Who is my neighbor?

Luke 10:25-37

Key Verse 10:37

**“The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”**

We all know we need to love our neighbors. But we also know to love our neighbors is one of the most challenging thing even among Christians. Statistics shows that the number one reason for missionaries to give up their mission and return from their mission field is ‘broken relationship with other missionaries.’ They fail to love their neighbors, who were other missionaries, and this is the number cause of their return. So today we want to think about ‘who is our neighbor’ and ‘how we can love our neighbor’.

Part I. What must I do to inherit eternal life? (v.25-28)

Part II. Which of these three was a neighbor to the man? (v.29-37)

**Part I. What must I do to inherit eternal life? (v.25-28)**

Look at verse 25.

**25On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”26“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”**

To the expert in the law Jesus was not the Messiah but a teacher. So he wanted to test the knowledge of Jesus since he was an expert in the law. Then he asked the question, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” It was a difficult question. He did not ask what is the greatest commandment but what he must do to inherit eternal life.

The same question was also raised by one rich young ruler according to other gospels. (Luke chapter 18, and Mark chapter 10) But the rich young ruler did not come to test Jesus. He came to Jesus with the question because he did not know the answer. And he called Jesus, ‘good teacher’. Jesus’ answers for these two people were different.

To the rich young ruler, Jesus said, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” But to the expert in the law Jesus replied. **“What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”**(v.26)

The expert in the law wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. His question was about ‘doing’. Obviously as an expert in the law he believed that he could inherit the eternal life by obeying the law. Jesus did not tell him about the limitation of obeying the law saying, “well, if you can obey the law that is good. But you cannot obey the whole law all the time. Therefore by obeying the law you cannot inherit eternal life.” But rather Jesus followed his question and said, “What is written in the law. How do you read it?” Jesus did not try to teach him, but he tried to answer his question.

The expert answered in verse 27, **“‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”**

To love the Lord and love our neighbor are the two most important commandments. They are the essence of all the laws and prophets. But the conditions attached to each one is different. “To love the Lord” comes with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our mind. But “to love our neighbor” comes with loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The expert in the law answered correctly. So in verse 28 **Jesus replied**,**“You have answered correctly,”  “Do this and you will live.”**

It is true that the expert in the law would inherit eternal life if he loves the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength and with all his mind and loves his neighbor as himself. So Jesus plainly said, “Do this and you will live.”

**Part II. Which of these three was a neighbor to the man? (v.29-37)**

Verse 29 reads, **“But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

The expert in the law was confident that he loved the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind. But he had a little question about loving his neighbor as himself because the law did not define who was his neighbor. However, he wanted to justify himself as one who loves his neighbor as himself. So he asked the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

Then Jesus told him a story. Look at verses 30-35.

**30In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’**

The story is very simple. One man met robbers on his way to Jericho from Jerusalem. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, went away, leaving him half dead. The robbers did not care whether the man would live or not. They did not need to beat him to half dead in order to steal him, but they did not care. They were very violent. Then a priest happened to go down the same road, and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So did a Levite. When he came to the place and saw him he passed by on the other side. Priest and Levite are supposed to care people the most because their calling from God is to take care of people. But somehow both of them could not do so. Both the priest and the Levite knew the needs of the man who was dying there, but they had other pressing concerns or inner limitation that they could not help him out.

But a Samaritan man was different. **33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’**

His help is described here in very detail. First he took pity on the man when he saw him. The priest and Levite did not take pity on him when they saw him. But the Samaritan man took pity on him when he saw him. That is the main difference. “To take pity on someone’ means ‘to [feel](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/feel_1) [sorry](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/sorry) for him and share his pain”.

Then he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. That was not it. **35Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.**When he put the man on his own donkey he had to walk by himself. It could be labor if the distance to the inn was far away. Obviously he could not help him the next day because he had other things to take care of. When he could not stay there anymore, he could have said to the innkeeper. “Hey, I found the man dying on the road. I did all I could do so far. But I need to go away for my business. So can you take care of him? If not, can you contact synagogue ruler or someone who can take care of him? I am sorry.”

But the Samaritan sought the innkeeper’s help on his own expense. **35The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’**

In Jesus’ time, one denarius was a small silver coin, and it was equivalent for the daily wage for an unskilled laborer. So it could be equivalent between $50 to $100 if we think about the price of asking one laborer to work for a whole day. Sometimes we need someone in front of Home Depot. Two denarii means the expense of the two days’ labor of a man. The Samaritan man was willing to pay all the cost involved in helping the man. Was the Samaritan rich? Probably not. But he was willing to pay any extra expense to help him.

Then Jesus asked the question. **36“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”37The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”** (v.36-37)

The expert in the law was so compelled to say, “The one who had mercy on him”. His intention to test Jesus was gone while he was listening to the story. Without realizing what he was saying he replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Then Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” That was what the expert in the law was seeking. He wanted to know what he must do to inherit internal life, and Jesus told him, ‘go and do likewise.’

“Who is my neighbor?”

