

State of the Church 2025

Luke 10:25-37

As we begin the new *anno Domini* 2025, what sort of people ought we to be? We live in “negative world” (2014 to present) where society has a poor view of Christianity and being known as a Christian is a social negative. Of course this is not true in all places even within one city, but it’s obvious how things have shifted. If we want to be salt and light as a church here, what should our attitude and actions look like? In this cantankerous year and at least a few following it this parable will have countless applications.

Summary of the Text

A certain lawyer stands up, apparently part of a crowd sitting down while Jesus teaches, to test Him asking “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 25). The question is good even if the motive is bad, and so Jesus asks him to give his understanding in light of the law (v. 26). The lawyer quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, the two greatest commandments: “So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself’” (v. 27). “Do this”, Jesus says, “and you will live” (v. 28). This causes him to want to justify himself, and so he asks, “And who is my neighbor?” (v. 29). Jesus tells the parable of a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, was robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead (v. 30). This journey was a 3000-foot descent over seventeen miles of desolate country where thieves had opportunity, and so it’s fortunate--“by chance”—that a priest sees him. But unfortunately, he passes by on the other side (v. 31). A Levite comes to the same place and also passes by (v. 32). Then a certain Samaritan comes and sees him, shows compassion, bandages his wounds, puts him on his own animal, takes him to an inn and gives two denarii (a couple days’ wages) to the innkeeper and tells him to take care of him until he gets back when he will pay anything else (vv. 33-35). Jesus then asks the lawyer who was the neighbor to man who fell among thieves? “And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him’” (vv. 36-37). Jesus tells him, “Go and do likewise” (v. 37).

Testing Jesus

This astonishing parable often gets boiled down and moralized to “Be nice to others,” or slightly better, “Do unto others as you’d have them do to you.” There is lot more here. While the second greatest commandment is quoted by the lawyer, the question to be answered is “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” People who inherit are heirs, so we can ask it another way: “How do I become an heir of the never-ending, grace-filled life with the triune God?” The conversation with the lawyer provides the context that enables us to understand what Jesus is teaching. The lawyer comes to test Him (v. 25). A few verses after the greatest commandment in Deuteronomy it says, “Do not test the LORD your God” (6:16). Jesus quotes this verse when the Devil tempts Him in the wilderness, telling Him to dive off the pinnacle of the temple and prove that the Lord’s angels will bear Him up (Matt. 4:7). The lawyer is an expert in the law of God—the Torah—and can answer correctly according to the letter but miss the entire point behind it. So Christ must teach him. “Do this (the law) and you will live. The problem for the lawyer is that he can’t: “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet 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. 2:15-16; cf. Gal. 3:21-22). Jesus tells him to love God and neighbor completely and continually, and something about this doesn’t sit right: “But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (v. 29). He needs wiggle room. He wants to justify himself one or both of two ways. He either wants to assuage his guilty conscience for not loving his neighbor by redefining who that neighbor is, or he wants to be justified in the sense of proven right in his quest to stump Jesus. Jesus wonderfully employs what Calvin calls the first use of the law, the converting use: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Ps. 19:7). When confronted with the holiness of the God as

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revealed in His commandments we are undone by our own sinfulness. The bad news prepares the way for the good news of the gospel. Christ zeroes in on our idolatry to call us to repent, including by stating the second greatest commandment. For some like the rich young ruler, He says “Go, sell all you have, and follow Me.” To others He says to walk away from idols of the heart or mind. He brings division in families. The lawyer comes to test Jesus, but instead has his own sinfulness exposed.

Who is My Neighbor?

The man robbed on the way to Jericho is an Israelite. This brother travel from the chief city of the land. You’d think a priest, someone who intercedes for and shepherds the flock of God, would take pity on him, but he doesn’t. Next a Levite comes and does the same thing, passing by “on the other side.” This causes some commentators to think the priest and Levite are concerned for ritual cleanliness, that if they touched a dead body they would be unclean and not able to serve at the temple (Lev. 21:1ff.). But they “came down that road”, meaning down toward Jericho and not to the temple in which case ritual uncleanness is not an issue. Regardless, the Pharisees added to the Mosaic holiness laws and so the hypocrisy is worse. At this point the parable is teed up to contrast the wickedness of Israelite clergy—elders and deacons both refusing to get their hands dirty to save this man’s life—and the love of a true Israelite for his fellow man. That’s what everyone expects, but instead Jesus goes and inserts a Samaritan. Samaritans were a schismatic sect in Israel with an alternate temple on Mount Gerizim. The Samaritan woman at the well is surprised Jesus speaks with her, “For the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (Jn. 4:9). As soon as He confronts her about living with a man who is not her husband, she argues about where to worship. Jesus responds, “You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews” (Jn. 4:22). When the Jews attack Jesus, they call Him a Samaritan who has a demon (Jn. 8:48). Samaritans really were a wicked cult claiming to worship Yahweh, and in the parable, when the Samaritan sees the wounded man, most Israelites would think he would finish the job and take his valuables. The Bible is not ashamed of negative generalities: “One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. 1:12-13). Cretans, like Samaritans, could change. Change happens by grace, through the faithful preaching of the gospel (rebuke them sharply!) and sacrificial neighborly love. So who is your neighbor? Who fell among thieves even because they were stupid or worse?

Go and Do Likewise

Symbolically, Judaism is the wounded man, the priest, and the Levite: mostly dead, corrupt, and uncaring. The Samaritan is God’s servant. He is the good neighbor, the one who shows mercy to others. By teaching this parable, Jesus didn’t suddenly change the behavior of the Samaritans. He’s not saying, “Really, these are wonderful people.” Some of them might be, but in order to find that out, you’d have to want to. The lawyer doesn’t need more information, knowledge, or verses memorized and ready to quote. He needs a new heart, the kind that has received mercy and therefore wants to show it. Jesus loved that Samaritan woman and told her all that she did (Jn. 4:39-41). Jesus sent the apostles to preach the gospel to the Samaritans and they did (Act 8:4-25). To inherit eternal life you know you were spiritually dead until Christ came and found you and brought us to His Father’s house. Then He sends out into the world to go and do likewise.