

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
February 8, 2015**

**Lesson Text: Luke 10:25-34
Lesson Title: Serving Neighbors, Serving God**

Introduction

The story of the Good Samaritan is without question one of the best known of Jesus' parables, yet it only occurs here in Luke's Gospel. This story has been the basis of Sunday school lessons, sermons, books, and even social programs reaching out to the needy or confronting prejudice. Usually the story of the Good Samaritan is studied and interpreted by itself. However, a proper understanding and application of the story must include Jesus' conversation with the lawyer, which is part of our lesson study text.

The setting of our Lord's encounter with the lawyer and his story of the certain Samaritan takes place somewhere outside of Bethany, prior to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The seventy disciples had just returned from ministering and they had stories to tell about what they had learned (Luke 10:17-22). When they were finished telling their experiences to Jesus and listening to His response to them, Jesus then spoke privately with the Twelve about their privilege to see things that even the prophets had not seen (Luke 10:23-24).

Luke quickly moves from the private conversation with the Twelve to a public setting. Evidently, the lawyer, over the past several weeks, had heard the disciples proclaiming the arrival of God's kingdom on earth. This seems to be the basis of his questions and the resulting story of the Good Samaritan.

An Inquiry from a Lawyer (Luke 10:25-29)

Verse 25

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

The “lawyer” is the first of two main characters in our lesson. This “lawyer” is anonymous. “Lawyer” is Luke's term for a scribe or an expert in Jewish law. This type of “lawyer” cannot be compared in any way to a judicial lawyer in today's world.

The “lawyer stood up” suggests that Jesus and the crowd to which he was teaching were seated. It is possible the “lawyer stood up” to gain the attention of Jesus or the crowd. Standing up when someone is teaching was also considered an action of challenge to the competence of the teacher. That is

significant because of the words “tempting him.” The word “tempting” is the Greek word *ekpeirazo* {ek-pi-rad-zo} which means “to test thoroughly.” The use of that word tells us the lawyer’s motive was one of confrontation and challenge with the purpose of tricking or trapping Jesus.

“Master” or “teacher,” is a title of respect. However, because of the lawyer’s “standing” and “tempting,” the use of the word “Master” can be viewed as sarcastic. It is also important to remember that the religious leaders, the educated, the prominent, and the powerful, had rejected Jesus and His message. They are the “*wise and prudent*” in Luke 10:21 of whom Jesus said that the Father had “*hid these things.*” Most of the people who are following Jesus at this point in his ministry are the nobodies of society, the fishermen, the poor, and the unknown. There are no Pharisee’s, no Sadducees, no scribes or rabbis or any one that is highly education accepting Jesus’ message. But here is a “lawyer” who finds himself one-on-one with Jesus. He is starrng eternal life in the eye. He has an opportunity that is beyond description.

The lawyer’s question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life,” was not an uncommon question from the populace. This question was addressed to Jesus on numerous occasions (Matthew 19:16-22; 22:35-40; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18-23). That tells us that the question of eternal life was on the minds of different people in different places. The people in general knew that God had a kingdom and that life would never cease to be. Obviously, this “lawyer” believed in eternal life. He believed he would live forever and that God had a kingdom. His question was, “What do I have to do to live forever in God’s kingdom.”

First-century Jews believed they automatically inherited the kingdom of God, or “eternal life,” because they were children of Abraham. If that be the case, why did the lawyer ask what he had to “do” to have “eternal life?” Although the lawyer didn’t ask the question as one seeking a genuine answer, he probably was sincere in wanting to know what Jesus would say. It seems however that he asked the question from the standpoint of a challenge to Jesus’ teaching that “eternal life” could only be experienced by faith. In trying to expose Jesus for what he must have concluded as strange teaching, the lawyer only exposed his inadequate understanding of spiritual matters.

Verse 26

“He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?”

One would expect Jesus to answer the lawyer’s question directly, but he does not. Instead, Jesus asked, “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” It was Jesus who introduced the subject of the “law,” not the lawyer. And he presented two questions to the lawyer.

