

The Wisdom of Christ
Reckless Kindness
Bible Study 4 - Luke 10:25-37

Goals:

- 1) To be able to describe the core truth of each parable in a sentence.
- 2) To be able to explain crucial cultural and literary facets of each parable.
- 3) To be able to describe how each truth challenges the way you live your life day to day.

Expectations:

1-2 hours of prep work (reading the parable, answering the questions and preparing to discuss your findings and create a plan for real life application)

Note:

Much of the information in this study, especially the cultural observations, was taken from Kenneth Bailey in his books *Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Both would be wonderful for additional reading.

Suggested Homework:

- 1) Print out these studies or have a way of filling them out and accessing them on your phone.
- 2) Read Luke 10:25-37 before completing this study. When you finish the study, reread the passage again.
- 3) Complete the following questions after the introduction.
- 4) Come to the group with 2-3 observations from the text/study and 2-3 ways you need to apply the lesson.
- 5) Read the parable three times this week. As you read through it, connect it to your experience of God's grace and seek to focus on that this week.
- 6) Meet with another member of the group to discuss issues of accountability and growth this semester.

Introduction:

DISCUSS: Please share something that you are thankful for and why you are thankful for it.

DISCUSS: What was a reckless thing you did that ended up costing you?

DISCUSS: Reckless actions could be described as sacrificial (costly), apparently wasteful, and seemingly foolish. With that in mind, what do you think the concept of "reckless kindness" means? What would this look like?

Review:

Background for Luke: The original reader- Written to Theophilus, a patron who wanted to know more of Jesus Christ. Luke compiled Luke and Acts as the answer to how the Church got started and who Jesus was.

Purpose: **Luke's purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, who came to save the world through his death.** The parables we will study this semester will articulate different parts of that main thrust- the Son of Man's sacrificial death for all as Savior. The Son of Man is a distinctive title of note as well. It comes from Daniel, and the emphasis of this particular name was to show that Christ was not only the Messiah as foretold by the Prophets, but one from among us. Luke contains a distinctive approach to the people in the book (as noted below), and an emphasis Luke also carries is Christ's humanity and his role as Messiah.

Audience: Luke is writing specifically to Theophilus, and more broadly to Gentiles, especially those who are disenfranchised or ostracized by society. **Luke wants those people to know that the Son of Man cares for and died for them.**

Luke shows particular attention on the oppressed, unfavored and gentile recipients of Jesus' ministry, such as Samaritans, women, Romans, gentiles, children, tax collectors and other non-religious elites. Luke wanted to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save all.

Luke 9-19 has been recognized as a great chiasmic artistic/poetic masterpiece. Known by many names, this account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is laden with brilliant poetry and magnificent composition of the parables and anecdotes within.

Review Questions:

- 1) Summarize the main point of Luke's gospel in your own words.
- 2) Describe the person Luke is trying to teach.
- 3) What was one truth from last week's parable that you had the opportunity to apply this week? Did you take advantage of that opportunity?

Literary Background

As with the other parables, this account has many literary features which clarify the picture Luke is trying to paint for his readers. As we investigate the literary and cultural features which inform a right reading of the text, it should be noted that the cultural information will prove most helpful in this particular text. There are a few literary touches to this commonly known parable, but the parable itself has a far more poetic feel than a literary one. Therefore, I want to highlight some of the ways in which

Luke draws our attention to certain aspects of the parable; but it should be said that there isn't necessarily an overarching structural device utilized to highlight the main idea, as we have seen in the previous parables studied.

The main concept that the poetic devices in this specific parable direct our attention towards are thinking in terms of comparison and contrast. We are told a story about several characters and how different groups respond to the same situation. The cultural information helps us to understand better the thoughts of a Middle Easterner and the poetic information to observe the difference in their response and Jesus' comments in the discussion.

Text: Luke 10:25-37

25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"

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 wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 Jesus replied and said,

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,
and fell among robbers,
and they stripped him and beat him,
and went away leaving him half dead.

31 "And by chance a priest was going down on that road,
and when he saw him,
he passed by on the other side.

32 "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place
and saw him,
passed by on the other side.

