

Who is my Neighbour?

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[0 : 01] We're pleased to have a seat. And just before we get into this familiar and loved passage, why don't we pray together? Oh, Father, we would come before you this morning and we would want to take to heart those last words that we've sung, that we need you.

Oh, Father, would you forgive us for the times where we think we can make it on our own? Lord, we need you. And we thank you that as we come to our Bibles this morning that we come to no ordinary book, that these words that we read, these are words from your mouth.

And we know that the words from your mouth are life-giving words. They are a lamp for our feet and they are a light for our path. So this morning, Father, would you come and would your words instruct us and would they lead us and would they mold us and would they inspire us all for the glory of your Son, Jesus Christ.

And in his name we pray. Amen. Well, to get us thinking this morning, I wonder if you'll raise your hand if you can remember ever doing the high jump at school.

Can anyone remember what they got at the high jump at school? Alistair, you've still got your hand in the air. What did you achieve?

[1 : 19] What did you jump? That should have been the verb there. Good. Anyone else? Charles? Five feet three. Five feet three. That's good. So the highest I ever got at the high jump was one metre thirty-five.

Actually, that was what I thought was quite good. That calculates to just over four feet. Well, I was reading about a man this week. I'll get his name right. He's a Cuban guy called Javier Sotomayor.

And in 1993, he became the only person living ever to clear eight feet in the high jump. Now, if you're trying to picture eight feet in your head, it's pretty much me raising my hand in the air and a little bit more.

Or if you really want to know what eight feet is, I put it on the pole at the back of the church. That is eight feet. That is a big jump. And that world record has stood since 1993.

Javier has set the bar for what? The high jump. What we need to get. What you need to get. There is the bar. Here's what we're going to see this morning in this passage.

[2 : 25] We're going to see Jesus set a very high bar. Now, what we're going to see this morning is him set a very high bar.

What we're going to learn this morning is that Jesus both defines and he demands that we love our neighbor. And what we're going to think about this morning is, as his followers, how we are doing at loving our neighbor.

Now, it's been six weeks since we were in Luke. So I think it's going to stand us in good stead just to spend just a little bit of time getting our bearings again as to where we are in this story.

And we're in the second major section of Luke's gospel. And you may remember that we transitioned into that new section back in chapter 9 and verse 51.

We're off the back of Peter's confession that Jesus, you are the Christ. Off the back of that confession, Jesus sets his face like flint to go to Jerusalem. Not because he fancies a weak city break, but because he goes there purposefully to lay down his life for his people.

[3 : 32] He goes there to die. So we're in this journey to Jerusalem bit of Luke's story. And it's in that context of this journey that Luke wants us to consider the big question of this section of his gospel.

And that question is, what does it mean to follow after this king? Quite literally, what does it mean to walk beside him?

That's the question that he's asking in this part of his gospel. And can I just say at the outset, that's a cracking question to ask. It's a great question to ask if you're here this morning and you're checking it out.

That is to say, you're here this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. You're thinking to yourself, what does this whole Christianity thing mean? If you're checking it out.

It's a great question to ask if you're thinking it out. Maybe you're here this morning and you've been here for the last little while as we've journeyed through Luke's gospel. And you're thinking through who this man Jesus Christ really is.

[4 : 37] And you're thinking through the claims that both he is making and the claims that he is making on your life. If you're thinking it out. And it's a cracking question to ask if you're living it out.

It's always great to be reminded in our Christian lives to come back to God's word constantly and to be reminded what it is we are supposed to be doing is we follow our great Lord and King and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It's a great question to ask this morning. What does it mean to follow this king? And really that is the backdrop to this encounter that Jesus has with this lawyer. And if you want to follow along with me in your Bibles, Luke 10 verse 25 that Lynn Redford is there, we'll see that it's an encounter that's marked by four questions.

Now let's just dive straight into it this morning. The first question comes at verse 25. And you'll see it there. Luke writes this, And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

Now what kind of question is that? Well, it's a trying question. On the surface, it probably seems like an innocent question, but if we look at the clues that Luke gives us in the text, we begin to get a bit suspect.

