

Luke 10:25-37

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[0 : 00] Well, very simply, I have a question and eight words for you this morning. Or rather, a question and four pairs of words.

! And I'm quite confident in saying that this is actually one of the most important questions you will ever have heard in your life, or ever will hear. That may not have been what you were expecting to come to when you came to church this morning, but I'm just going to talk about this for a while to give you some time to get used to this idea.

You're going to hear a very important question in just a few seconds. And here it is. Do you understand the gospel? Do you understand the message of Christianity, the message of the Bible? Maybe you're new to church this morning, and you're thinking, well, I don't even know what it is yet. And that's fine. You're very welcome, and we're happy to tell you. But I imagine most of you have been to church at least several times before.

What do you think you're hearing when you're hearing the Bible preached? Do you think you're mainly being given a list of rules? Or stories as a good moral example?

[1 : 14] Or maybe something else? Tricky thing is, if you think that's what you're going to hear, that's probably all you'll hear from it. Thankfully, there are sections of the Bible, and especially of the Gospels, where Jesus' teaching is designed to check whether or not you get it.

Whether or not you understand. And today's passage is one of those passages. So this brings us to the first pair of words I talked about.

The first of four pairs of words. The first two words, look out. Look out. We need to be careful with this passage. Precisely because it is a parable.

We might think, well, parables, they're stories, they're nice and easy. Parables make everything easier to understand. If you sort of grew up in the church and went to kids clubs or Sunday schools, your Sunday school teacher would always revert to a parable because it's a story.

But that's not necessarily what it is. Over the years, people have thought of the parables differently. Quite famously, St. Augustine looked at this parable and gave a very sort of allegorical interpretation.

[2 : 35] To be fair, he gave other interpretations in other works as well. But he's got all kinds of details. Like the inn is the church. And the innkeeper is the apostle Paul.

And all kinds of details like that. And that seems to be pretty prevalent for a long time. But by now, people seem to think this is mainly about moral teaching. It's an example story.

Telling this lawyer how he should live. Jesus, however, explains the purpose of the parables in this way in Luke 8, verse 10.

If you want to just flip over to Luke 8, 10 on 8, 6, 5. The purpose of the parables, he says, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.

But for others they are in parables, so that, seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. So that's echoing the words of the call given to the prophet Isaiah.

[3 : 39] And often when you see chunks with several parables stuck together, Jesus is repeatedly asking people to listen. Those who have ears to hear, hear. Listen, listen carefully.

Think about this. Parables are not there to make things easy to understand. They are there to divide the crowd.

Not to get them to fight with each other. But it is to split them. To understand who are the ones who understand, and who are the ones who don't. Not the ones who have the special magic code, and those who don't.

Not those who are spiritually superior, and those who are inferior. But simply those who are willing to listen, to what Jesus is saying, and willing to understand whatever he's saying.

One writer very helpfully explains that parables start off like pictures, then become like mirrors, then become windows.

[4 : 42] Parables start off like pictures, then they become like mirrors, and then become windows. I think that's a very helpful way of looking at it.

And our job is to look very carefully, and to listen very carefully, and to let the parable do this work. Look at the picture, look at the mirroring work of the parable, and then look at the window. See what it shows us. What can we see through the window? So the very simple question is, are you listening? Are you willing to hear whatever he has to say?

Well, that's our first two words, look at. And our next two words, look around. If we want to understand what the parable is about, we need to get a sense of the context. We need to look around what's going on here.

Let's start very easy, the top of the page, you'll see we're in Luke's Gospel. And we're at the beginning of a section, a very important section in Luke's Gospel, that starts in 951, which you'll see just on the same page as our passage.

[5 : 46] And in Luke's Gospel, geography is very important. Where Jesus is matters. He arranges it by where Jesus is. And in 951, we have a key turning point in Luke's Gospel.

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And from that point in Luke, he is very definitely, very clearly, very deliberately, heading towards Jerusalem. He is on his way to the cross. So some people can explain that the shadow of the cross is now over the rest of the Gospel. So from that turning point, he has gone through a Samaritan village. And he has sent out 72 people in pairs on mission trips. And they've come back to him. And they've told him about all the wonderful things that happened. And then just before our passage, in verse 21, Jesus prays a prayer of praise.

And he's praising God because the word has been working as it should have been. And it's been subverting the order. It's been subverting the way people expect things to work.

[7 : 00] The wise and understanding don't get it. But children do. It's quite reminiscent of Mary's song at the beginning of Luke's Gospel.

Where she is praising God in what we call the Magnificat. She's celebrating how God just gloriously works in tockly-turvy ways. The rich goes away empty and the humble is lifted and everything seems upside down from what you'd expect.

And Jesus is praising God because that is exactly what's happening. The wise and understanding don't get it and the children do. Then he blesses his disciples.

