

THE LAW-YERS DILEMMA

Speaker: Mr. Ajay David

Date: 22-03-2026

Scripture: Luke 9, 10

While the message for today is broadly based on the parable of the Good Samaritan, I would like to take you a little earlier into the context, and we'd be seeing from Luke 9 onwards, going over into ch. 10 where the actual parable is found.

There was a person called Martin Kähler who in the early 1900s talked about the gospels as 'passion narratives with a long introduction.' We know that the word 'passion' used in passion narrative that we typically talk about is what we see in the church calendar from next week which is Palm Sunday onwards leading into the time when Jesus was arrested, crucified, buried and then rose up again.

In fact, with Luke, the journey towards Jerusalem starts in Ch. 9, about 1/3rd of the book itself, already the agenda is set. In the gospel of John, roughly half of the book is the passion narrative. Right now is a beautiful season for us to be looking at that. If you've been following through the devotion booklet, "Shaped by the Lamb", you would have seen the various aspects of Jesus's life and His attributes.

So, let's look at Luke 9.

⁴⁴ "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men."

At this point, Jesus is saying that this is what's going to happen. He's starting the preparation for them to understand what's happening, because obviously the disciples are looking at a different way of what is to happen. They're looking at a Messiah who comes in all power and authority and glory. And here is a Messiah who's been talking about different things and now things are going to look different for them.

⁴⁵ Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵² and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. ⁵³ But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem."

They did not receive Him. Who were they? The Samaritans.

The Jews used to go to Jerusalem once a year at a minimum. Three times was mandated, but if they lived far off, they at least made the journey once a year. They were called to worship there. And the context of vs. 51-53 was north of Jerusalem, in Galilee, in a place called Capernaum.

Jesus is sending out His followers to prepare the way for Him. Basically, He had a large group of people who were travelling with Him, and the logistics were not easy. You couldn't call ahead and say, "Hey, book me 20 rooms at the Hilton." It didn't work that way. Jerusalem was about 200 km away from Capernaum, so they would need to stop overnight. Jesus would typically end up speaking in those places, so they had to find the largest houses in the area which could accommodate them.

There were two routes:

- One was through Samaria, which was in the middle of Capernaum and Jerusalem.
- The other was through the Jordan Valley. The river Jordan runs north-south, and that was the longer route.

Jesus chooses to go through Samaria. We don't know for certain that He took that route going further, but when He sends His people, the Samaritans say no. Verse 53 says they did not receive Him because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. Why? Because His purpose at that point was that He was going to worship at Jerusalem.

And for the Samaritans, this was an offense. Why? That's the history behind the distinction between the Samaritans and the rest of the Jews. The Samaritans were, in a sense, an outcome of a generation when the Assyrians had invaded and they had taken away the top leadership. They had left a lot of people behind and these people started intermarrying with non-Jews. So essentially, the Samaritans were half-breeds. And there was a lot of animosity between them and the Jews.

The Samaritans did not take the complete Old Testament which the Jews held onto. They decided that only the Torah, the first five books, or the books of Moses, as we call them, were what was proper. The rest, after that, was all corruption. The whole line of David and the rest, was all corruption in their minds. And so, they did not see Jerusalem as a place to worship. They had built up their own temple at their place, in competition to the temple at Jerusalem. Incidentally, the Jews had gone and broken that temple because it was an abomination to them.

So, very clearly, these two groups of people were at odds with each other. And it's quite surprising that Jesus brings attention into this discussion by using a Samaritan as an example of who a good person is when it comes to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Incidentally, the phrase Good Samaritan is known and used by everybody as somebody who helps somebody else, and does good.

So, Jesus is not received. Let us shift to Ch. 10 and read the immediate context of our parable for the day.

"10 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go."

You might wonder whether this calling and sending the 70 two by two, is the same as what is written about in the other gospels. But in both those places, it actually only talks about His sending out 12 people two by two. One is in Matthew 10:1, and the other is in Mark 6:7. Just for context, in Matthew 10, he actually tells the disciples not to go to the villages of Samaria.

Let's get to the whole passage which goes from 1-24. We will read parts of it.

"2 Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

1. There is a certain urgency that He is coming up with right now. He's not asking them to go and do more. He's asking them to pray, saying that the Lord of the harvest will send more laborers. So while there is an urgency, the urgency is asking them to go back to the Lord to help with that urgency.

4 "Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road."

2. Here, He's asking them to be dependent on God for provision, asking them to be ready for God to show them where they would go, how they would survive. "That's not your call; you do not have to think about that."

“⁵ But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. ⁹ And heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰ But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.’ ”

3. They need to understand that the outcomes are not for them to worry about, to try to engineer. Typically, if we are given a task, our whole outlook tends to be how I can make it happen. If I have to share the gospel with someone, how can I convince them to accept it? But what Jesus is saying is that the outcome is the Lord’s. Your job is to go and engage. The message, whether it is accepted or not, is to say that the kingdom of God has come.

Moving on when the people return.