[5 : 56] And we're a bit suspect for two reasons. Firstly, because of the man behind the question. Who is this man? Do you see it there in the text? He's a lawyer.

Now don't think Jerry Maguire. Think kind of lawyer-theologian. This guy knows the scripture that's in his hands off by heart. And notice another little detail that Luke gives us in the text there.

He's an expert in the law. Now I found that a bit puzzling in my preparation this week. And here's what I was thinking. He's an expert in the law.

So he knows his stuff, right? So the question is, why is he asking this question? I don't believe for a second he doesn't know the answer to that question.

If he's an expert in the law, why is he asking it? Well, notice again in the text that Luke tells us the true motives of this man. What is the word there? Test.

[6 : 54] Test. This man is out to test Jesus. And that's the second reason that we're suspicious of this man. It's because of the content of his question. Now we know it's a flawed question right away because logically you can't do something to inherit something.

Eternal life, especially in this context, salvation, is a gracious gift from a good God. And it's given by him.

By grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone. As Sinclair Ferguson writes, faith is by definition non-contributory. It's not about us. It's about Jesus Christ.

But essentially what this lawyer is asking is, what do I do, what do I need to do to be good enough for God? Now let me ask you this morning, have you ever asked that question?

It's a great question to ask. It's a great question to ask. What do I need to do to be good enough for God? I wonder how you would answer that question. Because that's exactly how Jesus responds to the lawyer.

[8 : 02] And this is our second question at verse 26. What does Jesus say? What is written in the law? Now what kind of question is that? Well, it's a textbook question.

How is the lawyer going to answer? Well, look what he says. 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.

Now let's give this guy credit where credit is due. You have to say he absolutely nails this one, doesn't he? He absolutely nails it. That is what God requires. Congratulations, says Jesus.

If you fulfilled that completely, then you've got absolutely nothing to worry about when it comes to eternal life. You've got nothing to worry about. You've got nothing to worry about. You've got nothing to worry about. You've got nothing to worry about.

But see, if we pause just for a minute and we just think about that answer. To love God with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your heart and with all your strength.

[9 : 09] The key word there being all. And to love your neighbor as yourself. Which when you think about it, I was trying to think about it this week.

That is a very high bar. To love your neighbor as yourself. And I tell you why it's a high bar. Because I love me. You know, the college that I study at on part of my job here.

They sent an email around the students a few weeks ago saying that there's a new prospectus out for the college. So break time comes, the bell goes, and I run down to get that prospectus.

And guess who I'm looking for? And I make it. Do you know how I make it? Because I'm there, back of my head. Nobody would know it was me. But I'm looking for me because I love me.

And then I get this claim that Jesus makes in my life. I'm to love my neighbor as I love myself. Let me ask you this morning.

[10 : 06] Have you stopped to consider the full weight of what God both requires and he deserves?

What do I need to do to inherit eternal life? Well, there's the answer to that question. And it's big. And you see, while everything is right with this lawyer's answer, we've got to conclude that everything is wrong with this lawyer's heart.

We get the third question here at verse 29. Now, what kind of question is this?

Well, it's a twisted question. Because if we dig a bit deeper under the surface of this question, we begin to see what this man is all about. Now, he's a lawyer.

He used to be one. Even in our day, that carries a certain unfair stigma, doesn't it? Do you want to know how many lawyer jokes there are in existence?

[11 : 23] None. They're all true stories. He's a crafty lawyer. And he's all about thinking through words and finding loopholes in the meaning of words.

This guy is a lawyer to a T. So when this man asks Jesus, what does he say? Jesus, can you define neighbor? He's not really asking Jesus to define neighbor.

He's asking Jesus to define non-neighbor. Because Jesus, if you just define for me that word neighbor, and you tell me who my real neighbors are, then I can ring fence that.

And therefore, by default, everyone who falls out with that category, I can place them outside that category. And therefore, I can class them as being not my neighbor.

And I can exclude them from the list of people that I have an obligation to love and to serve as myself. I'm pretty, pretty, pretty pleased, Jesus, as you answer that question.

[12 : 23] Can you make sure that the Samaritans are in this category? That's what he's asking. This man is a lawyer to a T. I'd give him a job.

