**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**BECOMING GOOD SAMARITANS**

**Luke 10:25-42**

**INTRODUCTION**

We live in a time when the Bible is largely seen as being irrelevant to everyday life. Ask your average Canadian about the Bible and they may say it’s an interesting historical document, but not much else.

No one can deny, however, that the Bible has had a lasting, enduring impact on Canadian thought and daily life. It’s present in our laws. It’s present in our calendars. It’s even present in our language. Let me give you a couple examples.

Many of you have heard the saying, “The writing is on the wall”. People typically say this when there are clear signs that something bad is about to happen. This reference comes from Daniel 5, when King Belashazzar of Babylon was feasting using golden vessels stolen from God’s temple in Jerusalem. A hand suddenly appeared and wrote a message on the wall of the palace. The prophet Daniel came and interpreted it to mean that the Kingdom of Babylon was about to be broken apart. That very night, Belshazzar was murdered, and his kingdom was fractured. The writing was on the wall.

What about the word “scapegoat”? We call someone a “scapegoat” when they take the blame for the wrongs of others. The concept comes from Leviticus 16, where a priest would lay his hands on the head of a goat, confess the sins of Israel over the goat, and send the goat away into the wilderness. It was a symbol of atonement: the goat was banished so that Israel could be accepted by God.

Perhaps the most common biblical phrase used in contemporary language is “the Good Samaritan”. The media likes to pull this phrase out when they report someone performing a random act of kindness for a stranger. A quick google search of the phrase “Good Samaritan” will pull up stories from all over the world of people pulling strangers out of crashed cars, or turning in a lost wallet, or giving a homeless person a new winter coat.

This isn’t typical for mainstream media. News agencies don’t typically report good news. They report bad news, because bad news gets attention, and attention means more money. But when it comes to Good Samaritans, the media will sometimes make an exception and turn our attention away from the bad and towards the good. Why? Because people like stories about Good Samaritans. People want to know that there’s some good in the world, and they find that in these stories.

In our text today, we come to the original story of the Good Samaritan, and as we will see, our culture gets parts of the story right. This parable told by Jesus himself is meant to make us more aware of the needs around us and to get us thinking about how we can meet those needs. Our culture gets the point that we need to become better people, but it misses the central point of *how* we become better people. The *how* is what really matters, because without it, our world will never see more Good Samaritans.

The title of this message is **Becoming Good Samaritans**. My aim today is to show you that **Jesus Makes us Good Samaritans to All People to Make Good Samaritans out of All Peoples.**

We will have two points today:

1. The Example of the Good Samaritan
2. The Lesson of the Good Samaritan

(1) **THE EXAMPLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN**

Our text today begins in verse 25 with a question for Jesus from a lawyer. Lawyers in those days weren’t corporate hot shots like they are today. They were experts in religious law.

Luke makes it plain to us that, though this lawyer is coming to Jesus with a question, he doesn’t come with pure motives. Verse 25 says that the lawyer wanted to “put him to the test”. This lawyer isn’t approaching Jesus as a student, but as a critic. His desire is not to conform to Jesus’ beliefs, but to see whether Jesus conforms to his beliefs.

And his belief, as an expert in religious law, was that everything we need to know about God, about man, and about God’s relationship to man is found in the Law and the Prophets, or what we know as the Old Testament. He comes to Jesus and asks, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” but he already knows the answer, because he knows what the Scriptures teach. What he wanted to know, however, was whether Jesus would answer from Scripture or from some other source. That’s why he was putting him to the test.

As we might expect, Jesus passes the test in his response in verse 26, where he asks a question of his own: “He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’” Jesus points the lawyer to the Law to show him that he agrees that the answer to the question is found in the Scriptures.

But why does Jesus ask a question rather than give a straight answer? It’s because by asking the lawyer what is written instead of telling him, Jesus exposes the lawyer as already knowing the answer to his own question! Jesus did this because he knew that the lawyer wasn’t coming to him in good faith. He wasn’t actually trusting Jesus to show him the path to eternal life. Jesus knows the thoughts and motives of the human heart, and the lawyer was no exception.

The lawyer’s answer is found in verse 27: “And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’”

The Old Testament law says a lot more than what we see in verse 27, but the lawyer sums it all up well in what are called the two great commandments: love God, and love others. The first one is the greatest, and the other is like it, for if you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength - that is, if you love him with everything that you are - then obeying the rest of God's commands will naturally follow, whether they are commands regarding how we are to worship God, or commands regarding how we are to relate to other people. Loving God leads to a right relationship with God, and a right relationship with God leads to a right relationship with other people. Obey the first command, and you will obey the second command to love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus approves of the lawyer's answer in verse 28. He says, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." If you want to obtain eternal life, then do what the Scriptures say: love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself. The keys to the door of eternal life are a perfect love for God, and a perfect love for your fellow man.

