

Church of God

The Biblical Grandview

The Good Samaritan: The Hard Questions

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Sermon Transcript

Cleaned and edited from Vosk AI speech-recognition output

He is occasionally on my bus. A worn man in crumpled clothing, with disheveled hair, his life looks different from the rest of ours. We are mostly middle-income. His face is etched with exhaustion, and he carries few belongings. We drive ourselves to the parking lot. He appears along a busy road, seemingly out of nowhere. We sometimes wonder where he slept the night before.

A few weeks ago, he boarded the bus, took, took one of the side-facing front seats, as he typically does, and looked down on the floor. A few stops later, a young woman boarded, a regular rider who speaks good but not native English. She swipes her bus pass, only to find out the machine would not accept it. The driver told her she would have to deposit the two-dollar, twenty-five-cent fare.

"Well, I just bought this card," she said. "I paid the money for the card."

The driver said he could - she could take the card back to the sales office and explain the problem. In the meantime, though, she would have to pay the fare

for today. The woman became distressed; didn't understand why she would have to pay the fare when she had the card. The rest of us just watched, wondering how the problem would be solved.

Suddenly, the crumpled-clothed man rose from his seat, dropped a jingle of coins into the fare box, and sat down, his eyes returning to the floor. His act was so unobtrusive that the distressed passenger didn't even realize what had happened.

"You're good," the bus driver said quietly. "He paid for you."

The bus driver repeated it and pulled away from the curb, and a hush fell over the bus. The rest of us had watched the woman's discomfort. He felt it. We wondered absently how the dilemma would be resolved. He resolved it.

We lawyers, journalists, business people were headed downtown to help fix the world. He fixed her world. We could have paid the two dollars and twenty-five cents and never missed it. It's easy to imagine that that was his fare home.

You never know when you're going to be in the presence of greatness or of grace. To the world, my fellow passenger looked like a man in need of solutions. I looked at him and saw only what he lacked. By the time he stepped off the bus that morning, it was obvious that he was a richer man than the rest of us. He had enough to open his eyes and heart

to a stranger, enough to give of what he had and trust life for the rest.

I haven't seen him since that day. Some people believe angels occasionally drop down and move among us. All I know is that I have a new respect for the simple act of kindness. It keeps the bus rolling. It speeds us along the way.

So that's a true story that appeared in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* a number of years ago.

Early in the Bible, we find one of life's great questions: "Am I my brother's keeper?" In the New Testament, there is a related question: "Who is my neighbor?"

How do we show up before our fellow human beings? How do we exhibit the Kingdom of God to people different than ourselves - different races, religions, beliefs, practices, political affiliations, et cetera? How does that look in a world where hate and division have escalated? What did Christ do in the Jewish society that He was in, being occupied by Rome?

We are familiar with the story where the second question comes from. It is the parable - the name is not such in the Bible, but in general - the parable of the Good Samaritan. How much, though, have we considered the full setting and context of the story? Especially, why did Christ pick those characters? Why did He tell this story in the first place? Is it just a nice story about doing good to

others? What questions are actually being answered?

If you want a title for today's message, this message is called "The Good Samaritan: The Hard Questions." The hard questions.

Now, as a quick review of the parables, parables are not only illustrations of a point. Parables are powerful events that change us. Jesus' parables should shake us up and move us down a new path. If we put ourselves inside the parables, they can actually transform us. Parables force the listener to wrestle, rethink, and reimagine, force them to think about hard questions.

It is critical to understand the setting that Christ creates in a parable in order to understand the full meaning of the parable. Parables are actually illustrations of Christ's mission. Jesus used parables to reveal values of the Kingdom of God. They often flipped cultural expectations. They often challenge religious assumptions, drawing listeners into a deeper understanding of what Christ came to represent.

Now, many of Jesus' parables were actually a shock. The trouble is that we know them so well, they don't often surprise us anymore. The parable of the Good Samaritan was probably bordering on scandalous when He first told it. We need to recover the shock value, to put it in modern language, if you will, or the wake-up call that Christ

intended. We need to bring it into our world today and see how it applies to us.