And he tells them they are blessed because they see, they understand. verse 23 of chapter 10. So Luke is on this theme of understanding and not understanding.

He's focused on that idea now. And just at that moment, behold, look, a lawyer stood up. Not like a solicitor or a barrister or anything.

[8 : 06] But probably an expert in Jewish law. Possibly one of the Pharisees. And standing would normally be a sign of respect. But he's not fooling Luke.

He's not fooling the Holy Spirit inspiring him. Verse 25, he wants to put him to the test. And from that point, we have two cycles where the lawyer asks a question, then Jesus responds by asking a question himself, then the lawyer responds and Jesus responds.

And then it happens again. Lawyer asks a question, Jesus asks a question, lawyer responds, Jesus responds. And the parable is the setup for Jesus' second question. So that's where we are.

So in this first cycle, this first time around, the lawyer's question, verse 25, what do I do to inherit eternal life? It was a common enough question, although you'd think the clue was in the word inherit.

You don't do things to inherit. But it was a common enough question and that's what he asked. And Jesus responds with a question, what is written in the law? How do you read it?

[9 : 15] And so he responds in verse 27. And you notice that his answer is exactly spot on. This guy is a brilliant theologian.

He gives the exact same summary of the law that Jesus gave, as we read in Mark earlier. That wasn't necessarily a common way people framed it. You have to know the law well enough to know that you take a bit of Deuteronomy 6.5 and then Leviticus 19.18 and that's the top commandment. Jesus knew that and this lawyer knew that. This man knew his Bible better than anyone in this room. This man would have passed his presbytery exams with flying colours.

You wouldn't have any problem with the toughest theology test. And so Jesus' response he responds very simply well then there you are then go and do that.

You know what the law says do it. That's the standard you know it just do it. So then comes the second cycle with the lawyer asking a question before Jesus asks a question.

[10:29] And note that he's gone from wanting to test Jesus he's gone on the back foot and he's needing to justify himself now. So comes the question in verse 29 and who is my neighbour?

It reminds me of some of you may have seen the real thing and I saw the film about it David Frost interviewing Richard Nixon after the Watergate scandal David Frost was interviewing him and if you watch the play or the film about it people are very frustrated with David Frost for not asking harder questions.

Nixon had resigned after the Watergate scandal where seven people had gone to break in to these apartments to steal information. But eventually Frost is given some transcripts of other conversations that they found that people hadn't really highlighted before.

and so Frost reads to Nixon this key quotation this whole investigation rests unless one of the seven begins to talk.

Well Nixon wasn't supposed to know about anything about these seven at this point but he's saying one of the seven and so of course what's Nixon's response? Now what do we mean when we say one of the seven?

[11:50] He knew exactly what we mean David Frost knew exactly what we mean and Nixon knew that Frost knew and Nixon knew that everybody at home would know every knew what one of the seven meant.

The lawyer knew who his neighbour was he didn't need to ask this question but he's wanting to justify himself and so it's in response to that question and who is my neighbour that Jesus tells this story setting up his question that will respond to that and so we've had two pairs of words we've got two more and these two pairs will summarise the parable for us and the first thing that Jesus says it's not a nice saccharine answer but it's firm and I think very loving he's telling him be quiet if you want to go less polite he's telling him to shut up part of what this story does is shock him into silence so let me explain many people these days probably as part of a reaction against that Augustine interpretation that I mentioned with the innkeeper of St. Paul and all of that they want to see this story as sort of a moral example so he tells a story and then the answer is so go and be like this Samaritan nice and simple after all he does tell him to do that in verse 37 but there are problems with that it's not quite that simple parables aren't there to make it easy if it was a moral story for the lawyer just to follow the example of the Samaritan surely the Samaritan would have been the victim and it would have been a priest came along and didn't help him a Levite came along but then an Israelite a teacher of the law came along and he saved the Samaritan so you be like the teacher of the law that saved the Samaritan but you notice that Jesus blocks him off from identifying himself as the hero at every point so he would hear this parable and he knows that this is a story for him to identify with and a common way in this period of time to describe all the people of Israel to say the priests the Levites and all the people of Israel or the priests the Levites and the Israelites and now that the kingdom had kind of deteriorated it wasn't about the king so much it was about the priest and the temple and so they said the priests the Levites and the Israelites and so he's expected to hear Israelites that he can identify with so the priest comes along and the teacher of the law knows he's not a priest so he knows that's not meant to be him and then a Levite comes along and he knows that's not meant to be him either so surely the next one the Israelites and he'll be able to identify with the Israelites but a Samaritan comes along there is no way on earth he's going to identify with a Samaritan he's not going to think that he's meant to be the Samaritan Israelites and Samaritans hated each other and Jesus has succeeded in blocking him from seeing himself in the Samaritans you see in verse 37 he can't even bring himself to give the simplest answer which would be the Samaritan he just says the one who showed mercy he knows what the character's name is the character's name is the Samaritan but he can't bring himself to say it and you'd think as well wouldn't you that the story would have run a little bell from that story in Chronicles maybe we don't know that as well but he would have known that really well he knows that Samaritans have helped Israel in the past so it shouldn't be that crazy an idea and then look at the two questions verse 29 who is my neighbour well Jesus is just echoing that question who turned out to be this man's neighbour well who is this man it's the man on the floor as this picture turns into a mirror and the man sees who he is meant to be in this story he sees he is on the floor half dead

beaten up he is not the hero he's a mess the man's question exposed his heart you see you can't really expect me to love everyone can you surely there are limits