The lawyer is intrigued by this answer. It's not quite what he was expecting. He didn't know that Jesus was so orthodox! So he presses the conversation a little further. He wants to go beyond theory to practice now, to get more precise about what these two great commands demands. Why? Luke tells us in verse 29: because he desired to "justify himself".

What does this mean? To "justify" is to "declare righteous". It's to put your life under the microscope of God's law and to pass the test. If you're justified before God, then you don't need to fear God's judgment. Instead, you can be confident that, when you stand before God on judgment day, he will declare that you are righteous and welcome you into his eternal kingdom. By telling us that the lawyer wanted to justify himself, Luke is showing us that this is what the lawyer wanted. He didn't just want to know the way to eternal life. He wanted to know that he had done everything he needed to do to obtain eternal life.

But there was a problem. How do you know if you've obeyed the command to love your neighbour as yourself? The lawyer was apparently satisfied with how he was doing with the first commandment, but he was a little troubled about the second. In his commentary on this parable, John Calvin observes that it's easy for people to say that they love God, because it’s difficult for others to discern whether it’s true. All you have to do is obey the right commands and say the right things and people will believe that you love God.

Loving your neighbour is a different story. It’s more “earthy”, and more tangible. People can tell if you love others by what you say about them and by what you do for them. Our love of others, or lack of love for others, is what exposes our true character, and our true loves. So if we are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves, the question naturally becomes what the lawyer asks in verse 29: "Who is my neighbour?"

In other words, who must we love in order to be justified before God? Are we to only love our family members? Are we to only love people who share the same faith as us? Are we to love only people of the same race? How far must the boundaries of our love expand? The lawyer wanted to know the answer, because he wanted to be able to say that he had done enough. He wanted to justify himself.

This question of who we must love, and how we are to love them if we are to obtain eternal life, sets the stage for Jesus' famous parable.

Jesus begins the parable in verse 30 by telling us that "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho". This little introduction tells us that the man was a Jew, because only a Jew would have been travelling from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life, to another Jewish town. On the way, he's robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the side of the road.

Now Jesus says "by chance" a priest was going down that road. Jesus uses the phrase “by chance” because it seemed extremely fortunate that a priest, a holy Jewish man and a leader of the Jewish community, would happen to be travelling along the same road. The poor beaten man seemed to be in luck! Today was not the day that he would die, for a man who knew the Scriptures and who loved the Jewish people happened to come upon him. But that's not what happens. Jesus says, "When he saw him he passed by on the other side." The priest wanted nothing to do with the man.

One might say that the priest was just a bad apple. Surely, there were other religious, pious people who would have stopped and helped. But Jesus doesn’t let us reach that conclusion. In verse 32, Jesus says that a Levite also came to the place and saw the man. A Levite was like a priest's assistant, serving in the Temple and helping the priests perform their priestly functions of offering sacrifices, tending to the Temple, etc. Like the priest, he would have been an upstanding member of the Jewish community. But what does he do? He also passes by on the other side of the road.

Jesus’ point here is obvious. By telling us that two religious leaders saw the need and did nothing, he’s saying that there was something wrong with the way that the Jewish faith was being practiced. Religious people at the time cared more about outward signs of piety than inward transformation. They thought they had love for God, but they had no love for their neighbour, which in turn revealed the true emptiness of their love for God. Jesus would have been making a subtle jab at the lawyer himself here, since he was an expert in religious law and part of the religious elite.

So a priest passed by, and a Levite passed by. If the cream of the religious crop was unwilling to help the man, what hope did he have? This is when Jesus turns the lawyer’s attention to the most unlikely of heroes in verse 33: “But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.” Remember what the relationship was between the Jews and the Samaritans. They hated each other. They were ethnic enemies. In fact, earlier in Chapter 9, when a village of Samaritans heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life, they wanted nothing to do with him. When the apostles James and John saw this, they asked Jesus if they could call fire down from heaven to consume the entire village! The Jews and the Samaritans saw each other as having deviated from the true worship of God, and therefore they each saw the other as being a threat to true religion.

But this Samaritan was different. He looked beyond the ethnic and religious barriers that divided him from this poor Jewish man and saw the need instead. And when he saw the need, he had compassion.