33 "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him;
and when he saw him,
he felt compassion,

34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*;
and he put him on his own beast,
and brought him to an inn and took care of him.

35 "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said,
'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'

36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?"

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

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

Format of the discussion surrounding the parable: (summary view)

Round one: A lawyer stood up to put him to the test and said,

- (1) Lawyer: (Question 1) "What must I *do* to inherit eternal *life*?"
- (2) Jesus: (Question 2) "What about the law?"
- (2') Lawyer: (Answer to 2) "Love God and love your neighbor."
- (1') Jesus: (Answer to 1) "**Do this and live.**"

Round two: He (the lawyer), desiring to justify himself, said,

- (1) Lawyer: (Question 3) "Who is my neighbor?"
- (2) Jesus: (Question 4) "A certain man went down from Jerusalem..."
"Which of these three became a neighbor?"
- (2') Lawyer: (Question to 4) "The one who showed mercy on him."
- (1) Jesus: (Answer to 3) "**Go and continue doing likewise.**"

This summary format should bring into focus the four questions discussed in this conversation between Jesus and the lawyer. **Notice that the answers to both original questions (1 and 3) involve doing.** There is a parallel to the questioning reminiscent to the step parallelism (which highlights a connection or progression of thought) and still uses inversion (starts and ends the same, same kind of middle terms). **The dialogue uses inversion principle in that the first and last speeches are questions of do and live.** The inner speeches have to do with the law, and the conversation ends where it began.

Step parallelism within parable

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho

- (A) and he fell among *robbers*
- (B) and they stripped him and beat him
- (C) and departed, leaving him half dead
- (A) Now by coincidence, a certain *priest* was going down that road,
- (B) and when he saw him,
- (C) he passed by on the other side
- (A) Likewise also a *Levite* came to the place,
- (B) and when he saw him,
- (C) he passed by on the other side.
- (A) And a *Samaritan*, traveling, came to him,
- (B) and when he saw him,
- (C) he had compassion on him.

The general pattern observed here is this:

- (A) A *person* comes
- (B) The person acts/sees
- (C) The person responds

Remember, a step parallelism is used to highlight the connection between the phrases used. Here is the section from the first lesson to help you remember:

Step parallelism

The step parallelism is designed to show relation similarly to the standard parallelism. Usually, there are repeated words, and the same progression of thought. It draws our focus to see how the two phrases or sets are different and similar. In summary, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

My silly example:

A The one *drinking Coke* will be *happy*,
B and he will also be *full of joy*.

A I *drink Coke* and feel *happy* inside,
B and within my heart my *joy* is *full*.

Here, we see common words used and a similar progression. The author then may be seeking to draw attention to this particular progression. In addition, the change from speaking about anyone who drinks Coke to personal experience further shows another facet to the truth of the material. Remember, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

QUESTION: What does the structure point to as the source of eternal life?

QUESTION: What are the similarities between the responses of the characters in this parable? What are the differences? What might be significant about those differences?

QUESTION: Look back at the text. How are the statements in verses 28 and 37 similar? Why might this conclusion to both original questions be given?

Cultural background:

--Please highlight two sentences in this section you found particularly interesting or that helped your understanding of the parable.

Standing up to Test him:

There is an interesting cultural contradiction here. As we expect, the Pharisees and lawyers badger and test Jesus regularly, trying to trip him up or trap him. Yet in the Middle East, this initial phrase "He stood up to test him," would not have made sense. In that culture, a student stands to address a teacher out of courtesy and respect. However, we are told that this man did so to test him.

It is also demonstrated through the discourse that this man questions Jesus in order to justify himself and bring the conversation to obeying the law. Most Jewish teachers of that day were insistent on the keeping of the law, and believed that was what determined one's final destination. This lawyer

begins the conversation likely feeling self-righteous and seeking to show Jesus as a teacher soft on the law and/or demonstrate his own righteousness. Neither happens though, and in the end, it is the lawyer who has need of repentance.

Who is your neighbor?

