 2. This "expert" in the law had missed his most important responsibility – to obey the law.
 - a. It was a great thing that this lawyer and his colleagues had carefully studied the law. It was certainly appropriate for them to discuss – even debate – the meaning of the law.
 - b. But all of this should have been driving toward something – toward obedience! They should have lived what they studied and learned.
 - c. But tragically, many of these "experts" had done the opposite. They used their study and debate to find ways around obeying the law.
 3. To a man like these, Jesus turns him from debating to doing (**v. 28**, "do this"). His first obligation to the law was to obey the law.

The Lesson From The Story

- A. This lawyer is a sad character. But his attitude challenges us to examine our own attitude toward the law of God. Could we ever be guilty of looking at the law of God the same way he did? What is the law of God to us?
1. Is it just something we study? It's great that we get together and study the Bible like this. It's great that we have Bible classes where we can dig into the details of the text. It's great that our kids have Bible classes where they learn the Bible story. It's great that we have our Bible reading program to encourage us to read every day...but to what end? Are we just increasing knowledge? Is this a purely intellectual exercise?
 2. Is the word of God just something we use to argue with our denominational friends at work? Don't miss the point, we need to defend truth and answer error (**1 Peter 3:15**). But there are guys who go to work and argue with friends about baptism, then go home and ignore what God says about loving their wife. Or, they come to services and harbor bitterness in their heart toward a brother. Is that all the law of God is to us; something to argue with friends?
 3. Worse yet, is the word of God something we quibble over and twist to get around what God wants us to do? I've heard people argue about Hebrews 10:25 and what it means to forsake the assembly. How much can you miss before you are forsaking? Whatever you may decide about that text, does anyone believe that when God's people gather to praise Him and learn about Him that He would be okay with us choosing to stay home and watch the game? Are we ever guilty of studying the word and debating the word merely as a way of getting around what God wants us to do?
- B. What would Jesus say to people with this attitude?
1. I suspect He would say the same thing that He said to this lawyer. Our first duty to the law is to obey it.
 2. We study this book and learn God's will for our lives so that we can go and do in our lives what God says to do (**John 13:17; Colossians 1:9-10; James 1:22-25**).
 3. Jesus had a simple message for the lawyer, "do this." It's the lesson I hope you will carry home today. We need to be doers of the word.

Conclusion: If you're not a Christian today, you need to DO what Jesus said to do (Mark 16:16).

- David A. Banning