



“Modeling Compassion”
Luke 10:25-37

Idea: How we live with others is shorthand for how we are related to God.

Intro: ¹⁶By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
– 1 John 3:16-18

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. – James 2:14-17

On the seminary campus, a Greek class was given an assignment to study the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. These young theologians were to do an in-depth analysis of the biblical text, observing and commenting on all the major terms and syntactical factors worth mentioning. Each student was to write his own translation after having done the work on his commentary.

As is true in most language classes, there were a few of the students who cared more about the practical implications of the assignment than its intellectual stimulation. The morning the work was to be turned in, three students teamed up and carried out a plan to prove their point. One volunteered to play the part of an alleged victim. The other two tore his shirt and pants, rubbed mud, ketchup, and other realistic-looking ingredients across his “wounds,” marked up his eyes and face so he hardly resembled himself, and then placed him along the path that led from the dormitory to the Greek classroom. They then hid and watched while he groaned and writhed, simulating great pain.

Several students passed by him that morning. Some walked by him alone. Others passed by him in groups, but not one student stopped. They all walked around him, stepped over him, and said different things to him. But nobody stooped over to check or offer help. No one acted with compassion toward him. What do you want to bet their academic work was flawless, insightful, and handed in on time? I believe the Apostle John would declare these students of the Bible loveless. James, the half-brother of Jesus, would deem them faithless if not spiritually dead.

Through Luke, we are learning that part of Christ’s purpose in our redemption is to send believers out with the message of redemption to others. We discovered last Sunday in the first half of Luke 10 that believers have been commissioned to participate in the great harvest taking place among their neighbors and the nations. This is the first of the three scenes in this great chapter, illustrating three ministries for every follower of Christ. The second scene reveals that believers are neighbors who look for opportunities to show mercy in the name of Christ. Next Sunday, in the third scene, we will see that believers are worshippers who long to listen to God’s Word and commune with Christ.

Today, God's Word calls us to demonstrate our love and commitment to Jesus by modeling His compassion toward others. It is a call to put our love and faith into action. And we will learn that our willingness to model compassion will reveal a lot about our walk with the Lord. You see, how we live with others is shorthand for how we are related to God.

Read Luke 10:25-37.

Inquiry: In this story, a lawyer brought up a theological area of debate before Jesus. Now, this lawyer was not the kind of lawyer that we think of today. He was not arguing cases in the court of law in Jerusalem as a prosecuting or defense attorney. No, he was part of a class of professional interpreters and teachers of the law. Sometimes this class of men are referred to as scribes or rabbis in the NT. It was customary and expected for rabbis to discuss theological matters in public, and the question this lawyer asked was one that was often debated by the Jews. It was a great question asked with a terrible motive. The lawyer's plan was to trap Jesus, yet we see he was the one who falls into the trap.

Through this theological discussion we learn where to find the answers to our questions. When the lawyer posed his question, Jesus asked him, *"What is written in the Law?"* The answers we need for our questions are found in God's Word. We also learn that being changed by Jesus means that our heart and subsequent actions are also transformed. So, let's look at this passage. There are three points I want to outline for you. Then, I want to show you three implications we can draw from this discussion.

1. A Theological Question

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" – Luke 10:25

Again, the lawyer asked Jesus a great question. In fact, it is the most important question any of us could ask? The man asked how to inherit or receive eternal life. Most people think of heaven when they hear the words eternal life. The idea is that and more. Eternal means "forever." Therefore, eternal life is forever-life with God as it was meant to be with God. It is living life to the fullest extent possible. This idea is what the lawyer asked about, and it is the question that should be on the mind of every person who will die one day.

Notice, that the lawyer assumed there was something he could or must do to earn eternal life. He said, *"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* Most people think there is something they must do or stop doing to earn God's approval. Often, when a person realizes that his or her life has hit rock bottom, this is when the individual begins thinking about a better life with the help of God. The man who has eroded his life in alcoholism thinks, "I have to go to church so God will change my life." Obviously, it is good to be among God's church. In the church, this man will hear the gospel, feel the love of God from His people, and be encouraged to walk away from his vice. Going to church, however, does not make one a candidate for eternal life. The same is true for the lady who has lived a life of licentious sin. She may be tempted to think, "I have to clean myself up to be accepted by God." The truth is she does not have to clean up her life. Jesus said, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matt 11:28). He accepts the lady just as she is in her sinful brokenness. In fact, she cannot make herself clean before God. The cross of Calvary was necessary because no one is good enough.

The lawyer asked this theological question, but he was not sincere. His goal was to test Jesus. He was a smart theologian, and he believed he had the Law mastered. He, however, was going to learn from the Master and the Word Himself. This man asked a theological question, and then Jesus offered an answer.

2. A Gospel Answer

The answer Jesus suggested to the lawyer's question was, "*What is written in the Law?*" (vs. 26). Take note that the Lord did not suggest the answer could be found in philosophy books, self-help books, or even religious books. He pointed the man to Scripture. Jesus believes the place to find the most important answer to the most important question is in the most important book, the Bible.

The lawyer knew the Law, and he summarized it in verse 27 with the shema (שמע) of Deuteronomy 6:5 and the teaching of Leviticus 19:18. Jesus, then, affirmed his answer (vs. 28) but He did so with a twist. He said, "*Do this, and you will live.*" Jesus insinuated that if the lawyer would perfectly obey God's commandments, then he would have eternal life. Therefore, one way to gain eternal life is to perfectly obey God's command to love Him and our neighbors.