I mean some people frankly they don't deserve my love some people aren't worthy I mean some people are Samaritan scum after all I'm better than not everyone deserves my love and Jesus is saying you want to know what you bring to the table in terms of loving people well let me give you a picture of you and everything you do to bless and love your neighbours you look like a man half dead beaten up bloodied bruised useless that's right that's what you look like that's what your apparent obedience to the law looks like that's how impressive you are that's what he's telling him so you can get rid of all these delusions of you being really obedient and really brilliant and just be quiet fortunately though that's just where the story begins because along comes a Samaritan and for the longest time I mean it's the Sunday school cliché isn't it they took the Samaritan to be Jesus following Augustine Augustine sort of made it an allegory where the man is Adam fallen Adam and Jesus comes and saves Adam and so people wanted to veer away from that because they saw the weaknesses in it but let's not throw the baby out with the bath water because Luke has put clear indicators in here to show who it is now Jesus obviously isn't literally from Samaria but as I mentioned where Jesus is matters in Luke's gospel and what's Jesus doing he is travelling from Samaria to Jerusalem he's figuratively a Samaritan not literally just like Jesus is not literally a thief in the night but he does compare himself with a thief in the night sometimes but he is the one who is travelling from Samaria to Jerusalem and so our final pair of words the lawyer asks who is my neighbour

[18:58] Jesus first of all just be quiet don't think too much of what you can do to love people but here's the second answer who's my neighbour I am that's Jesus answer who's my neighbour I'm your neighbour and I've come to get you I have come to be the neighbour that you desperately need even though you think of me as an enemy I've come as a neighbour to fulfil the law for people like you I want you to know who your neighbour is it's me and I'm coming he's saying this parable of course as he knows he's on the way to Jerusalem where he will be beaten and bruised and not just half dead but dead and he's coming with oil of comfort to ease our pain he's coming with wine to wash our filth he is coming to carry us home to help us all at his own cost and so this is where the mirror becomes a window because now through this window we can see what the good news of Jesus means and he's saying this to a proud self-righteous lawyer he's preaching salvation and good news to this proud religious man is that not more mercy than you can handle it's more grace than I can get my head around we read earlier in our assurance of pardon

I'll just read a bit earlier from that Romans 5 one will scarcely die for a righteous person though for a good person one would dare to die but God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us so it's hardly surprising that by the end of chapter 11 in Romans Paul just says oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God one minister I know said that if you had to summarise the Bible in one word it would be that word oh that's when you know that you get it when all you can say is oh and it's at that point we're ready to hear the concluding exchange the two responses that are between them the lawyer is so poor at loving people he can't even bring himself to answer the question saying the Samaritan is the hero of the story that's exposed his heart and so when

Jesus responds saying go and do likewise all he is going to hear is more rules and in a sense that's what he needs he has made it very clear he doesn't love his neighbour but he needs to justify himself but he needs to see himself he cannot keep the law there's absolutely no way he can do it he's utterly hopeless that's one of the uses of the law it shows us our sin it shows us our helplessness and our desperate needs the law brings us to the point where we say in the words of this morning's prayer of confession I do not know what else to do but to hope and pray for your mercy but we don't have to be like the lawyer we can ask Jesus to save us we can acknowledge who the Samaritan is and Jesus gladly saves us so when we hear the command go and do likewise we don't hear a heavy burden but an invitation that we are more than happy to accept don't we there's actually something we'll be seeing a bit more tonight in 1 John so do come to this evening's service to look at that together but for now the parable will have done its work among us do you get it do you understand

Jesus' message do you see what he's saying if not it's not too late it's not that it's completely hopeless for you now but you need to ask yourself what is gripping your heart so it's blocking you from understanding this message blocking you from seeing more than just a set of rules like the

lawyer did who do you hate or what do you love more than God or neighbour that would stop you from seeing here a set of rules but if you see here through this wonderful window that Jesus has given us God's great love for us saving us paying the cost for us bringing us back to life as he goes on to Jerusalem goes to the cross pays our price and comes back to life to restore us then all you need to do is ask and you will receive as we were singing earlier and your heart will be full of praise to God we would just be responding to him saying oh oh the depths that is when we know that we understand the gospel let's pray shall we desde
Thank you.