



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Who is Your Neighbor?

Bible Reading: Luke 10:21-37

21 At that time [Jesus] rejoiced in the Holy Spirit & said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven & earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise & intelligent & revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, because this was your good pleasure. 22 All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, & who the Father is except the Son, & anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal him.”

23 Then turning to his disciples [Jesus] said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see the things you see! 24 For I tell you that many prophets & kings wanted to see the things you see but didn’t see them; to hear the things you hear but didn’t hear them.”

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

25 Then an expert in the law stood up to test [Jesus], saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the law?” [Jesus] asked him. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, & with all your mind,” & “your neighbor as yourself.”

28 “You’ve answered correctly,” [Jesus] told him. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 Jesus took up the question & said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho & fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, & fled, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place & saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, & when he saw the man, he had compassion. 34 He went over to him & bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil & wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, & took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, & said, ‘Take care of him. When I come back I’ll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.’

36 “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

37 “The one who showed mercy to him,” he said.

Then Jesus told him, “Go and do the same.” (Luke 10:21-37 CSB)

Summary:

This passage reminds us that God uses ordinary people for extraordinary purposes and that our greatest joy is not in spiritual success, but in knowing we belong to Him. Jesus teaches that eternal life is not earned by perfectly keeping the Law—loving God absolutely and others selflessly—but it's given as a gift through Him, since we all fall short.

In the 'Good Samaritan' parable, Jesus challenges our understanding of "neighbor." In this story the religious leaders fail to help the wounded victim of violent robbery, while the unexpected outsider—a "Samaritan"—shows true compassion. The point is clear: 'neighbor' is not defined by proximity or preference, but by mercy in action. Jesus calls us not just to believe the right things, but to live them out. Those who truly know Him will reflect His love by caring for others—especially those people whom we might otherwise overlook.

I. The Context

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus sends seventy-two of his followers to declare, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." We are not told who they were, and they are not mentioned again by name. I believe these seventy-two were later present with the twelve disciples in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost and then became part of the group that spread the gospel to all nations.

When the seventy-two returned, they were excited about what they had experienced. Scripture says that they returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." This would have been incredibly exciting for a "common" person at that time—to see God use them so powerfully. In those days, just as now, we often believe that God primarily uses the talented, the super-spiritual, or pastors. But time and time again, we see Jesus calling "common" men and women to do great things in His name.

In 10:20, Jesus tells them something very important. He says, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice...that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Jesus reminds them that their greatest joy should not come from power or success in ministry, but from the assurance of their salvation.

There was debate within Jewish theology about what happens after death. It is not easy to understand the exact positions of the major Jewish groups (the Pharisees and the Sadducees), but it appears that some believed in the resurrection of the dead, while others held a different view of what the afterlife looks like. (See Matt. 22:23; Acts 23.) The question of how one's name is 'written in heaven' was very important during the time of Jesus, just as it is today, and it is a subject we will examine later in this chapter.

II. God chooses the Ordinary to Experience the Extraordinary

21 At that time [Jesus] rejoiced in the Holy Spirit & said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven & earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise & intelligent & revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, because this was your good pleasure. 22 All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, & who the Father is except the Son, & anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal him." 23 Then turning to his disciples [Jesus] said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see the things you see! (Lk. 10:21-23)

In this passage, we see Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit and saying in 10:22, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, & no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son & anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." This is a bold statement. Jesus is claiming authority and intimacy that belong to God alone—doing things that only God can do.

We continually see the doctrine of the Trinity being challenged by Muslims, religious Jews, & atheists. They often claim that Jesus was made divine by later authors of the New Testament, such as Paul & John. However, what we see consistently throughout the entire New Testament is that there is only one God—the God of the Bible. Just as in the Old Testament, the New Testament is not introducing a new God but revealing more clearly who that one God is.

In 10:23, Jesus tells His disciples, saying, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets & kings desired to see what you see." God promised a Messiah all the way back in Genesis 3, and prophets & kings waited for that day to come. You would think that at the coming of the Messiah, God would 'roll out the red carpet' for Him and invite the rich, famous, and influential. But instead, God chose the "ordinary" to witness the extraordinary. Throughout the Bible, the most important people were often not those VIP's considered important by all, yet God made them a vital part of His story. God chooses us to be part of His story as well, & we get to experience life after Jesus' resurrection, with the Holy Spirit living in us.

