

More Than Obedience

Scott Grant · Luke · Luke 10:25-37

AT A GLANCE

A lawyer tries to justify himself by asking who counts as his neighbor, and Jesus answers not with more law but with a story that exposes the lawyer's inability to keep the law he already knows. Scott Grant argues the parable's real center is mercy: we need more than obedience, because we fail at it, and the hated Samaritan who stops to help models the mercy we ourselves need from Jesus.

- The lawyer's question was a disingenuous test, and Jesus answered a lawyer's question with a lawyer's answer to expose him.
- Reciting the law to love God and neighbor perfectly is easy; keeping it is impossible, which is why obedience alone cannot be enough.
- Jesus turns 'who is my neighbor' into 'who proved to be a neighbor,' making mercy itself the mark of true neighbor-love.

“Receive mercy in order to show mercy.”

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

Luke 10:25-37 — Then an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. He said, “Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you understand from it?” The man answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ Also, ‘Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself.’” Jesus said, “Your answer is right. Do this and you will have eternal life.” But the man wanted to show that the way he was living was right. So he said to Jesus, “But who is my neighbor?” To answer this question, Jesus said, “A man was going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Some robbers surrounded him, tore off his clothes, and beat him. Then they left him lying there on the ground almost dead. It happened that a Jewish priest was going down that road. When he saw the man, he did not stop to help him. He walked away. Next, a Levite came near. He saw the hurt man, but he went around him. He would not stop to help him either. He just walked away. Then a Samaritan man traveled down that road. He came to the place where the hurt man was lying. He saw the man and felt very sorry for him. The Samaritan went to him and poured olive oil and wine on his wounds. Then he covered the man’s wounds with cloth. The Samaritan had a donkey. He put the hurt man on his donkey, and he took

him to an inn. There he cared for him. The next day, the Samaritan took out two silver coins and gave them to the man who worked at the inn. He said, 'Take care of this hurt man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again.'" Then Jesus said, "Which one of these three men do you think was really a neighbor to the man who was hurt by the robbers?" The teacher of the law answered, "The one who helped him." Jesus said, "Then you go and do the same." (ERV)

The argument

The Lawyer's Test Exposes His Own Failure to Obey — Jesus answers a lawyer's question with a lawyer's answer

Scott Grant reads the lawyer's opening question as disingenuous — he is not seeking truth but trying to 'smoke Jesus out' so he can accuse him. Jesus turns the test back: 'What is written in the law? How do you read it?' The lawyer answers correctly, citing Deuteronomy and Leviticus, love God with your whole being, love your neighbor as yourself. Grant notes the irony: the lawyer can state the command perfectly but cannot keep it — only Jesus can. As Grant puts it, 'What Jesus is doing here is answering a lawyer's question with a lawyer's answer to show the lawyer that he needs more than obedience to the law.' Correct doctrine without the capacity to obey it leaves a person needing something more.

Insight — Being able to state God's command correctly is not the same as being able to keep it, and that gap is where mercy must enter.

The Parable's Hierarchy Reversal Indicts Religious Status — Priest, then Levite, then — shockingly — a hated Samaritan

Jesus answers the lawyer's second, self-justifying question ('who is my neighbor?') not with another question but with a story. Grant traces the escalating expectation built into the sequence: a priest passes by, then a Levite, both temple officials who should help but don't. The listener expects a Jewish layperson to complete the pattern as hero. Instead Jesus names a Samaritan — a group Jews considered 'half-breeds and usurpers,' even enemies. Grant connects this to Jesus's earlier rejection by a Samaritan village, where the disciples wanted to call down fire and Jesus rebuked them instead: 'He's modeling mercy... he has mercy on the Samaritan village.' Making the despised group the hero is itself the argument.

Insight — Jesus repeatedly locates goodness in the person the audience is least prepared to honor, forcing a reckoning with whom we assume God favors.

Jesus Reframes the Question from Identifying Neighbors to Becoming One — "Who is my neighbor" becomes "who proved to be a neighbor"

The lawyer had asked who qualifies as his neighbor, seeking to limit the command's reach. Jesus closes the story by asking the opposite question: 'Which of these three proved to be a

neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' Grant observes the lawyer cannot bring himself to say 'Samaritan' and instead answers, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus's command, 'go and do likewise,' aims the lawyer not toward his Jewish heroes but toward the Samaritan as the model to imitate. Grant states it plainly: 'Be like the Samaritan, not like your Jewish heroes.' The question of who deserves love is replaced by the question of who will act mercifully.