First, “What is written in the law” he is asking the lawyer what the Mosaic Law says about eternal life. Jesus says, “You’re the expert in the law, you tell Me which of the laws guarantee eternal life?” Second, “How readest thou” means “how to you read it,” or “how do you recite it?”

These two questions required the lawyer to respond. Instead of telling the lawyer what to think, Jesus challenged the lawyer to answer the original question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life” for himself.

Verse 27

“And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”

Jesus asked the lawyer what role he thought the law played in making it to the kingdom of God. In response to Jesus’ questions, the lawyer quoted two Old Testament texts from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Deuteronomy 6:5, “*And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,*” speaks of man’s relationship to God. Leviticus 19:18, “*Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD*” expresses man’s relationship with others. By quoting these two verses, the lawyer proves to Jesus that he correctly understood the heart of the law. In other words, the heart of the law was to love God and your neighbor.

The person who perfectly loves God, who perfectly loves others, who is completely self-denying, selfless, this person qualifies for eternal life. That is the answer the lawyer gives.

Verse 28

“And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”

Jesus said, “You’re exactly right. Now go do and you will live.” Jesus now uses the word “do.” But that’s the problem. No one can “do” those two things perfectly. None of us have loved God perfectly, nor have we loved our neighbors perfectly.

Verse 29

“But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”

The lawyer knew he couldn’t “do” what the law required. So, “he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?” It would have been a blessing if the lawyer had said, “Master, you’re right. Have mercy on me

because I can't keep the law or fulfill your righteous demands." Instead, he attempted to "justify himself" or "proclaim himself righteous" with a selfish follow-up question, "And who is my neighbor?" Remember, this lawyer is standing in a public arena among the poor and the uneducated who were following Jesus. So he needed to appear to be righteous. He says, "As far as I know, I love God and my neighbor, unless You have a different definition of my neighbour."

What do you suppose was this lawyer's definition of a "neighbour?" He was probably thinking of people in his league, on his educational level, and those who lived in the neighborhood. Could the lawyer's question also be, "You're not implying I should love people such as are gathered here are you? You're not telling me I should love Gentiles are you?"

It's interesting that the lawyer doesn't mention God in his attempt to justify himself. He only mentions his "neighbour." He won't even consider the possibility that he doesn't love God perfectly. He just gave absolutely no thought to the possibility that he may not be right with God. Like most sinners today, it wasn't even in his thought process. And that is eternally dangerous!

A Story from the Lord (Luke 10:30-34)

Jesus' story of the certain Samaritan is among the most instructive and powerful to be found both in and out of the Bible. It is significant that Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of the story. Jesus was a Jew, and he told the story to a lawyer who was a strict Jew. Jews and Samaritans had been hostile and prejudice toward each other for centuries. A priest and a Levite are also part of the story. So everyone in the story knew what the law required in regard to loving God and loving others. That is, everyone except the Samaritan!

Jesus told the story in a setting that His audience was easily recognize. When Jews traveled from Judea to Galilee, they typically traveled down the mountains toward the Jordan River. They did this to keep from going through Samaria, which lay between Judea and Galilee. Jews hated the Samaritans and would take the longer route rather than set foot in their territory. The lawyer had no doubt taken this road to Jericho many times. But being a lawyer and man of notable reputation, it is highly unlikely that he ever traveled this road alone. Jesus tells this story so the lawyer would see himself alone and helpless.

Verse 30

"And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead."

The route from “Jerusalem to Jericho” was perfect terrain for thieves and robbers. Jesus introduces “a certain man” who was traveling this route and “fell among thieves.” They “stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.” “Thieves” means there was more than one attacking this individual man who was all alone.

The “thieves” took the man’s valuables, his clothing, and “wounded him” to the point of near death. If that wasn’t enough, they left him “half dead.” The words “half dead” means “entirely exhausted, unable to survive without help.” His condition was such that dead was sure if no one came to his aid.

Verse 31

“And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.”

“By chance” should not be understood as mere “chance.” It basically means “it happened.” The word is used by Jesus here as a type of irony. Remember, He’s talking to a lawyer about the law. So, Jesus is saying, “Guess what, a priest who knew what the law required came by.”