III. How do I inherit eternal life?

25 Then an expert in the law stood up to test [Jesus], saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the law?" [Jesus] asked him. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, & with all your mind,” & “your neighbor as yourself.”

28 “You’ve answered correctly,” [Jesus] told him. “Do this and you will live.” (Lk. 10:25-28)

A lawyer comes to Jesus to test Him. ‘Lawyers’ of that time were not like lawyers today; they were experts in the Law that God gave the Israelites while they were in the desert. The lawyer asks Jesus: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” This is a very important question. As we saw earlier, Jewish thinking about life after death included disagreements. Jesus answers with a question, which is a very Jewish way of teaching. He asks him, “What is written in the law?” Jesus did not come to say that the Law was irrelevant, but to fulfill the Law. The lawyer knows his Bible & answers, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your strength & with all your mind (Deut. 6:5), & love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18).” Jesus says, “Do this & you will live.” I don’t know about you, but that is not an easy thing to do—to love God with all of your being, & on top of that, to love your neighbor as yourself. I don’t know many people in the Bible who look like they truly achieved this.

A. The expert answers correctly from Scripture (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18)

1. Love God

- “The importance of the qualifiers is to plant the flag of God’s sovereignty over the whole of one’s life. God’s claim on us reaches to every area of our experience, to our innermost being (heart); our lives – what gives us our individual identity (soul); our energy, strength, resolve, & resources (strength); & our understanding & intellectual capacities (mind). No part of ourselves is to be withheld from God.” (Allan Culpepper, Luke, pp. 188-9)
 - i. With all your heart
 - ii. With all your soul
 - iii. With all your strength
 - iv. With all your mind

2. Love neighbor (others)

- “There is no dichotomy between the commands to love God & to love one’s neighbor. Indeed, when one loves God, one lives out love for others as well.” (Allan Culpepper, Op. cit., p.189)

3. Love yourself

- “The phrase ‘as yourself’ implies that love for oneself is also expected. Three loves characterize the life of one who is already experiencing a measure of that life that will characterize the age to come: love of God, neighbor, & self.” (Allan Culpepper, Op. cit., p.188)
- Jesus challenges him to put into practice what he ‘knew’ from Scripture
If you are like me, you might be asking, “How can we do this?” If that is the list of things I have to do in order to inherit the kingdom, how can I possibly do this? The answer is that we cannot do this—no one can by his own strength. We all fall short of the glory of God; in other words, we all fail to live up to God’s high standards. The amazing thing is that Jesus made a way for us through His death on the cross to inherit eternal life as a gift. We are called into a life changing relationship with God which we get through Jesus.

IV. Who is my neighbor?

Before we get into Jesus’ story, or ‘parable,’ we need to remember how to interpret a parable. With all parables, there is a main message that Jesus is trying to convey. Some parables are self-explanatory, while others need explaining, which Jesus sometimes provides. Many times, we try so hard to find meaning in every detail of the story that we end up missing the main point of the parable. Let us stay focused on the main point Jesus is trying to convey.

Verse 29: But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

‘Trying to justify himself’—something we all try to do, especially when we know we are not living up to an expectation—he asks, “Who is my neighbor?” The specific Hebrew word used here is *reha* (rehe’a), not a more narrowly defined word for “neighbor,” which makes the meaning broader & less specific. This makes it harder to determine exactly who is included. I’m fairly sure the lawyer was hoping that Jesus would name a group the lawyer already loved, but as we see, Jesus does not answer in the way one would expect.