This man is out to justify himself. Presumably, Luke indicating to his readers, do you see it there, how he's written it? That this is how this man lives his life. Picking and choosing, dismissing and ignoring.

And by asking this question, and by asking Jesus to answer it, he's hoping that Jesus will tell him that how he's behaving is both justifiable and acceptable in the sight of God.

It's a twisted question, because it comes from a twisted heart. Now, the tension at this part of the story is, how is Jesus going to answer this man?

How is Jesus going to answer this man? Is Jesus going to throw the book at him? Is Jesus going to publicly humiliate him in front of everyone else? What's one of the big themes we've seen as we've journeyed through this gospel of Luke?

[13 : 32] The beauty of Jesus Christ. The love of Jesus Christ. The compassion of Jesus Christ. The grace of Jesus Christ.

And the wisdom of Jesus Christ. Does Jesus throw the book at him here? And he tells him a story. Would you see the grace at which Jesus deals with this man here? Jesus, the one who knows this man better than this man knows himself.

Jesus, the one who is giving life to this man, who is giving him every breath that he's taking at that second. Jesus proceeds to tell him a story.

And it's a famous story. We love this story. I would say people in our world, regardless of whether they're a Christian or not, love this story. And it's a story of a man who's traveling on the 17 mile long Jerusalem Jericho Highway.

Before he's set upon by a bunch of cut throats. And he's beaten, robbed, stripped and left for dead at the side of the road. Tension in the story. Who is going to come to this guy's rescue?

[14 : 38] Okay, if I was writing a film for this, there'd be the I Need a Hero soundtrack in the back. That's the question we're meant to ask at this point in the story. Who is going to come to this man's rescue? Well, the first man to appear in the scene, do you notice it?

Is a Jewish priest. Now this priest probably is making his way from Jerusalem, where he's carrying out his priestly duties, to Jericho, where he most likely lives. And he sees this man.

That's the key word for us here. He sees this man. He doesn't just not see this man. He cannot claim ignorance here. He sees this man. And he sees this man who is stripped.

And he's almost dead. Now why is that significant? Well, it means that as the priest looks at this man, no way of being able to identify both who he is, and whether he's still living or not.

So if you're a priest, you come in contact with a dead man. You touch a dead man. His uncleanness transferred to you. You're considered unclean. That means a trip back to Jerusalem to make yourself clean again.

[15 : 41] That's an inconvenience. That's a hassle. That's a risk not worth taking. And in addition, who knows whether these cutthroat robbers are still hanging around. So the priest looks at this man, weighs that all up in his head, and he passes on by.

And then comes along a Levite, who you can understand simply as someone akin to an assistant priest. And so he would have the same concerns as the priest, and he too passes on by.

Big point, implicit point in the story. We're meant to understand both these men who knew what God required. They saw a fellow human being in need, and they chose to do nothing about it.

So the question still remains in the story. Who is going to come to this man's rescue? Well, the hero of the story, do you notice that he comes from the most unlikely, of places?

Because the hero in this story, the man who saves the day, is in fact a most hated outsider. Now he's from Samaria. Now just to get your geography for a minute, where is Samaria?

[16 : 48] Well, this is how I try and remember it. Jesus' day, geography-wise, you've got Galilee in the north, you've got Judea in the south, and you've got Samaria in the middle, called Samaria. Samaria, this is where it is.

He's in the middle. Now there's an awful lot of history in there between the Jews and the Samaritans, which we don't have time to go into. But needless to say, that Jews in Jesus' day considered Samaritans to be religious sellouts, because of their pick-and-mix social and religious practices.

Don Carson, I think, nails it on the head with his description of it. He says, the Jews looked down on Samaritans as a half-breed people with a half-baked faith.

So the hero of this story, do you begin to taste how distasteful this must have been for this guy? The hero of this story is one of them. He's a Samaritan. And in stark contrast to the two men before him, he sees this man, and he has compassion and concern for this man.

This man who he sees has been stripped, beaten, robbed, and left for dead. What does he do? He stops. And he gets down.

[18 : 03] And he inconveniences himself. And he makes himself vulnerable. And he gets his hands dirty. And he binds up this man's wounds.