“⁴⁷ Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”

Wow! But Jesus goes on to say:

²⁰ Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

This is what He’s pointing them to, saying that whatever you’re doing, that is not as much of a highlight as the consequence, the end state – that your names are written in heaven.

What is our takeaway from what we’ve read so far? We see first that being part of God’s kingdom is not about being important. It’s not about knowing it all. Bear that in mind because we’re going to see a contrast to that shortly. We are called to say yes to the purposes of God. That is our mandate. And our choice after that is to live the way God wants us to live. Are we living the way God wants us to live? Are we following His mandate?

The context to the Good Samaritan’s passage is typically often ignored. But if you really look at that, it’s extremely important because it actually lays the foundation to pointing to the fact that the Good Samaritan’s story is not as much about doing good, but has more to do with God’s purposes, the love of God.

“²⁵ And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”

²⁷ So he answered and said, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

²⁸ And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”

Now let’s look at who this person is. It talks about a lawyer, not to be confused with a civil or criminal lawyer. At that point in time, the law was the word of God. The lawyers or scribes, as they were also called, were focused on teaching the law, understanding it, studying it, focusing on knowing it so well that they could help others understand it. In fact, they had gone so far as to take the basic 10 commandments and the rest of the law as we find it in the first five books of the Old Testament, and made them into 613 laws. They were called the mitzvot, and each of these was called the mitzvah. They were expected to know all these laws. Even the ordinary man was supposed to know all these laws.

These lawyers or scribes were experts in terms of interpretations or understandings of these laws, and were the ones who went and explained it to the people. So, this man essentially was probably by the fact when Jesus says, here he is spending all his time and energy on one thing which is he study of the law. And Jesus is telling men who probably didn't understand the law. Those were the 70 he sent out, and they come back, and Jesus is telling them: Your names are written in heaven. So that leads them to the question.

Verse 25 says that he stood up and tested Him. Standing up was because they were used to sitting on the ground. So standing up was a mark of respect, and they would typically stand up. That's the way they would address the person who was teaching. But he definitely didn't have that respect internally because he was trying to trap Jesus. He was trying to test Him.

And Jesus does something. He turns the question around and says: "What's your understanding of the law? You're a lawyer, obviously. So, what's your understanding of the law?" That's when this man says the first part of the *Shema*, as well as adding the part about loving your neighbor, which was not part of the *Shema*, but which he, as a lawyer, or somebody who understood the Ten Commandments well, knew that that was the second part of the Ten Commandments which was focused on the neighbor, on the people around you.

So, when he says this, and Jesus says "Go and do, and you will live," he was expecting a bit more. He didn't expect Jesus to finish there. v. 29 says "But he, wanting to justify himself." He was a teacher of the law, and he wanted to be able to say, "Yes, I've done everything. I've ticked all the boxes."

If you attended service last Wednesday, you would have heard Capt. Abhishek Babu talking about just that. Quite a few in this season of Lent would get into that mode of saying: I'm off chocolates for this season, or I'm not watching movies, or other things. Are we getting into the mode of ticking the boxes, rather than getting onto that place of saying: this is what God wants me to do, and I'm doing it.

He was expecting Jesus to say: Your neighbors are the people around you, or within 200 meters or whatever his expectation was. Because the moment he had summarized it, the definition had become so broad that he was in that place where he needed to be confronted with the Word. Instead of repenting and seeking grace, because that's what leads us into a full understanding of His love, he gets into wanting the right words. And that's when Jesus steps in with a totally different answer.

Let's see what happens when we don't allow ourselves to get into that 'tick the box' kind of behavior. He's getting into a mode of self-justification, and you can almost hear Jesus saying, "But I am the Justifier. You cannot justify yourself." Further on in Luke 16:15, Jesus addresses the Pharisees saying, "You are those who justify yourself before men, but God knows your hearts."

That should lead us to the question: What about you and me? Where is our heart? Are we in that place where we are trying to justify ourselves or are we accepting the justification that Jesus gives? Because when Jesus justifies, when He sets us right with God, we reach a totally different place. Not a place where we are trying to scrounge around saying: Have I done this? Have I ticked this box? But we go into the place where we say: Am I living the way God wants me to live?

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." When we become the righteousness of God, when we accept

that, when we are under that banner, under that protection of Jesus, under His righteousness – things change.

- We don't strive towards God's approval because we know it's already a done deal. We are already approved by God. It's not about what we are, what we have done. It's about what Jesus has done for us because we know that nothing can come close to what Jesus has done for us.
- We've received complete forgiveness and complete acceptance. Not partial. There isn't 80% or 90%, and the remaining 10% is for you to do. It's completely done.
- There's freedom from guilt and condemnation. Romans 8:1 reminds us as we've been reminded earlier "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We don't live in fear of God's wrath because we know that between the wrath of God and us, there is Jesus and His righteousness. And because of that, we have a new identity and a new relationship. We are adopted as God's children. We are His, with full access to God the Father because of the finished work on the cross.