Read verses 30-35: 30 Jesus took up the question & said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho & fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, & fled, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place & saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, & when he saw the man, he had compassion. 34 He went over to him & bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil & wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, & took care of him. 35 The

next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, & said, 'Take care of him. When I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.' (Lk. 10:30-35)

A Dangerous Road

- "The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous. It descended nearly 1000 m in 27 kms. The road ran through narrow passes at points, & the terrain offered easy hiding for the bandits who terrorized travelers." (Allan Culpepper, *Op. cit.*, p.189)
Even today, the road between Jerusalem and Jericho is a rough and dangerous road. If you go to Israel today, you can still drive it, and it is not a pleasant journey. Jericho is located in the Judean Desert, and if someone were attacked and left for dead on that road, they would most likely die.
In Jesus' story, three different people walk by the man who was robbed. The first two are a priest and a Levite. This would be comparable to a church pastor & a church-deacon—people you would naturally expect to help. But both of them see the man and 'pass by on the other side of the road.' They show no concern for him at all. Not only do they refuse to help, but they completely avoid him instead. But, before we start judging them, we need to recognize that Jesus shared this story because it reflects something many people do. You may have never walked past someone who was dying and ignored them completely, but we should ask ourselves: who are we ignoring in our own lives? Who is suffering around us while we simply "walk to the other side of the road"?
- **Appreciate Jesus as Story-teller; Luke as Story-writer**

Use of Repetition (e.g. Lk. 12:31-32)

- 31 A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
- 32 In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.
- "Both verses (31, 32) end with the word[s] 'passed by on the other side'... Ending these two verses with the same word[s] draws attention to the idea of 'passing by.' Further, the word ['pass by' appears only here in the NT, which] draws the further attention of the reader.' [Keith A Reich, *Figuring Jesus*, p. 104]

Use of Surprise (e.g. Lk. 10:33)

- "Jesus [has] set up the surprise moment of the parable when the Samaritan actually stops & helps the beaten man. Culpepper... writes 'by storytelling conventions, the audience can expect a series of three, the third character will break the pattern created by the first two [characters]. Moreover, the expected pattern would be [1.] a priest, [2.] a Levite, & then [3.] an Israelite. [Surprise! It's a Samaritan!]. Ringe notes two prominent reversals in this parable. [1.] First, the Samaritan, despised & outcast, is actually the embodiment of the 'neighbor' in this passage. [2.] Second, the [Samaritan] traveler was also likely a merchant [with a donkey, etc.], another outcast in [religious] society. Therefore, Luke's Jesus has lifted up two of the despised classes in this parable, while denouncing two of the higher & more respected classes [priests & Levites]." [K. Reich, *Figuring Jesus*, p. 105]

The Third Passer-By

The big shock comes with the third person who walks by—a Samaritan. Samaritans were considered great sinners by the Jews. They were a group of people who were brought into the land of Israel when the Israelites were exiled to Babylon. The Samaritans adopted some Jewish beliefs, but changed them. They had priests, offered sacrifices, & their own center of worship, which was not in Jerusalem. If you look at John 4, you can see Jesus interacting with a Samaritan woman, which highlights some of these differences.

- "The expected sequence would be a priest, a Levite, and then an Israelite. The story would then have an anti-clerical edge to it. The ordinary Israelite would do what the priest and Levite would not. [However,] shattering all expectations, the third traveler is a Samaritan... By making the hero of the story of Samaritan, Jesus challenged the long-standing enmity between Jews & Samaritans. The latter were regarded as unclean people, descendants of... mixed marriages (2 Kings 17:6, 24). By depicting a Samaritan as the hero of the story, Jesus demolished all boundary expectations. Social position – race, religion, or region – count for nothing." (Allan Culpepper, *Op. cit.*, p.190)
- "Not much needs to be said about Jewish-Samaritan relations in the first century. Animosity between the groups went both ways. Samaritans were classed by Jews in the same category as Philistines & Edomites (Sirach 50:25-26). They had even been accused in Jewish tradition of secretly entering Jerusalem during... Passover... & defiling the temple by strewing human bones '... throughout the temple' (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.30) ... So by introducing a Samaritan into the story, Jesus was probably picking out a person who was considered by his audience to be one of the most odious characters possible." (Sylvia Keesmaat, *Op. cit.*, pp. 279-80)

Not only is the Samaritan the one who helps, but he goes above & beyond in caring for the man. It is not just a quick check to see if he is okay; he puts the man on his own animal, pays for an inn, & even provides extra

money to make sure he has time to recover. For Jesus' listeners, this would have been very hard to hear. As the 'chosen people,' they would have expected the hero of the story to be the priest or the Levite, or (at least) a fellow-Israelite. But not only are they –the priest & the Levite– not the heroes, they are actually portrayed negatively.