So, turn over to Luke chapter 10, if you would, please. We may go to one or two other scriptures during this entire message, but we're pretty much going to stay parked in Luke chapter 10 and the parable, verses 25 through 37. We're just going to read through the entire parable to begin with, and then we're going to go back and discuss each section.

So, Luke chapter 10, verse 25, beginning in verse 25. And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tempted Him. Let me give the context of the chapter. So, the beginning of the chapter, Christ has sent out seventy to go spread the message. Christ also addressed those cities that would not receive His message and said, you know, it's going to be more tolerable for Tyre and for Sodom and Gomorrah than it's going to be for you. And then, just before this parable, He's talking to the disciples and said, "You are blessed for understanding which you are able to understand."

But then, beginning in verse 25, a certain lawyer stood up and tempted Him, saying, "Master, what should I do to inherit eternal life?"

And He says, "Well, what's written in the law? How do you understand it?"

And answering, he says, "Well, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all

your strength, and all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

And He said to him, "Well, you gave the right answer. Do this and you shall live."

But he, willing to justify himself, or wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "Well, who is my neighbor?"

And answering, Jesus said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among robbers, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by coincidence, a certain priest came down that way and, seeing him, passed by on the opposite side. And in the same way, a Levite also, being at the place, coming and seeing him, passed by on the opposite side. But a certain traveling Samaritan came upon him and, seeing him, he was filled with pity," or filled with compassion, "and coming near, he bound up his wounds, poured on oil and wine, and set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And going on the next day, he took out two denarii" - a lot of money at that time - "gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' Which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among robbers?"

And he said, "The one who showed to him mercy."

And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

All right, let's take a look at each section a little bit and see what's going on.

So, the first section is, you know, what was even the impetus for this parable? Well, we see the lawyer was wanting to tempt Him. He was wanting to test Christ. It was motivation. He was wanting to justify him. So it wasn't the best reason, let's put it that way. And he would have known the finer details of the moral religious law and what was required. He calls Christ "Teacher," but in reality, is putting Christ - trying to put Christ on the spot. So, he's wanting to know the requirements.

Now, it's not a bad question. And in fact, if you notice, even though he was wanting to tempt Christ, he's asking a life question. He's asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" So, this is not a trivial topic by any means, although obviously the lawyer was presenting it for less than, let's say, honorable intention.

Christ, though, is going to eventually address both the lawyer's real impetus and his actual stated question. Christ says, okay, what does the Torah say, and how do you understand what was said? He's not giving a listing here, of course, but a summary. And Christ acknowledges that the summary was correct.

And I'll give you a couple of reference scriptures for these: Deuteronomy 6:5, which you're probably familiar with, Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18,

Leviticus 19:18. And so these come from, you know, the Old Testament. Christ reiterates these in other parts of the Gospels as well, these two great commandments. And all Scripture involves principles and application of these two main laws.

And so, in verse 28, Christ says, well, you have the right information. You've answered correctly. Do it and you will live. Commit yourself to doing this and you're going to be fine.

So, the story of the Good Samaritan is not simply a nice, feel-good, milk-of-the-Word story. It is about, really, life's great questions: eternal life - what must I do to inherit eternal life? - and how Christians should actively show love towards other human beings. Those are two of the great questions.

So, it goes on, of course. The next context is verse 29, and he's trying to justify that he was righteous. And it's like another story where a lawyer comes and he says, "All these things I've done from my youth. What do I lack?" And Christ says, well, okay, go do this, and he was stumped.

So, he's saying, okay, well then, who is my neighbor? Who is my neighbor? I understand those, to do that, but who is my neighbor? Now, notice he did not ask, "How should I do this?" Why did he ask the question that he asked?