According to Jesus’ story, who is one’s neighbor is determined by two things. First, it is not determined by one but by one’s neighbor. The expert in the law asked, “who is my neighbor?” But Jesus asked, “who is a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” To the priest and Levite, the man who fell into the hands of robbers was not their neighbor. So they could justify themselves in heart, saying “Oh, I love my neighbor as myself. And the man lying on the road is not my neighbor. I did not know him, and I was so busy. I am sure that somebody must have called 911 or police and could have taken care of him.” But Jesus’ question was not ‘who was the neighbor of the priest or the Levite?” It was ‘who was the neighbor to the man?” Jesus taught that we should understand the definition of our neighbor from the view point of our neighbor rather than that of us.

The second thing that determines ‘who is one’s neighbor’ is ‘mercy’. The expert in the law replied ‘the one who had mercy on him’. The priest and the Levite did not take pity on the man. But the Samaritan man had mercy on him, and indeed he was the neighbor to the man.

How can we love our neighbor?

We can love our neighbor by remembering two things.

First, we can love our neighbor by remembering how we were treated by Jesus, and knowing that we are so precious toward each other.

Figuratively speaking, the Samaritan man represents Jesus because he saw things from our point of view of us and had mercy on us. When we were suffering from our sin he saw our pain and agony from our point of view. Then he had great mercy on us. He took our pain and suffering on himself on the cross because of his great mercy on us.

The man who fell into the hands of robbers can refer to all men. The robbers could be symbol of the devil and its subjects. We are all like the man who fell into the hands of robbers. Without realizing it we all fell into their hands, and we were beaten and wounded and left half dead on the road. And many times we are left alone. It is only a matter of time for us to die in loneliness. If it were not the mercy of Christ we would have all been dead by now.

But Christ came to us and bandaged our wounds pouring on oil and wine. The “oil and wine” could be the symbol of the Holy Spirit and Jesus’ blood. Our wounds by our sin can only be healed by the blood of Jesus and his Spirit.

Then, he put us on his own donkey and brought us into an inn and took care of us. When he could not stay with us any longer he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying “Look after him” “when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.” This is what Jesus did practically in our lives. How did he do so? By sending our bible teachers and shepherds. Jesus used them because they were his own people, the people whom he called as his own. Although his people are not perfect at all they still represent Jesus because Jesus gave them his mercy in their hearts. They took care of us even at the cost which is beyond their own ability. They have mercy on us not because we deserve but because Jesus put his mercy in their hearts. Indeed they are our good neighbors, representing Jesus who is our true neighbor.

Who are our neighbors? Look around you. They are your bible students, bible teachers, your brothers and sisters in the church, your children, your parents, and your wives and husbands. Are they our neighbors? Yes! They are our neighbors.

How then can we love our neighbors? How then can we have mercy on them? By remembering how Jesus treated us and knowing how precious we are toward each other. When we remember how Jesus treated us in his mercy, we realize that we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. We call God as ‘our heavenly Father’, and indeed we are all brothers and sisters. What does it mean we are brothers and sisters in the Lord? It means we love each other. And we must believe that we love each other. Why? Why should we believe that we love each other? It is because we cannot see the love of our neighbors if we do not believe it!

Do you feel that your neighbor love you when they speak well of you and you feel that they hate you when they speak ill of you? If we feel that way, that is the main reason why we could not love our neighbors. We could not love them because we were not confident of their love for us. We could not love them because we did not know how precious we were to them, and they were to us. So when they speak well of us, we feel that they love us, and when they speak ill of us, we feel that they hate us.

That is the very reason why loving our neighbor became so challenging. But remember how Jesus treated us. When we remember how Jesus treated us in his mercy, we realize we are all precious to him. Therefore we are all precious toward each other. Think about it! Who joined us together in this church? Did you choose your bible students or your bible teachers, your sons and daughters, most of all your brothers and sisters in the Lord? No, you did not choose. It is God who joined us together. Think about it! No one can replace each other in our lives in a given situation, time, and place. That is why we are precious to each other. Not only it is God who chose us to live together, but also it is God who poured his own love for us in our hearts that we can love one another. Look at

**Romans 5:2b-5**

**And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;4perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.**

So we love one another. We have mercy on each other. Do you believe this? We need to believe because we cannot see it if we do not believe. When we doubt our love toward each other we sin. When Adam and Even doubted the love of God in the Garden of Eden, they sinned.

When we know we are so precious toward each other, and we love each other regardless of our careless words and deeds, we can love each other. We can love our neighbors. Most of all, we must remember Jesus left our neighbors under our care.

Secondly, we can love our neighbors by remembering that Jesus will reimburse us for any extra expense in the course of helping our neighbors when he returns.

When the Samaritan man says, “and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have” he reminds us of Jesus who will return again, and at that time he will reimburse all of our extra expense in the course of helping our neighbors. Sometimes we may feel that our cost is too much or beyond what we can bear in order to help our neighbors. But the bible reveals that when Jesus returns again he will reimburse us for any extra expense we may have. What a wonderful truth it is! So we should not worry about our extra expense toward our neighbors.

In conclusion, our neighbors are those who need our help, and we can become neighbors when we have mercy on them. We can love our neighbors when we remember how we were treated by Jesus, and how we are precious toward each other. We must remember that we love one another in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. We can love our neighbors by remembering that Jesus will reimburse us for any extra expense we may have in the course of helping our neighbors.

One word: who is my neighbor?