Jesus goes on to spend the rest of the parable telling us what this compassion led the Samaritan to do starting in verse 34. He bound up the man’s wounds, likely using strips of his own clothing since the man was naked. He also treated the wounds with oil and wine, giving up some of the resources he needed for his own journey. Then he puts the man on his own animal, forcing himself to make the long journey to the nearest inn by foot, and he ends up staying at that inn with the man in order to take care of him. Verse 35 tells us that the Samaritan stayed overnight with the man, since it’s not until the next day that he pays the innkeeper, but the Samaritan doesn’t just pay the innkeeper for the night. He pays him two denarii, which was about two days’ pay, so that the innkeeper would care for the man until the Samaritan returned to the inn after completing his journey. And lastly, whatever more the innkeeper spent beyond the two denarii to care for the man, the Samaritan would repay when he returned.

In short, the Samaritan sacrificed his clothing when he bound up the man’s wounds, his resources when he treated the wounds, his energy when he gave up his animal, his time when he stayed overnight, and his money when he paid the innkeeper. He did everything he possibly could to care for a stranger he had never met before who belonged to a religion he was supposed to hate.

So what’s Jesus saying? What’s the answer to the question of who is my neighbour, so that we can know who we need to love in order to obtain eternal life? To understand what Jesus is saying, we need to look at verses 36-37, which are the keys to understanding the parable. Jesus asks the lawyer, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer, unable to say “the Samaritan” but also unable to avoid the obvious conclusion, replies, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go and do likewise."

Do you see what Jesus has done? The lawyer had asked, "Who is my neighbour?" In reply, Jesus asks him in verse 36, "Who proved to *be* a neighbour?" Jesus once again answers the question with a question of his own because the lawyer’s question was the wrong one. The lawyer wanted to know, "How many people do I need to love before I can obtain eternal life?" Jesus shows him that he should have been asking, "What kind of person do I need to be before I can obtain eternal life?"

Obtaining eternal life isn't about doing just enough to get to heaven. It's about becoming the right kind of person. It's not about putting just enough on the "good deeds" side of the ledger to outweigh the "bad deeds". It's about living in such a way that your entire life is characterized by good, a life that looks like the Good Samaritan’s life.

(2) **THE LESSO N OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN**

We’ve looked at the example of the Good Samaritan, and it’s a stunning one. But what’s the lesson here? What is Jesus teaching us? Is he telling us that we just need to work harder to become better people if we want to go to heaven? Or is he telling us something else? This leads to our second point: the lesson of the Good Samaritan.

I don’t believe that the lesson of this parable is that the only way to obtain eternal life is by working harder to become like the Good Samaritan. There are three reasons for this.

The first reason is from the wording of the lawyer’s question in verse 25. He asks, “Teacher, what shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?” He wants to know what good works he must *do* to merit going to heaven. Jesus is merely responding to the question when he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. If you want to *earn* your way into heaven, you have to live like the Good Samaritan. Of course, there may be another way into heaven other than “doing enough”, but the lawyer doesn’t ask this, so Jesus doesn’t tell.

The second reason is the attitude of the lawyer. As we’ve seen already, he was coming to Jesus with a self-righteous attitude. He came to test Jesus, not learn from him. He wanted to justify himself, not receive God’s mercy. So Jesus does what he needs to do: he confronts the lawyer with the full force of the law. If you want to earn eternal life for yourself, this is what you must become. You need to love all people with all that you are all the time. Jesus does this because he knows that people will only know their need for grace when they know that they could never satisfy the law’s demands. That’s why Jesus gives him the law, not grace. He needed to be convicted by the law before he would be ready to receive grace.

The third reason why I believe that the point of the parable is not that you must simply work harder to gain eternal life is the context. When we’re studying a passage, we always need to consider the context. And what do we find in the context?

When we look back at the context, we see Jesus talking about eternal life back in verse 20, where he tells his disciples that they shouldn’t rejoice in the success of their ministry, but in the fact that their names are written in heaven. Jesus is telling them that they have eternal life. How could that be? Had they all achieved the perfection of the Good Samaritan? No, they hadn’t. In fact, we’ve seen the disciples fail repeatedly. They didn’t have enough faith during the storm on the Sea of Galilee. They didn’t have enough humility when they talked about who was the greatest among them. And they didn’t have enough love when they begged Jesus if they could call fire down from heaven upon a Samaritan village.

And yet, despite all their failings, Jesus can say that they should rejoice in the fact that their names were written in heaven. They had fallen far short of the standard of the Good Samaritan, and yet they had obtained eternal life.