Well, it was well known - the Jews are well-known people, the Jewish faith, especially with religious leaders - trying

to establish more of a checklist mentality for obeying the law and, by extension, serving God. They had very strict rules about what not to do, but also rules and guidance limiting their obligations. Which people do I have to love? Maybe he wanted Christ to give an answer to which he could say, "I'm doing that. I've done that. Highway to the Kingdom of God. Here I am, you know, ready to go."

Now, one of the scriptures I do want to go to is Leviticus 19:33-34.

Now, this is also in the Old Testament. This is also something the lawyer should have known. Leviticus 19:33: "If a stranger lives with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. The stranger that dwells with you shall be one as born among you, and you shall love him as yourself." Okay, so included in "neighbor," originally, even back from the time of Israel, was the stranger, because He said - God says - you were strangers in the land of Egypt. "I am the Lord your God." So included in this neighbor was the stranger.

So, let's go back, then, to Luke.

In general, though, the people of the time, in the nation of Israel at that time, only thought of other Jews as being neighbors. They even had interpretations of who constituted a neighbor, because the word literally only means someone close to you, okay, close in proximity. The closer they are, the more obligations I have to them; the

further away they are, the fewer obligations I have to them. Some people were so remote that they're not even neighbors at all. I can discount, you know, discount them. They're not a neighbor. God says love your neighbor; they're not a neighbor. There we go.

Above all, this was true of the foreigners in the land, the Samaritans.

In our mindset - so remember the title, "The Hard Questions" - here come some hard questions. In our mindset, who are our neighbors? Only fellow UCG members? Only people who have not brought problems on themselves? Only people with certain moral practices? Only people from our own country? Only people with the same political views we have?

In Christ's interactions with people, whom did He regard as neighbors for the purpose of extending love? And that's a Bible study. You can go through the Gospels and see to whom He extended love.

Okay, the next context is verses 30 through 33. I'm going to take a look at the characters a little bit. Now, what's interesting, in most of Christ's parables, if you look at them throughout the Gospels, characters don't have specific societal identities. In most of His parables, there's no real identity of the characters being discussed. That is not the case here. The identity of all four were important for all of the lessons that Christ was trying to bring across.

These characters, and the fact that Christ used these characters - He knew what He was doing. He knew that He'd be pressing a couple of red buttons and kind of poking the bear a little bit by using the characters that He did and how He used them.

So, let's talk about the priest and the Levite. They represent the religious elite. They would have been well educated. These people were characteristically, let's say, a little bit arrogant. We see that throughout the Gospels: hypocritical, treating others they considered to be of lower class, such as the Samaritans, with contempt. Frankly, the Samaritans were considered internal enemies. It wasn't just the Romans; it was the Samaritans, especially from a religious standpoint. So, when Christ describes the reactions of the Levite and the priest in this parable, He's not exaggerating. That's, you know, that would have been the case.

In terms of genealogy, if we talk about the Samaritans, the Samaritans were a mix of non-Judah Israelite ancestry and non-Israelite nations at the time of Christ. They were religiously similar to the Jews in a number of ways, but disagreed where worship should take place - that actually comes out in interaction Christ has with the Samaritan woman - and which books of the Torah were sacred. They believed it was only the Pentateuch.

Characteristic of Jesus, who loves to humiliate the proud and lift up the humble, He used a Samaritan in His illustration as the good person, and the priest and Levite as, well, having moved to the other side.

Next hard question: Who are the Samaritans in our worldview? If we're honest with ourselves, you have to answer that for yourself. I have to answer that for myself. Who are the Samaritans in our worldview?

Now, let's get to the fourth person in this story. What do we know about the person who fell among thieves? Absolutely nothing. We know nothing about this person. Zero. What would the priest and Levite and Samaritan have known about the man? Also, nothing. No clothes to identify him, beaten so bad he looked dead, valuables would have been missing. Maybe the person couldn't even talk.

For the priest and Levite, this was no one. For Christ, this was everyone and anyone. In literature, this is known as an *everyman*. The person represents any human being because Christ gives him no identity. Remember, the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Christ answered that question with a no-identity person. He didn't specify which, you know, race, nationality, religion. No identity. In other words, everyone and anyone in need.