And he doesn't just do that. Do you see the detail? He pours oil and wine on them. And he trades places with this man. Presumably, as he gets down off the donkey and puts this man on his donkey, as he walks alongside.

And he pays the price to the innkeeper to ensure that this man gets some needed recovery and rest at the inn. And I think how we read this story, we have to be in little doubt that this Samaritan has saved this man's life.

Legally, in those days, that you'd be sold as a slave if you couldn't pay your debt. So this is what the Samaritan is doing here with the innkeeper. That if this man stays longer than these two denarii are going to cover him for, then the bill doesn't just stop there.

that actually, I'll cover the bill. I'll cover the bill. It's almost equivalent to saying, put my card behind the bar and I'll cover the tab. This is what he's doing. This man was helpless.

[19 : 20] And this man was hopeless. And this man was facing a very bleak future. And through a costly demonstration of compassion and love, this Samaritan has acted to change this man's life.

And so the men, do you feel the sting in the story? The men who are considered the super righteous in society, Jewish society, have been well and truly shown up by this offensive outsider.

That's who your neighbor is, Mr. Lawyer. That's who your neighbor is. Your neighbor is anybody that you happen to come across. Any human being made in the image of God, that is your neighbor.

Do you honestly think that you can stand in front of a holy and righteous God now and justify yourself to him that you've been a good neighbor?

But truth be told, you're asking the wrong question. The question isn't, who is my neighbor? The question you should really be asking is, how can I be a good neighbor?

[20 : 28] You see the lawyer here? Do you feel his cheeks getting red at this point? He's been well and truly sent back to law school. And so we get the third question at verse 36.

Jesus says this, which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? Now what kind of question is this? Well, it's a telling question.

You have to say, it's a question with a really easy answer, isn't it? I mean, I don't know how many, if there's many students here with your exams coming up soon.

Is there, let's see some hands. So there's quite a few. I mean, if this one came up in your test, your exam, you'd be absolutely delighted, would you not? It's a really easy question.

And Jesus makes it really simple for him. This isn't, can you provide me with an essay? Can you provide me with a few hundred words with a snappy introduction and a nice little conclusion and bring it all home?

[21 : 34] And to make it even easier, it's a multiple choice question. And even, even, even easier, it's got three answers to it. It's either him, it's him, or it's him.

It is either the priest, it's the Levite, or it's the Samaritan. Who's it going to be, Mr. Lawyer? And it's a telling question because it tells us two things. Firstly, it tells us that this man has got heart issues.

Do you see it in the way he answers this question? He can't even bring himself to credit the Samaritan with being the good guy in the story. He can't even do it. He loathes the Samaritans.

He loathes the Samaritans. Now, you can imagine this playing out in his everyday life. Picture him going home. Picture him picking up his, his children. Picture them saying, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, can we have a good night story before we go to bed?

Can we please have that one where the good guy defeats the bad guy? Now, who do you think is the bad guy in that story every time? This guy has heart problems.

[22 : 41] Jesus flips this story well and truly on its head and in doing so, he draws out this man's prejudice to the surface. And do you see in passing what that's telling us about life in Jesus' kingdom?

That there is no place for favoritism. That there is no place for subtle racism. That there is no place for a superiority complex. That attitudes like that are not on for the people of God.

This is life in Jesus' kingdom. And the second reason why it's a telling question, I think this is the massive point from this story, is that it tells us a lot about Jesus.

For the thing for us to get our heads around here, like we said at the outset, if you remember, is that Jesus defines here the very heart of what it means to love one's neighbor.

He defines it. Now how does he define it? Well, who will go to these lengths out of love for their neighbor? Who can possibly hit the standard that this Samaritan sets here?

[23 : 53] Who will have compassion and who will stop to help those who cannot help themselves? Who will be the one who will exchange places with the outcast?

Who will be the one who will pay the great cost to save people from slavery and death? What you see is, we see this parable in the wider context, and that's why it's so important that we do that in Luke's Gospel.

Do you see that Jesus is actually on the way to Jerusalem to be this good Samaritan? Jesus had come to have compassion on helpless men.