It is also necessary to note the contemporary views of who exactly one's neighbor was from that period of time. This was not the first time this question had been asked, and upon asking this question, as noted above, the lawyer probably believes he knows who this neighbor ought to be and *has* demonstrated love to him. **He asks this question not due to ignorance, but because he believes he has already fulfilled this part of the law.**

Many teachers of the day would heartily affirm that your neighbor is your friend and relative. Here the lawyer is justified. In Leviticus 19:17-18, the neighbor is identified as "your brother and the sons of your own people." In keeping the law toward the Jew, the lawyer is probably once again, justified. There were a variety of views on who the neighbor was, but only a small population would have included even a good or God-fearing gentile or Samaritan in the category of neighbor. Both groups were viewed as enemies and it was right to scorn them, right to abandon them when they were in need, and right to stay ceremonially pure. He certainly would not have expected a story like he hears next.

The Law (the Priest):

Before we observe the response of the priest, the condition of the man is firstly of note. Jesus sets the stage perfectly for the drama that unfolds by describing the condition the man is left in by the robbers. He is said to be "half-dead," which was a Jewish expression meaning at the very point of death. One said to be in this state is not able to identify himself or speak. This is significant because the traveler cannot identify him for his dialect or language, another way to know what region he is from. He is also stripped naked, which would not allow the travelers passing him later in the parable to identify his class or ethnic association. One cannot know whether he is Jew or Gentile, slave or free, wealthy or poor. **The grace given him will be an act of kindness and sacrifice not based on any factor of his position or identity.** In addition, it was common for robbers and thieves to beat a man near death then leave him near the road so that they can ambush the next traveler who comes to help him. The road to Jericho was notorious for this kind of attack, as well. The one stopping to help him will not know who they might be helping, but also whether or not his body is just the bait in a trap for them. He might have been their slave whom they beat to draw in a more wealthy prey.

At this point in time and history, the next character to whom we are introduced is a priest, one of the religious elites. These men were in the highest class of people, and, especially among the Jews, were revered and loved. It is of note that the priest would have been riding. There are very specific cultural rules about who the rider is and who walks and how one gets from place to place. The journey along this road to Jericho was long, about 17 miles, and anyone who would be in the position of authority and class would never walk such a distance. It is also helpful to remember that Jesus' point in the parable would necessitate that each man *could* help the dying man.

Ben Sira, along with many other elite Jewish teachers of the time, is helpful to us as he wrote that one ought to be careful who was helped. This teacher taught that a Jew was a neighbor, but definitely not a gentile nor sinner. He actually wrote "Give to the good man, and do not go to the help of a sinner," and "do good to a humble man, but give nothing to a godless one." In keeping this well-known teacher's sentiments, it would have been highly counter-cultural for a priest to stoop to help a man he was not sure was, in fact, a righteous Jew. There was a balancing clause that allowed the law-abiding Jew to help someone who was being attacked by animal or bandit, but in this case, the priest does not know what has befallen this man; therefore, the concession does not apply.

In addition, there were copious amounts of similar man-made laws which were constructed around God's Law, to help them to keep that central command- love God and love others. Many of these man-made laws concerned the priest's purity. Any priest coming within four cubits (six feet or so- which is about how close he would need to go to find out even whether he were dead or not) of a dead animal or person was required to rend his garments, shave his head, bathe in a specific manner and purchase and offer sacrifices for his defilement. The ritual would have taken an entire week. This would have also gone against the tenet taught by many rabbis to not waste or destroy valuable or sacred things. In addition, were it discovered that the man was not dead, but a gentile, and the priest touched him, the same ceremony would have to be carried out for defiling his ritual purity. Any Jew hearing this story, especially one knowing the law, will applaud the priest for leaving the dying man. **He has followed "the law" to the best of his ability, down to maintaining the six foot buffer (he passed on the other side of the road), yet neglected the central tenet of God's Law that Jesus is commanding.**

The Law (the Levite):

As we move forward to deal with our next character, the Levite, it is significant to know that this journey was fairly dangerous and one necessary precaution one took was to know who was planning on making the same journey at the same time of day. There are also a lot of curves and exposed trails along the hillsides. It is extremely likely that the Levite would have already been aware that the priest was ahead of him in this journey. Coming upon the dying man and knowing that the priest had gone down before him along with his knowledge of the law as shown above would further discourage him from taking action.