Christ uses extreme examples to demonstrate His point. He picks a well-

educated religious person to represent the bad behaviors we've already discussed, and a Samaritan, the least knowledgeable, at least in the eyes of the society of the time, to represent model behavior.

So next question for us: If Christ told that story within the Church, who would the characters be? We'll come back to that question a little bit later. Who would the characters be?

Okay, let's talk about the reactions of the priest and Levite, notably in verses 31 through 32. Why would they have done what they did, moved away? Well, you know, maybe the priest is thinking - and I realize this is a parable, not a real-life story, but I'm kind of making it as a real-life story - maybe the priest didn't actually see it happen. How could I be sure the wounded man is truly a neighbor in the sense of loving your neighbor? Because I can't identify him.

If the person lying there is a non-Jew, the priest could risk defilement, especially if the person were actually dead. If he defiles himself, he could not collect tithes. He cannot perform rituals. You know, people are going to suffer because of that. He can't do his duty. Maybe they're just simply afraid of being ambushed. It wasn't a safe road, that particular road.

So, it says here, they saw. Seeing him, they moved aside. And, you know, "seeing" means to be aware, but that's

all they were. They were aware. Nothing else happened.

And so, again, we can ask ourselves: How do we see? Do we just see, or, like the response of the Samaritan, do we have compassion with our seeing? Do we see ourselves as potentially part of the solution?

What was the response of the Samaritan? Well, it was compassion. It was pity, verses 33 through 35. It was an ache in the gut. He hurt for the person. He felt for the person. Like the person on the bus, he felt the pain. He could put himself in that scenario. It wasn't just an abstract event that had nothing to do with him. He could put himself in there.

And so, he showed love of God with heart, mind, soul, and strength, and he showed love your neighbor as yourself. He saw the need. He was moved with compassion and empathy. His heart was involved. He provided a high-quality service, sparing no expense. He sacrificed. It wasn't just out of his abundance.

He didn't simply pour on water, but oil and wine - fine wine to cleanse, oil to protect. Those would have been expensive items. And, of course, the symbolism wouldn't have been lost on those listening, because wine and oil were used in temple rituals as part of sacrifices.

He made sure to complete the job. He said, "I'm going to return. I'll pay any other expenses that may have..."

We know the story. So, the compassion the Samaritan would have upset his plans. He had prepared himself for a journey. He had food. He had drink. He had money. Now all those things get, you know, put in disarray because he had this situation that he took care of.

Okay, so let's take a look at the comparison of the questions being asked in the story. What was the lawyer's original question? "Who is my neighbor?" What is the question Jesus asked? "Who was the neighborly one?" There's a difference in those questions.

Who is acting as a neighbor?

Jesus redefines neighbor not as a category of people to love, but as a way of being, of heart. Not obligation to a predefined subset of people, but who do I want to be? What kind of heart do I want to have? What's the nature of God that I want to take on? What is being representative of the Kingdom of God?

So, what is the emphasis? Not, "Unto whom must I show love?" but rather, "Where can I act as a neighbor to somebody who may be in need? To whom will I be a neighbor?" No limitations. No disclaimers.

A neighbor can't be categorized. It's anyone who is in need. A neighbor is someone you encounter who needs mercy, regardless of ethnicity, religion, social status. We even have, of course, the very well-known command from Christ in the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies." Okay, so it's not

just a neighbor; it's even enemies, whatever constitutes enemy in our life.

So, Christ did not limit, by definition, who a neighbor is. Being a neighbor to someone is not limited by family relations or proximity. In specific, though, with regards to the lawyer's question, by showing that a Samaritan was neighbor to a Jew, that a Jew should be neighbor to a Samaritan, and that would have rocked the world of the listeners of the time.

One commentary I was reading in preparing for this message said, "Parables don't answer the question you ask; they answer the question you should have asked." I found that would actually be true.

Okay, lessons from the story for us. It's about changing our heart and our perspectives.