Jesus is the one who has come to give his life to save men from death. Jesus is the one who has come to trade places with sinful men.

Jesus is the one who has come to pay the price to set sinful men and women free from slavery. Because the way that Luke records the story for us here, I think quite intentionally, leads us to draw the inference that the great Samaritan is Jesus himself.

[25 : 02] Now just pause for a minute there, and let me ask you, have you grasped just how much Jesus has done for you this morning?

Do you know him to be, not simply just your example, but do you know him to be your savior? Because the truth of it is that we all like to see ourselves as first and foremost as the Samaritan in this story.

But before we get there, and we will get there, we have to see ourselves as the man who was left dead at the side of the road in this story. And Tim Keller, he writes this, Jesus did not come to tell us how to save ourselves, but to save us himself.

Here is Jesus setting the bar. Here is Jesus laying down the pattern of the kingdom. Here is Jesus setting the standard of costly compassion and of extravagant grace.

And here is Jesus calling for his followers to behave and to act like he does, like we were singing earlier. He is the servant king. And that alone, as we look at the beauty of Jesus Christ, that should motivate us to follow in the pattern that he sets us.

[26 : 29] But as if we needed just a little clincher, that was the case. Do you see how he ends this exchange with this man? The final words of Jesus in this exchange, what are they?

Does he say, go away and think about these things? No, he says, go away and do these things. You go and you do likewise.

Jesus is not calling him to be a philosopher. Jesus is calling him to be a follower. Go and do likewise. And so having looked at those four questions, let me just bring it home this morning by asking us a fifth and a final one.

You know, I wonder as a church and I wonder as individuals, how are we doing at doing likewise? How are you getting on?

How are we getting on at being neighbors to those around about us? Now just pause for a second and just think about those who you rub shoulders with on a daily basis.

[27 : 34] Picture them in your head. Who is it that you rub shoulders with every day? Who has the Lord brought into your path? Maybe over the last little while. Who can you show Christ-like compassion to?

Now let me just put a little bit of meat on that idea. What did the Samaritan do? Well he saw and he had compassion and he did something about it.

So here's the first question. Questions to ask as you're thinking that through. Who has the Lord put in my path that I can be a Christ-like neighbor to? First question to ask, who do you see? Who do you see?

Who do you share an office with? Who do you see at lunch? Who do you see in your family? Who do you see in your street?

Who do you see in your community? Who do you see on your daily commute as maybe you walk to work every day? Who do you see?

[28 : 46] Who's in your life? Secondly, do you have compassion in those that you see? How could you show that compassion this week?

To whom could you show that compassion this week? Who could do in your life? Who's in your circles? Who could do with being loved?

Who could do with being supported? Who could do with being encouraged? Who could do with being wrong? Who could do with the text?

Who could do with a hug? Who could do with being asked? Who could do with being helped? who do you see do you have compassion on them and thirdly could you do something about it and not just could you do something about it but will you do something about it i think this is where this has massively challenged me this week to think about those people who the lord has put in my circles everyday circles how can i show this christ-like compassion to my neighbors so as we leave this story this morning we've got to see that jesus sets a very high bar he both demands that high bar and by his life and his death he defines that high bar now let me just finish with the words of of john newton with a poem about this good samaritan story from luke let me just finish with these words how kind the good samaritan to him who fell among the thieves thus jesus pities fallen man and heals the wounds the soul receives gently he raised me from the ground pressed me to lean upon his arm and to every single gaping wound he poured his own all healing balm there through eternal boundless days when nature's wheel no longer rolls oh how i shall love adore and praise the one this good samaritan of souls amen let's pray together father we thank you so much for our time together this morning and father as we respond to your words we pray even now just in the silence that you would be bringing people to our minds who we can be christ-like neighbors to and father above all else will you bring christ to our minds that he isn't just our example but he is our savior and our king and so father we ask that by your spirit who is living in us you would help us to have our eyes fixed upon him father would he be the darling of our souls this week we ask so lord would you help us to live and to love your glory this week we ask in jesus name amen let's go let's go let's go let's go let's go listen seen remember ta what's good so to to the