Let's get to the actual parable here. Luke 10:30-37

³⁰And so Jesus then answered him and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now, by chance, a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²Likewise, a Levite came and looked and passed by on the other side. ³³But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. And he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said to him, take care of him. And whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you. ³⁶So which of these three do you think was a neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

³⁷And the lawyer responded, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, go and look, do likewise.

A quick understanding: Jericho was in the plains, Jerusalem was in the hills. It was about 2,500 feet above, and the way down was roughly about 28 km to Jericho. It was through narrow valleys with sharp turns, all of where a person could be easily ambushed. It was so dangerous that it was known as 'the way of blood' or *adom*.

That's the context in which Jesus is setting this story, and the hero of the story, He makes a Samaritan. We already saw the tension with the Samaritans earlier. Yet, Jesus still brings them into play.

We see a man who is robbed, beaten, stripped, left for dead. There is a priest who is crossing. He might have had very valid reasons why he was not going to touch the person just in case he was dead, or even the wounds would expose him to blood and to a lengthy purification ritual. So also the Levite. The difference between the priest and the Levite was that the Levite actually came and at least looked at the man, while the priest went off the other way.

The Samaritan who kind of becomes the hero of the story, comes; he stops, he looks, he had compassion. He went to the man, he bandaged his wounds, putting oil and wine on them to soothe them. then he put him on his own animal, which means he would have had to walk. He took him to

the inn and asked the innkeeper to take care of him. He gave him money which covered the two months' rent for the man to stay at the inn. He gives that money which probably was all the cash that he had. By stopping, he was exposing himself to the same robbers. He also promised to pay the innkeeper more if required. Obviously, he was used to coming on that road, so the innkeeper probably knew him. He says, "Whatever else happens, I will take care of that."

Incidentally, if that man had required more care, and there was nobody to pay for that care, that man could even have ended up becoming the innkeeper's slave. That was the way things worked at that time. If you owed money to somebody, you became a slave to that person.

What we see here is a key word – compassion which Jesus brings into play. Incidentally, this word is used in the New Testament about 12 times, out of which eight times is used about Jesus. Three times it is used by Jesus Himself in the parables, and once by the man who brings his son who is possessed to Jesus, and he asks Jesus to have compassion. Jesus is the one with compassion. The word in Greek has its root in the word gut, the intestine or entrails. So from the inside wells up this compassion.

That's what we see with Jesus. He comes to us in our place of being beaten, of being bruised. We might not have physical bruises on us, but we might have wounds which are caused by people around us, by situations in our workplaces. We might be wounded by circumstances in our families. Whatever it is, Jesus comes. He bandages us, He pours oil and the wine to cleanse, and He takes care of us even to the point of coming back again for us.

Then, if we look at this question which the lawyer asks to justify himself, saying "Who IS my neighbor?", Jesus turns that around so beautifully. When the question comes to us, it gets changed to: Who is that person in need that God is placing in my path today? It might not be the whole world, but God has placed those needs all around us. That need may be in your office. It might be in your home. It might be a neighbor who is living alone without any help. It might be somebody in the vicinity. Maybe it's a security guard around you who's going through a tough time with his family far away and not in the best of situations.

We might know the order of priority in terms of keeping God first, and then, other things following. But until and unless that knowledge gets translated to our heart, it is of no use. The priest knew the law, but that didn't get him to stop and intervene in the case of that wounded man. So, knowing that we need to do something is only going to happen when the knowledge of the Love of God gets translated into our life. When it becomes a part of us by the work of the Holy Spirit, that it says that this is really what God wants from us. We need to consider that it's not just learning a rule like the lawyer, but it's like a heart-level activity that the Holy Spirit brings into our mind, and our lives.

As we conclude this part of the passage, the world is desperately in need of Jesus. Do we take Him into those situations that He is calling us into? Are we in that place of being able to say, "Yes, Lord. I will go. I will be Your hands and feet. I will step in into this situation. I will meet that neighbor. I will put a comforting hand around that colleague's shoulder. The person who is being bullied, the person who is probably being asked to leave at the end of the month. Or if I am that person who is in a desperate situation, am I reaching out to the Lord saying: Lord, You provide. I want You to be the person who is sending people my way."

Am I looking to the Lord for answers? The Holy Spirit is waiting. The Lord is waiting as we look at this passage, as we consider this whole chapter and in the context of what is happening in this time, as we are seeing and hearing various messages. Are we truly being drawn to Christ? Are we truly being drawn to have the work of the Holy Spirit complete that transition from head knowledge to heart

knowledge? Are we allowing that work of the Holy Spirit to bring us to make us more like Christ? Willing to stand in that place, willing to be His hands and His feet.

As we consider these things, I pray that the Lord will speak into our lives even through probably every devotion that we read, every passage that we read, because we see that it's all one trajectory ending at the cross. And as we prepare ourselves not just to deal with the cross, but with the resurrection, with the ascension, I pray that the Lord will do His work in each one of our hearts.

Let's pray.

Lord, the more we look to You and inwards in our hearts, the more You point us outwards to love our neighbors, to serve the hurting, to share your light. We thank You for turning our gaze from ourselves to help others. Help us to follow where You lead us. in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