Now, we can't change the world. I realize that. And what we have available is limited. But we're all going to find situations where we can take a step in. Maybe it is a sacrifice, but we won't be able to do that unless we have geared our hearts to doing that and looking for those opportunities, and thinking about, okay, what can I do when this situation arises? What are things that I can be prepared for? Think ahead of time for that.

So, in terms of preparing our own hearts, our nature, our mindset, we need to ask ourselves: How do we view people in need? The homeless, stranger,

the fatherless - throughout the Bible we're told to take care of these people - victims of crimes. What would Christ do? Who and what would He want us to do?

If you want to note, by way of reference, we're not going to go over there, but Luke 4 and Luke 7. Christ gave witness of His identity and mission to those in the synagogue and to John the Baptist. When they asked about His identity, His mission, He said, "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and good news is proclaimed to the poor."

Christ showed His identity by saying, this is what is happening. You decide. You decide if I'm the Messiah or if I am who I say I am. And He said, this is how I show my identity.

Christ also makes no disclaimers about people in need throughout the Bible. When it discusses caring for the fatherless, the stranger, the widow, and the poor, again, you see those throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Now, no limitations are given. "Well, it's his own fault that he or she is poor. You know, they're drug addicts, and immigrants didn't get enough training for a decent job. I don't have to help in those circumstances. It's their own fault."

We need to ask ourselves: Does God limit His help towards us in situations when it's not our fault? I'm glad He

hasn't limited His help towards me when it's only not my fault, because most of the time it is my fault. It's myself getting myself in trouble.

Matthew chapter 25. You're familiar with the three parables there: the foolish virgins, the unprofitable servant, the goats and the sheep. In all three of those parables, you know, you have two sides in each parable. Okay, the, the side that doesn't get the compliments, let's put it that way, they were not condemned for doing wrong; they were condemned for not doing right.

And that's an important distinction we need to remember in terms of how we live our Christian lives. It's not just about avoiding the wrong.

We need to make sure that we are doing the good and the right wherever the opportunity presents itself, and, and, and need to make that a high priority.

I've been in the Church for fifty-plus years. I've been in the ministry thirty-six years or so, and I say this about myself, so I'm not trying to point fingers at fellow speakers at all. But we discuss, in large measure, the wrong to avoid. And certainly, we do need to avoid the wrong. I'm not saying otherwise. But in my opinion, after so much time, we don't emphasize enough the doing the right, the things that are going to make a difference in someone's life, however small it may be, however limited our ability is to do so. But in my opinion, we, we don't emphasize that enough.

Let's see. Let's pop over to James. The only other scripture we're going to go to. James chapter 2.

And in this section, we won't read every verse between verses 14 through 26, but he, he starts off by asking a question. By the way, you can tell I'm fascinated with questions. I love the great questions we've seen throughout the Bible. To me, a question creates a vacuum, a vacuum that is just begging to be discussed.

And so, James has a question: "My brothers, what profit is it if a man says he has faith and does not have works? Can faith save him?" Another great question, one of the great questions of the Bible.

And he goes on to discuss, well, if a brother or sister is naked, destitute of food, and you say to them, "I'll pray for you" - okay, that's not exactly what James says, but he says, you know, "Go, be warmed and filled" - but you do not give those things that he actually needs, you're not actually being the solution. What good is it?

And he goes on to say, "Even so, if it does not have works, faith is dead, being by itself." And so there, there needs to be this positive action in our exercise of faith.

Okay, and you can read the rest of that chapter. Pop over to James 4:17. We know, of course, from Romans 6, one of the most common definitions of sin is that sin is the transgression of the law. Here is a second one that we also need

to keep in mind. James 4:17: "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and doesn't do it," he says that that's sin. So, sin is not just doing the wrong. It's not doing the right. It's not being active in that regard.

All right; we can go back to Luke.

So again, the question we can ask ourselves: Do we see ourselves as potentially part of the solution?