Jesus directed the man to the Law as a tutor that reveals the need for redemption. The Law has no power to save. It only describes the standard and requirements that God has declared as acceptable. The depravity of man, which resulted from the fall, renders man incapable of fulfilling the demands of the Law. Mankind by nature is in rebellion against God. Every person is born into this life in sin and so separated from God. Therefore, rather than offering redemption, the Law manifests the stark dichotomy between God's holiness and man's sinfulness. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God in the Law to bring conviction upon sinners over this failure (Rom 3:23).

This lawyer knew the Law. However, there is a huge difference between answering correctly theologically and living perfectly practically. The lawyer recognized this point. In his head the answer was correct, but his lifestyle betrayed him. This is the very point of the Law. It exposes sin and reveals the need for a Savior. Jesus offered a gospel answer to the lawyer's theological question. He called him to recognize his sin and need for a Savior, but He did not end there. Jesus illustrated how one's heart and subsequent actions are transformed when a person turns from sin to the Savior.

3. A Clarifying Illustration

At this moment, the lawyer surely felt the weight of his guilt, which is apparent because when he heard Jesus say, "*do this*" he scrambled for an excuse. This excuse came in a question about who his neighbor was (vs. 29). He wanted to know the depth and breadth of this command to love others. He probably thought it was at least restricted to Israel. There is no way God would require him to love the Romans or the hated Samaritans. By extension, the man surely thought love should be restricted to people of character. Perhaps, he thought of himself. "A person cannot love everyone, so you have to draw the line somewhere," he thought. "What about tyrants, blasphemers, and immoral people? Am I to love them? Is that type of person my neighbor?"

The illustration Jesus offered clarified the issue for the lawyer. This story's opening lines sound like they could have come from any news headline in America. A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was robbed and left for dead in the road. The first person to walk up on this man lying in the middle of the road was a priest. Jericho was one of the main areas where priests lived, so the priest was likely returning from performing holy service in the temple. If the man was dead and the priest touched him, then the priest would have been ceremonially defiled (Lev 21:1ff). Rather than risk defilement, he passed by on the far side of the road. To preserve legal cleanliness, he heartlessly transgressed the entire second table of the Law.

The second person to find the man in the road was a Levite. He belonged to another class of religious leaders in Israel. They were not as high ranking as priests, but Levites were highly privileged and served in the temple. The grammar of the text suggests that he went up close to the man to see him, and then he passed by on the other side.

This lawyer, listening to Jesus, probably expected a threefold rhythm of the Semitic story form to reveal that an Israelite layman came to the aid of the injured man. What Jesus presented next no one would have expected. It was a Samaritan rather than a Jew who came to the man's rescue. The Jews viewed Samaritans as compromising mongrels who were apostate. Yet, Jesus made a Samaritan the hero in the story. This outcast of society applied aid and provided long-term care.

After telling the story, Jesus asked which character proved to be a neighbor to the hurt man (vs. 36). The lawyer understood the Lord's point. It was not the priest, Levite, or even by implication the lawyer posing the question who modeled compassion. It was the hated Samaritan. This scenario was likely a true story people had heard since Luke offers no indication that it was a parable. Whatever the case, the man recognized that to love your neighbor as yourself means to show compassion toward others who are hurting. He also understood that while the priest, Levite, and lawyer can be close to the things of God, loving God and loving others is the direct result of a personal, redemptive encounter with God.

Conclusion: The story we read in these verses is essential to our spiritual development as Christ-followers. We claim to know and follow Jesus. We delight in the biblical truth that Christ is in us and that we are in Him. Doctrinally, we hold high these beautiful truths, but if we are honest, too often our lives fail to live up to the transformation we claim. Instead, they look more like that of the priest, Levite, and lawyer. Rather than helping others in need, we sidestep them and move on our way. Or we argue that it is not our responsibility and try to lower the standards.

Do you remember the exhortations from John and James that we read earlier?

¹⁶By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. – 1 John 3:16-18

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This lawyer intended to trap Jesus in a theological snare, but it was the lawyer who became pinned by the reality of his own sin. His eyes were opened, and ours need to be opened as well because how we live with others really is shorthand for how we are related to God. There are three implications we need to recognize from this conversation.

3 Implications

- 1) Showing gospel compassion to one's neighbor is evidence of having received gospel compassion.

The person who has experienced the glorious grace and mercy of Christ possesses a new, spiritually innate desire to replicate the Lord's compassion toward others.

We love because he first loved us. – 1 John 4:19

Do you have this desire to love others?

- 2) Your relationship with other people validates or invalidates your claim to know and love God.

Scripture's call to love our neighbors as ourselves offers a way for our claim to be in relationship with God to be tested. We should be assessing ourselves on this level, but even if we fail to do it personally, others are judging our claim to know Christ based on the compassion we show.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. – 1 John 4:7

- 3) If you characteristically pass by people who are physically, economically, socially, or spiritually distressed, then you are probably not a Christian.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. – 1 John 4:8

Please do not misunderstand the point. We are not discussing perfection. Only our Lord loved God and His neighbor perfectly. He was the only One who was always consistently merciful. But there should be a level of consistency in our lives. Maybe we are not batting a thousand, but hopefully we are batting 300 or 400.

Is gospel compassion modeled in your life? Do you possess a love for God that is demonstrated in love for your neighbors and the nations? If so, praise God and ask Him to help you employ more of it for His glory. If not, then why not? Have you as a believer forgotten the compassion the Lord has shown toward you? Perhaps, you have not yet experienced the compassion of God through Jesus Christ. I would invite you to look at the gospel and see all that God has done for you in Christ.