

“Showing Mercy”

Luke 10:25-37

5th Sunday after Pentecost + July 13, 2025

Dear Friends in Christ,

What do you think of lawyers? We all have probably heard jokes making fun of them. Yet, the legal profession is like any other profession: there are good ones and bad ones. If you have to go to court, you most certainly need a lawyer and you need a good one. We are blessed in our community with any number of faithful Christians serving capably as attorneys. In fact, on a routine basis, they help see that justice is done, which is certainly a great help to their neighbor and, when done in faith, most pleasing to the Lord.

Here we have a lawyer standing up to ask Jesus a couple of questions. The first has to do with eternal life and our relationship before God; the second has to do with earthly life and our relationship to other people. Let’s listen in and see what the Lord has to say to these two questions, because, after all, the answers of Jesus are certainly written down for us all.

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Here we go with Question One: “And behold, a lawyer stood up to put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” (v.25).

This is the greatest question for you and me to answer. It is much like the question sometimes asked, “If you were to die tonight, why should God let you into heaven?” or “Why do you believe that you will go to heaven?”

Before we hear Jesus’ answer, notice a couple of things about the man’s question. First, notice that he was not sincere. “He stood up to put Him to the test.” He was not concerned about finding out the truth, but rather with making Jesus look bad. He may very well have belonged to the party of the Pharisees and, like the other Pharisees, wanted Jesus to say something that would turn the people against Him or get Him into trouble with the Roman authorities.

Notice also that even his question is framed in the manner of the Law, not the Gospel. Even though he used the term “inherit” he wanted to find that level of works necessary in his life so that he could be acceptable to God for eternal life. As a lawyer, he was trained to think in terms of people getting what they

deserve. You do this, and you earn that result. If you do more, you get more. Dear friends, it is not just lawyers that think this way. This is the natural human way of looking at things, the default position in human relationships. It works fine in the realm of society. We have to have laws and consequences if you break them. If you work more hours, you get paid more than the other guy. You get what you deserve. So what happens if you apply this way of thinking to your relationship with God? Let's see how Jesus answers.

Jesus answers the question with a question. He wants the lawyer to find the answer for himself. Jesus asks: "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (v.26). The lawyer was undoubtedly an expert in the law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, so Jesus refers him to his own textbooks.

The lawyer answers, "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" (v.27). Jesus answers, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live" (v.28).

The man asked a question and heard Jesus confirm his answer. But the man is still not satisfied. Why is that? It is because now the man begins to have doubts that he can actually fulfill those commandments that he has just quoted to Jesus. That is exactly what Jesus wanted to happen. You see, Jesus knew that lawyer had to come to an understanding of his sin before he would welcome any news about a Savior who would die and rise again to take away his sins. Knowing full well it was impossible for the man to do so, Jesus told him: "Do this and you will live."

Friends, that question about getting to heaven cannot be answered in a satisfactory way in terms of what WE do. It can only be answered in terms of what GOD has done for us through Jesus His Son. In order to live by means of keeping these commandments, every thought, every desire, every word, and every deed for every moment of every day of your whole life would have to be full of this love of God and for others. There is no one that can do it! The only way to have eternal life is to receive it as a gift. Put aside the thinking of "You get what you deserve." In that way of thinking we would all be in hell eternally. Think instead of the compassionate mercy of God, who saw us in this hopeless situation and sent His Son Jesus. The Father dealt with Him according to what

our sins deserved. That is why Christ suffered so much on the cross; He was suffering for all the failures of all people of all time to keep these laws that the lawyer mentioned to Jesus.

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That brings us to the second question the lawyer asks Jesus. Setting aside for a moment the part about God, he asked a question about loving his neighbor. “And who is my neighbor?” (v.29). But once again, notice his motivation: “he, desiring to justify himself, said...” He wanted to make himself look good and right in the eyes of God.

What does it meant to justify yourself? If you work with a word processor you know what it means to “justify.” When a document is justified on the left margin, it means that all the letters are in a row at the beginning of each line. If it is justified on the right and on the left, it means that on both sides the letters are in a perfect row. Everything is lined up just right. To justify yourself means that you have to prove that everything that you have done is in perfect alignment with everything that God says. To be justified in this way, there could not be a single thought, word, or action out of line. God has drawn the margin, so to speak, and the various elements of our lives are compared with it.

This lawyer, in order to justify himself, had to prove that he had indeed loved his neighbor as himself. But that wouldn’t work unless he could narrow his definition of who his “neighbor” was. If it included just his friends and relatives, just the people who lived next door, just people who had the same kind of lifestyle, perhaps he could feel pretty good about it. But if you are going to include people who had different political views, people who dressed and talked and acted differently, if you are going to include those wretched Samaritans up north, then even he could not fool himself into believing he was righteous.

What is your reading of the Ten Commandments? Is it done in order to justify yourself? That will not work! Let the Commandments instead show you your sin and drive you to Jesus, your Savior and Rescuer from sin.

You know how Jesus answered:

“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.”

The Spirit of God at work in us teaches us to say, not, “What is the bare minimum that I have to do?” (The answer to that is “perfection”!) Rather, the Gospel teaches us to say, “To whom can I be a neighbor today?” How can we get that? It only comes from having an eye on the compassion and mercy of God Himself.

It may be easy to feel compassion for those who are “innocent” victims, such as those who have suffered from a tornado or earthquake. But what about those who have brought suffering upon themselves, who have made bad decisions and are suffering as a direct result of their own sin? The Samaritan didn’t say, “Why were traveling this road alone? Don’t you know it is dangerous? How could you be so foolish as to get yourself into such a situation?” No, he simply helped him in his need.

Consider how God has dealt with us in our troubles. Often they are troubles that we have brought on ourselves by our own sinful behavior. Yet God had compassion on us. This IS the Christian Gospel: God came and did what we COULD NOT do. We had brought on ourselves all sorts of troubles, including our own eternal condemnation. What did God say to all that? Did He say, “You made your bed, now lie in it”? “I will give you exactly what you

deserve”? No, let His love and compassion trump His perfect justice and righteousness. No sin went unanswered for; they were all put on Jesus His Son. The suffering was completed. The debt was paid, as the resurrection of Christ demonstrates.

Perhaps you have struggled with “compassion fatigue.” There are so many people and places that are needy and who are asking for our help. What do you do with all those requests for donations that may come to you in the mail? What if you have nothing left to give? One suggestion is to say a pray for that ministry and then discard the letter. Ask the Lord to provide the resources to get the work done. That way you, at least, have not passed by on the other side. You have allowed their need to enter into your soul and petitioned the Lord of all compassion to help.

The Lord is calling us as individuals and as a congregation to show mercy to others in need. God is calling us as a congregation to look around us and see, who is there in need in our neck of the woods? How can we help them? Sometimes we seem to think, “The Pastor should be out there trying to get new members so that they can help us pay the bills around here.” Rather, God is calling us all to say, “How can we all work together to help those in need around us and so demonstrate to them what compassion really is?”

Dear friends, how do we inherit eternal life? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that God, out of His great compassion and mercy, sent Jesus to keep the law that we could not keep and suffered completely for our guilt. How should we deal with our neighbor, with the people with whom we happen to come into contact? We deal with them out of that same compassion and mercy. Amen.

Originally preached July 14, 2013.