So going on, when we talk about the priest and the Levite, they had the identity of being righteous, but Christ said they walked on past. They walked on past.

So, the interesting question is: Did the priest and Levite break any of the commandments that refer to other people, any of the Ten Commandments that refer to other people, basically, as we say, the last five of the Ten Commandments? Did they break any of those commandments by walking past?

Actually, they didn't. They didn't. But that's not the point. That's not the point.

Knowing what is right without doing what is right, it just won't cut it. And we can't use one part of God's law to avoid doing another part of His law. We can ask ourselves: Did the priest and Levite practice justice, mercy, and faith with deeds? And obviously the answer is no.

All right, let's get back to one of the hard questions that I asked earlier. If Christ were telling this parable today, who would be the priest and the Levite?

Would it be a Church of God minister?
Would it be a Church of God employee?
I used to be one - no, not right now, but
I used to be one - Church of God
member?

If our hearts and actions are like the
priest and Levite, then we have to put
ourselves in their shoes in this scenario.

It's, it can be easy to think, "Oh yeah, I
would have done what the Good
Samaritan did," but let's, you know, let's
be a little bit tough on ourselves and be
honest with ourselves of what we would
do.

So, third and last lesson for us to take
away is the Samaritan was considered
an outsider due to genealogy and
religious practice. Christ used him to
illustrate fulfilling the second great
commandment.

Now, we need to turn that a little bit in
our heads. And it's not the only time He
does that in His ministry, where He uses
somebody outside the nation of Israel to
illustrate a point or illustrate a good
point, to illustrate a good example. And
calling people of great faith, He says that
to the centurion. He says that to others,
Samaritans. He says to the woman from
Canaan. He says that in various
situations. These are people of faith.
These are people who are doing the right
thing. And He does it without
disclaimer. He does it without
disclaimer.

And He deliberately uses the Samaritan
to demonstrate righteousness.

So again, a hard question for us: Who
are the Samaritans in our worldview?

Who would Christ have - if Christ were
telling this parable today and using
modern characters to tell this parable
today - who would Christ use in place of
the Samaritan? A Muslim from Iraq? A
Buddhist? A Baptist? A Mexican
Catholic? An atheist?

I think these are important questions
for us to mull over and to think about.

Okay, let's take ourselves a little bit
outside of maybe our usual thinking and
say, okay, who would Christ have used?

It would have been just as big of a shock
that He used a Samaritan in that case as
any of the people I listed from our
modern-day life here.

So, I think we just, we also need to take
care when we are seeing good being
done by other people outside of our
fellowship. You know it can be - and I've
heard these comments; I've probably
made these comments, so again, I'm
certainly not pointing fingers - but, you
know, maybe we say, "Well, you know,
they're certainly doing good, but, you
know, they don't keep the Sabbath."
"Well, yeah, that's a good deed, but are
they really showing love? And they don't
have the Holy Spirit."

How do we know they don't have the
Holy Spirit at all? We don't. And again,
Christ complimented and used positive
examples of non-Jews without
judgmental disclaimers.

So, in wrapping up, Jesus is not just telling people to be good. It's not just a story of being good. He is actually revealing in the story what God is like.

So, if you think about this story, the Samaritan sees and seeks out. He is moved with compassion. He draws near. He binds wounds. He pays the cost. And he promises to return.

Now, who does that sound like? That sounds like Christ's mission. Sounds like what He did and what He's going to do. He sees and seeks out. He moves with compassion. He draws near. He binds wounds. He pays the cost. And He is going to return. And He promises to return.

This is Jesus' own mission in narrative form.

So, am I my brother's keeper? Who is my neighbor? Christ answered these with a question for us to live by: To whom can I be a neighbor? Who needs a little bit of the vision of the Kingdom of God today?

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Editorial Notes

This transcript was cleaned from raw Vosk speech-recognition output. Edits were limited to punctuation, capitalization, sentence boundaries, paragraph breaks, and correction of clear recognition errors. The speaker's wording, cadence, and asides have been preserved throughout.