What if we look forward at the context? Here we see this little story about Jesus spending time with two sisters named Mary and Martha. Verse 30 tells us that Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.” Martha, on the other hand, was “distracted with much serving”. It appears that Martha really wanted to honour Jesus by preparing a nice meal for him. She’s bustling around the kitchen, getting this ready and that, but she grows increasingly frustrated with her sister who isn’t helping out at all. So Martha comes up to Jesus in verse 40 and says, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me!”

Sounds fair, doesn’t it? Martha’s doing all the work. Why should Mary be allowed to just sit there and listen to Jesus? Martha’s acting more like the Good Samaritan here. She’s giving of her time, her energy, and her resources in order to serve Jesus. Shouldn’t Mary do the same?

But Jesus has this reply in verse 41: “But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.’”

One thing is necessary. One. *Sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him*. Not much serving. Not the giving of your resources. Only one thing is necessary. *Sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him*.

This is the one thing we need to receive the good portion, which will not be taken away. It’s the one thing we need to obtain eternal life. *We need a relationship with Jesus*.

This is why the disciples’ names were written in heaven. They had a relationship with Jesus. This is why Mary is commended as having chosen the good portion that will not be taken away from her. She had a relationship with Jesus.

Living like the Good Samaritan is one way to obtain eternal life, but the problem with that way is it’s impossible for us to live. We can’t justify ourselves under the law, because the standard of the law is too high for us to reach. So Jesus comes and opens up another way to eternal life so that we don’t need to be justified by our works. We can be justified by our faith in him. As Galatians 2:16 says,

“[Y]et we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” (Gal. 2:16)

We are justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because Jesus satisfied the law on our behalf. He obeyed the law perfectly, so that through our faith in him, God credits his perfect obedience to us.

This shows us the central lesson of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus is the true Good Samaritan, because only He could love all people all the time with all that he had. We were left for dead in our sins by the side of the road, unable to save ourselves. But Jesus came upon us, bound up our wounds, and nursed us back to health. He showed us compassion when we were still his enemies. He paid the full price for our lives, not us, except the price for our lives wasn’t a few coins. It was his very life. And though it would cost him his life, he willingly paid the cost by dying on the cross, so that through faith in him, you and I could obtain eternal life. It is by his wounds that we have been healed.

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to point us to himself. He wants us to see our desperate need under God’s perfect law, so that we would turn to him to meet that need.

And once we turn to Jesus in faith, trusting in him as our Good Samaritan, he starts working in us to make us more and more like him. Jesus wants to make us Good Samaritans as well, people who spend themselves for the good of others, not because we want to justify ourselves, but because we know the One who has justified us already.

This is how true Good Samaritans are born and bred. It’s by knowing *the* Good Samaritan himself. Jesus wants to fill the world with Good Samaritans, people who go out of their way and do not spare any expense to care for the needs of others, because that’s the kind of living that shows the world what *he* is like. It doesn’t matter if the person in need comes from a different race, or social class, or even a different religion. Jesus wants us to be Good Samaritans to all people, so that he can make Good Samaritans out of all peoples.

**CONCLUSION**

There are needs all around us. There are homeless youth in Keswick looking for temporary shelter. There are 10,000 babies in Toronto alone being murdered in the womb. There are immigrants looking for friendship in Oak Ridges. Jesus is calling us to reach out to such people. He’s calling us to be Good Samaritans so that we can show them *the* Good Samaritan.

But what if you’re just not feeling it? Perhaps you’re overwhelmed by your own struggles and don’t feel that you have anything left to take on the struggles of others. Perhaps you find it very difficult to talk to people who are very different than you. Or perhaps you find that you just don’t care that much about other people. Whatever your struggle may be, I can tell you that the remedy to your struggle isn’t found in yourself. It’s found in knowing Jesus more.

Sometimes we get so busy with life, whether it be with work, or family, or even ministry, that we forget about the one thing that is necessary: sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to him. We live in such a busy culture where everyone’s always doing something, but hardly anyone’s doing the one thing that can never be taken away from us. Knowing Jesus is more precious than all the riches in the world, and yet we can so often treat him as if he’s worth nothing to us.

So have you been spending time with your Lord? I’m not just talking about reading your Bible. The lawyer read his Bible a ton. I’m talking about being like Mary, who postured her heart under Jesus’ lordship and care just as she postured her body by his feet. Let’s not get distracted by secondary things. Let’s put our phones away, turn off the TVs, and stop bustling about as if we needed to earn eternal life. Our eternal life has been earned for us by Christ, so that we could know him in intimate, personal relationship both now and for eternity. So let’s sit at his feet and listen to him, that we may make us more like him, the Good Samaritan.