If I were to rewrite this story to fit our context, I would say that Nigel and I are walking and see someone who looks like they are about to die or is clearly suffering, & we completely ignore them—even to the point of changing our route to avoid them. Then along comes an atheist, a Muslim, or — you can fill in the blank, with whoever you would least expect to help —and they are the ones who step in. Not only do they help, but they go above and beyond in doing so. Just thinking about it, I'm ashamed.

Then Jesus asks an obvious question: which of these three proved to be a neighbor? I think the word 'proved' is an important one. It is one thing to say you believe something, & it is another to actually live it out. I think most of us believe that we should 'love our neighbor as ourselves,' but in reality, we're often too busy or believe we are better than others, to actually help. The Samaritan proves to be the neighbor because of his actions, not his words.

- "To love God with all one's heart & one's neighbor as oneself means then & now that one must often reject society's rules in favor of the codes of the Kingdom – a society without distinctions & boundaries between its members. The rules of that society are just two – to love God & one's neighbor – but these rules are so radically different from those of the society in which we live that living by them invariably calls us to disregard all else, break the rules, and follow Jesus' example." (Allan Culpepper, Op. cit., p.193)

Conclusion

The question of how we inherit eternal life is just as relevant today as it was in Jesus' time. Jesus invites all of us into a life-changing relationship with Him. He sets a very high standard for us to reach—one that we cannot achieve on our own—but Jesus died on the cross to pay the price we could not pay. This does not mean that we should not strive to love God with all that we are and love our neighbor as ourselves, but these actions are not what get us into heaven. Nevertheless, in his parable, Jesus still asks us, "Who is Your neighbor?" and "Do you see him or her?"

➤ Not Allegorizing this Parable

Many have allegorized this parable

- "But while the obvious [meaning] – literal or historical, indeed ethical sense of the parable – is usually acknowledged ...one of the most common readings of the parable was to allegorize it in terms of the church." (S. J. Kistemaker, Jesus as Storyteller, p.)
- "This famous parable has a long history of allegorical interpretation. For example, Augustine interprets various elements: [1] The man is Adam; [2] going down from Jerusalem to Jericho indicates the fall of Adam [3] Jerusalem is the heavenly city; [4] Jericho is the moon (Jericho sounds like the Hebrew 'moon'), which stands for our mortality (because the moon "is born, increases, grows old, & dies") [5] the robbers are the devil & his angels [6] stripping the man, they rob him of his immortality [7] they beat him by persuading him to sin; [8] the Priest represents the Law [9] the Levite represents the Prophets; [10] the Good Samaritan is Christ, [11] oil means the comfort of hope, [12] wine is the encouragement of work; [13] being placed on his donkey means being united to the incarnation, [14] the inn is the church, [15] the innkeeper is Saint Paul, [16] the next day is after the resurrection of Christ; [17] the two pence are the sacraments (bread & wine), or [18] the 2 commandments of love—towards God & man or (yet again) [19] the promise of this life & that which is to come & [20] the Samaritan's promised return is Christ's second coming, when He will 'repay.'" (Z. L. Erdey, Interpreting Parables: One Point or Many?)
- "The Good Samaritan is not a metaphorical story about some other reality. [E.g. it's not an allegory about Jesus as the 'true Good Samaritan.' It's not about the church as the 'inn' receiving wounded people.] It is about a compassionate Samaritan and is intended to teach about the love command." [Klyne Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, p. 352]

Illegitimate allegorizing

- "Is Jesus the Good Samaritan? Despite frequent assertions ... I see no justification in the parable for any such identification ... Others make the identification more on theological grounds, but it is unfair to inject Jesus ...allegorically into the parable... All attempts to find Jesus...in the parable are illegitimate allegorizing." [Klyne Snodgrass, Op cit., p. 356]