If in fact the Levite knew about the priest journeying ahead of him and came upon the man beaten and left for dead, it would have been improper for him to take any action. If anyone learned that the priest had done nothing, but the Levite had stopped to help, it would be seen as disrespectful to the priest. The Levite must also bow to the priest's interpretation of the law, for he must remain in submission to the priest's interpretation because of the higher stature the priest has. **The Levite in this case would have been excused by the listener because he cannot, without breaking many cultural regulations, help this man beaten on the road.**

Samaritan Kindness:

The Samaritan demonstrates kindness from the very beginning, which is astounding given the history these two people groups had. Jews hated Samaritans, and these people were often treated with a level of contempt surpassing that of even sinners and gentiles. If a Jew tripped and a Samaritan helped him up, it would have been common for the Jew to spit in that person's face and shout insults in reply. A famous Jewish Rabbi instructed all his students never to accept any kindness or gift from a Samaritan because a tithe had not been paid on them and those items would be unclean for a Jew to receive.

The Samaritan not only stops to see the state of the man, but brings him into the nearest town. This was highly dangerous, as has already been noted, but the danger intensifies as he brings the man into the town. Vengeance killings still occur often in the Middle East, and especially when racial and societal prejudices are included do the families of the injured or diseased seek to exact payment for their loss. The situation would be comparable to an American Indian riding into a town in the old west with a scalped cowboy on his horse in the late 1800s. Even if that man had nothing to do with what happened to the "cowboy," he would be suspected of committing the act himself, or at least, being a party to it.

Already putting himself in harm's way, the Samaritan goes a step further by staying the night with the man left for dead. Commercial inns were unsavory places and known for the sexual abuses both single guests and even animals received at such a location. During that time, "prostitute" was commonly within the same meaning as "woman who tends an inn." The Samaritan staying ensures that

he will not suffer that their hands over the night. The Samaritan also lays his name on the line (he may be pursued by the family still) by offering to pay for any expenses and promising to return again, a further sign of his commitment to care for this stranger.

Conclusion:

Jesus describes in this story the sort of kindness that is required by God's standard of righteous character. This is the very kind of sacrificial love that brought Christ to the cross and it leaves no room for those who think they have arrived. This type of love is what we are called to and motivated to express because of the great love we have received. None of us are perfect, but lest we think we have appeased God with our service or good deeds, this parable helps us to realize that we still have fallen short, and that only through Christ can anyone experience this kind of love.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) **DISCUSS:** As you read through the parable, how would you sum up the meaning into one sentence? How does this fit into Luke's purpose that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save the world?

- 2) **DISCUSS:** Compare and contrast the responses of each of the men that interact with the traveler (Robbers, priest, Levite, Samaritan).

- 3) **DISCUSS:** Describe one cultural feature of this parable and how it gives a fuller sense to the meaning you mentioned in question 1.

- 4) **DISCUSS:** How do you only show kindness to those like you? What are three reasons it is difficult to show kindness to those who are different from you?

- 5) **DISCUSS:** What are two ways you can demonstrate this "Samaritan Kindness" to those around you this week at PBF/ABF/class/church?

- 6) **DISCUSS:** How has God shown you this kind of grace and acceptance, even though just like the Samaritan, he had no reason to? Spend a few minutes recounting God's reckless grace toward you and thanking Him together for it.

ANSWERS: (spoiler alert)

- 1) The purpose of the parable is to show that the essence of the law is loving God and loving neighbor. It also seeks to demonstrate God's love and describe how we are to live for God (Jesus keeping that Law through his sacrificial love and commanding us to do likewise).
- 2) The Robbers stole from him and beat him, taking away everything. The priest thought himself too great and valued his ceremonial purity over the life of this man. The Levite sought to save face and conformed to the cultural expectation instead of loving the man. The Samaritan risked greatly and loved greatly and likely would have paid a price for the kindness he gave.
- 3) Answers will vary.
- 4) Answers will vary.
- 5) Answers will vary.
- 6) Answers will vary.