There was “a certain priest” that came by where the man lay. This “priest” may have been returning home after completing his service in Jerusalem. This “priest” represented hope to this beaten man. He was someone who could help the beaten man. In addition, he was “a priest.” A “priest” was a man called by God to mediate the relationship between God and man. This priest “saw” the beaten man but instead of helping him, “he passed by on the other side.”

Luke doesn’t tell us why the priest avoided the beaten man. A logical reason would have been *ritual purity*. Any contact with a corpse would have rendered the priest unclean for service. Since the man was “half dead” he might have appeared to be completely dead. Another possible reason the priest avoided the beaten man was fear of becoming a victim himself. That is suggested in the words “passed by on the other side.” “Other side” suggests the priest may have thought the beaten man may have been a decoy to fool him into stopping which may endanger his life.

Verse 32

“And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.”

“Likewise,” or in similar fashion, “a Levite” came by the crime scene “and looked on him” and also “passed by on the other side.” “Levites” were those who assisted the priests in their services. A “Levite” didn’t need to worry about ritual purity. The words “see” and “looked on” are the same Greek word. Both

the priest and Levite were aware by seeing and looking at the condition of the man and the fact that he needed help. But both “passed by on the other side.”

Both the “priest” and the “Levite” showed up at this man’s time of greatest need and both did nothing to help. They represent organized religion with all the titles and the appearances of what is right and yet neither was willing to risk anything to help a dying man. They were selfish, failed to show mercy, and neglected the help meet the basic need of the beaten man. One wonders if they would have even dialed 911 had it been available! They were professing to serve God without serving their neighbor.

Verse 33-34

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”

Can you imagine the lawyer’s reaction when he heard the words, “But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was?” Why did Jesus introduce a half-breed pagan into this story? The hated “Samaritan,” passed by the beaten man just like the priest and Levite. The difference is, “when he saw him, he had compassion on him...” and did something about it.

This “Samaritan” was acting out of love. First, he made his *touch* available to the beaten man. He “went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.” This action is impossible without touching the individual. The binding of the wounds and the application of the oil and wine provided cleansing for the wounded areas and prevention from further infection. The “oil” would be used for comfort and soothing of the pain. Second, he made his *time* available to the beaten man. This “certain Samaritan” was going somewhere just like the priest and Levite. He had plans to fulfill and places to be, yet he saw a need and was willing to use his time and help. Third, he made his *treasure* available to the beaten man. After placing the beaten man on “his own beast,” he “brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” The words “took care of him” means he cared for him like a physician and a brother. In addition to the bandages, the oil and the wine, he invested his own wages on a stranger. Luke 10:35 says, “*he took out two pence, and gave them to the host.*” “*Two pence*” was the equivalent of a days’ wages. He also promised to return and check on the wounded man and if anymore was owed, he would pay.

Conclusion

Jesus’ story left the lawyer with only one correct answer and a big decision to make in his life. When Jesus asked the lawyer, “*Which now of these three,*

thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves,” the lawyer’s answer was *“He that shewed mercy upon him”* (Luke 10:36-37). Jesus then commanded the lawyer, *“Go, and do thou likewise”* (Luke 10:37).

There was no way the lawyer or any of us can live up to the standard of loving God and loving our neighbor perfectly. Jesus wanted the lawyer to see that in spite of all his knowledge of the Scripture and all his meticulous detail to legal standards, he was less righteous than the hated Samaritans. The lawyer now knew that earning your way to heaven is an impossibility. All have fallen short of the standard. Therefore, all need the grace of God.

Jesus never calls the Samaritan in the story, good. He refers to him as “a certain Samaritan.” “Certain” is one of Luke’s favorite words in his gospel. It is used no less than four times in our lesson text in connection with the lawyer, the priest, the man robbed and the kind and loving Samaritan. “Certain” means “a particular person,” but not necessarily anyone special or unique.

The “certain Samaritan” saw human need and he did something different from the others. What you are determines what you see, and what you see determines what you do. Are you a “certain Christian” who is willing to serve the Lord by serving others?

Amen.