**Luke 10:25-37 (ESV)**

**25**  And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” **26** He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” **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.” **28** And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” **29** But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” **30** Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. **31** Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. **32** So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. **34** He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ **36** Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” **37** He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

**“Mercy Made Known”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The Gospel reading in Luke about the Good Samaritan is a standard in our society. People might not even know where it comes from in the Bible or that Jesus told this story. Yet, the Good Samaritan text stands out because it makes sense in terms of the moral law. This is the basic right and wrong written upon the heart of every man. We go out of the way to display the title “Good Samaritan” on hospitals, nursing homes, and with awards for those who care. The culture also may be degrading, but most still react with disgust when the news shows an elderly person falling over with no one offering to help. The need to help another when it comes down to it is almost natural.

Then again, I say “almost” natural because the corruption by sin in man goes just as deep. In other words, there are limits to how anyone will see the Good Samaritan. The famous “spiritual” woman Oprah Winfrey for generating so much charitable money still teaches her followers stating, “[Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/o/oprahwinfr383697.html).”[[1]](#footnote-1) Sounds like pure self-righteousness to me. Why pick on those outside of Christian circles? The famous preacher Joel Olsteen, who has the largest church in America, makes the comment, “We need to show mercy. I mean, because as much mercy as you show people, that's the mercy you're going to be receiving.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Sounds better, but did the Samaritan receive anything in return for helping the half-dead man? The compassion of Christ alone sets apart His baptized people with love toward others in His image.

Before the lawyer in our text took center stage, Jesus had just told His disciples a very special point about Himself. He said, “…Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Luke 10:23-24). Of course, the Devil never takes such proclamation of the Gospel come in Jesus Christ lightly. You can hear the challenge made against God’s Son. The question was a crafty design just like when Jesus was being temped in the wilderness. The lawyer asked, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Rather than answering, Jesus leads the lawyer to answer his own question. It was to love God and your neighbor. Jesus would give the same response about the Law on other occasions. The difference here is that he tells the man, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

The #1 rule shown by the Lawyer is do not get too close to God or man because you might get burned. He was smart enough to admit love to God and others, but neither meant much in practice. The Laws demands are too far reaching for any sinner. The question begging for an answer ended up being, “And who is my neighbor?” He does not even consider asking the question who is my God! Jesus stood right in front of that lawyer and he did not see Him as God or Savior. This still happens today when it comes to trying to fulfill the Law for our defense. Man has no escape since the “sinful human nature picks and chooses its neighbors, those who agree with them and those who they like. Others are often enemies” (Bul’s Notes). It means having to exercise the #1 rule. Do not get too close to God or man because the Law always burns. St. Paul clearly says, “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them (Romans 10:5).

Of course, Jesus saw the sorry situation of the lawyer. How he was a tool of the Devil unable to see the better news of the Gospel. The story of the Good Samaritan starts out pretty stable. A man traveling to Jericho falls victim to evil men was not far-fetched. There will always be such types in this world. Anyway, maybe the man was unprepared or had it coming. Likewise, the priest and Levite passing by could have a justifiable excuse in terms of their purity codes. It is not much different from good and lawful people today going about their own business. However, the shock comes immediately upon hearing those words, “But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.” The distinction cannot be missed over who made the difference for the half-dead man. The Samaritan came from outside of Israel seeming to be an enemy. He put himself at risk being possibly mistaken as one of the robbers. His love was personal, time consuming, and came at a cost against Himself.

Christ overrules the #1 rule with His compassion as God come to save sinners. This was the message He shared to the Lawyer. The Law was in the Old Testament, but salvation rested for Israel upon a firm trust in mercy for, “I am the Lord your God.” It is the same mercy Christ brings by Word and Sacrament today. By baptism, He alone has lifted you out of the half-dead life that you came into this world being under sin, death, and the Devil. The acts committed against the Law in love to God and what we omit in doing for our neighbor. Jesus has carried upon His back to the cross. His life is the perfect sacrifice to the Law’s demands and has enough love able to extend even to our worst enemy. As the Good Samaritan from heaven, He brings the half-dead into the inn of His Church for care. His Word heals wounded lives, while the Sacrament sooths the pain offering His true body and blood. Jesus made the good deposit on your behalf and mine. He says, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.” He declares His forgiveness remains as a promising rest from our labors.

Rather than showing disgust over robbers or siding with a loveless priest and Levite, Jesus brings out the true confession of His coming. He asked, “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.” How could the man act like that Good Samaritan? Such sacrifice had no definition, no boundaries, and no limit! The Gospel reveals that such activity happens only from having received God’s mercy. Jesus is the true neighbor who draws close to the Lawyer having compassion, relief, and life in His Name. Eternal life was an inheritance not earned, but given by God’s grace in His Son. St. Paul tells us, “May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” As Christ lives in His baptized so mercy will be made known. Not in terms of asking, “who is my neighbor,” but answers of love alive from Christ.

The #1 rule is now faith in the work of Christ with proof of love that is never too close. Since God draws near by the gifts He gives, we have a love that closes the gap to all we meet. As St. Augustine proclaims, “He shows mercy to us because of his own goodness, while we show mercy to one another because of God’s goodness. He has compassion on us so that we may enjoy him completely, while we have compassion on another that we may completely enjoy him” (ACC). This means much more than sending money to help a situation and you can go on with your life. It is greater than a government run program with a check in the mail having no face. Compassion literally means, “to suffer with” and that can be the steady love needed toward a wife or husband. It can be the patience of parents over their child wasting their life. This compassion can extend to those in the church needing to work together or facing the needs in a community. Frankly, this attitude goes out to all, but the most real it will ever be is in those we face daily. This is more than acts of kindness as the human thing to do. The natural Good Samaritan never compares to the truly Good Samaritan who is able to save sinners with eternal life. The compassion of Christ sets us apart with love toward others in His image. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/surround\_yourself.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/joel\_osteen.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)