Insight — Neighbor-love is not solved by defining its boundaries but by becoming the one who crosses them in mercy.

Jesus Himself Is the Samaritan Who Comes for Us — The parable read back onto the reader as the wounded man

Grant pushes the parable further: what if the lawyer — what if we — are the man left half-dead by the roadside? Jesus's enemies in John's Gospel called him a Samaritan, and Grant identifies Jesus himself as the one who sees us, unlike others who 'have passed you by,' and 'feels something... compassion.' Where the Samaritan in the story pays two denarii for the injured man's care, Grant says of Jesus, 'He doesn't pay two denarii for you. No, he pays with his life for your well-being. He pays with his blood in order to bring you the deepest healing possible.' The parable's ethical demand rests on a prior rescue.

Insight — Before the parable is a command to imitate, it is a picture of the mercy already extended to the reader by Christ.

Receiving Mercy Produces the Capacity to Show and Learn It — "He who has been forgiven much loves much"

Grant lays out a three-part movement: receive mercy, show mercy, learn mercy. Receiving mercy is harder than it sounds, he says, because 'there's something within us that doesn't want mercy' and wants to handle things ourselves. But real reception 'cracks open your heart' so that showing mercy becomes almost unavoidable — echoing the earlier study in Luke 7:47, 'he who has been forgiven much loves much and he who has been forgiven little loves little.' Grant then argues we can even learn mercy from those we consider enemies, pointing to Desmond Doss rescuing the very soldiers who abused him, and to Ruby Bridges praying nightly for the people who threatened her.

Insight — Mercy is not generated by willpower but by rightly grasping how much mercy you yourself have already received.

Cross-references

- [Luke 6:27-28](#) — Grant cites Jesus's command to love enemies and pray for abusers as the standard the lawyer is being measured against.

- [Luke 9:51-56](#) — Used to show Jesus rebuking his disciples rather than condemning a rejecting Samaritan village, establishing the pattern of mercy the parable's Samaritan hero later embodies.
- [Luke 7:47](#) — Cited to explain why receiving mercy produces loving action: forgiven much, love much.

DEVOTIONAL

There is a version of religion that only wants the test, not the mercy — the lawyer standing at a safe distance, reciting the law perfectly, hoping the recitation will substitute for the reckoning. Jesus will not let him stay there. He answers a lawyer's question with a lawyer's answer and then, more devastatingly, with a story: a man in a ditch, half dead, and two respectable passersby who keep walking. We know that road. We have walked it ourselves, sometimes as the ones who pass by, more often, if we are honest, as the one bleeding in the ditch, waiting for someone — anyone — to stop. And the one who stops is the last person we expected: the outsider, the heretic, the one our own hearts had already dismissed as beneath mercy, let alone capable of giving it. Scott Grant names him plainly: Jesus is the Samaritan. He is the one who does not pass by. He sees the wound and feels something before he does anything, and what he feels is compassion, and what he does is bind, and carry, and pay — not two coins tossed to an innkeeper, but his own blood spent on the wound. The command 'go and do likewise' only makes sense once you have first been carried. Mercy shown becomes mercy required, but only because mercy received comes first. You will find healing in his cross. Let that be settled before you try to become the Samaritan for anyone else.

Reflection

- Where in your life do you resemble the lawyer — able to state God's command correctly while quietly avoiding the reckoning of whether you actually keep it?
- Who is the 'Samaritan' you would be most reluctant to receive help from, and what would it cost you to let that person's mercy in?
- If you truly believed you had been forgiven much rather than little, what would change in how you treat someone you currently consider an enemy?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, you put us right into these parables, and here we are. You have seen us by the side of the road; you have come alongside us, healed us, put us back together, and raised us up. Thank you, Jesus. Now, by your Spirit, help us take in all this mercy we have been shown, so that we may extend mercy to others. Help us, Lord Jesus, to learn mercy. Mercy begins with the Son of suffering.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

You are the one left for dead in the ditch, and Jesus is the Samaritan who stops, binds your wounds, and pays with his own blood.

This week

This week, read Luke 10:33-37 slowly and name one place you've felt left for dead by life. Tell Jesus that in prayer, thank him for stopping for you, then pray by name for one person you find hardest to love.

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