He Is Our Righteousness

Leader's Guide

Session 1:
Introduction/The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Context

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Luke 10:25–29

Introduction to the Bible Study Series

Does our Lord teach justification by grace through faith? We all immediately answer, "Yes, of course." But, where does He teach it? And how? We may find ourselves uncomfortably ill-prepared to answer those two questions. We know Jesus *must* teach justification by grace, but we are more accustomed to turning to Paul for help with this doctrine than we are to turning to our Lord. And it's not only that, there are many — even people who claim to be Biblical scholars — who try to make us doubt our answer to the first question. In this study we will look together at a passage that some have used to argue that Jesus did *not* teach justification by grace alone and through faith alone. And it's a passage that many of us may find confusing when set side by side with Rom. 3:28 or Gal. 2:15–16. We will discover to our great comfort and joy that Luke 10:25–37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan) does, in fact, teach justification by grace, and it does so in a beautiful and memorable way.

Setting the Context: In Luke

Luke is the only evangelist to include the parable of the Good Samaritan in his Gospel, so we will focus on Luke as we set the parable in its historical and literary context. The instructor will be the best judge of how much review is needed of the early chapters of Luke, but many students will be familiar with Luke's birth narratives, his account of John the Baptist's early ministry and his telling of our Lord's temptation. Chapters 4–9 provide numerous episodes from Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee both in terms of His teaching and in terms of healings and other miracles. Jesus has already told several parables, and He has explained His reasons for using parables by quoting the prophet Isaiah (Luke 8:10, quoting Isaiah 6). He has gathered around Himself a large, popular following, often speaking to crowds numbering in the thousands (see Luke 9:14 and, later, 12:1). He has also called closer circles of disciples to learn from Him, and He has sent out both the 12 and the 72 to proclaim the

Kingdom ahead of Him. Among the disciples are those who have seen Him transfigured (Luke 9:28–36) and those who have confessed Him to be "the Christ of God" (Luke 9:20). By the time the reader reaches Luke 10, he has already heard Jesus twice announce His coming death. Indeed, Jesus has now "set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), and our parable falls within Luke's extensive account of the things Jesus says and does on the way.

Setting the Context: A Parable

It may seem strange or even ill-advised to turn to the parables of Jesus to find His teaching on justification, but the parables form an extremely important part of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. Fully one third of His recorded words come to us in the form of parables. It's also true that several of the parables explicitly raise the question of justification. One example that comes readily to mind is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Jesus concludes the parable by telling us that the tax collector "went down to his house *justified*" (Luke 18:14, emphasis added).

1. Read together Luke 18:9–14. What does "justified" mean in verse 14? How might verse 9 provide help in understanding verse 14?

Most parables are not this explicit concerning justification.[1] It's certainly true that not every parable needs to teach justification by grace; on the other hand, what would it mean to claim that a particular parable teaches something *contrary to* justification by grace? How could we then defend our position that justification is the central and unifying teaching of *all* Scripture? This study will focus on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) to show that such a claim is groundless.

2. Why does Jesus teach with parables?

Setting our parable in its context involves understanding it as part of Luke's Gospel, but it also involves understanding how it works as a parable. It will prove helpful in the course of the study to pause very briefly here to consider Jesus' explanation of why He teaches with parables.

Turn to Luke 8:8b–10. (A fuller discussion of these questions would include also looking at Matt. 13:10–17 and Mark 4:10–12.) Why does Jesus teach with parables? The passage quoted by Jesus from Isaiah 6 may make it sound like His purpose was to *prevent* most of the people from understanding Him! One helpful approach to this difficult passage is to remind ourselves that, for learning to begin to take place, we need to admit that we don't already know everything about the matter in question. There is significant *un*-learning that often has to take place before the learning can happen. There is a parallel between what Jesus says here about true learning and what He says about true healing in Luke 5:31. [Another study in the CTCR series is called "Unjustifiable Faiths." The parables force the hearer to begin to question whether *his* faith, what he has been trusting in, is, in fact, trustworthy. The parables expose many of these man-made "faiths" as "unjustifiable."]

Setting the Context: Defining the Limits of "the Passage"

The relationship of Luke 10:25–37 to the passage immediately preceding it is a matter of disagreement. While some claim that the "and behold" of Luke 10:25 signals the beginning of a completely new episode, others see this phrase making a close connection between the lawyer's questions and what Jesus said about Himself in Luke 10:21–24. Luke's own usage favors the latter view.[2]

3. Read together Luke 10:21–24. What difference does it make for our reading of Luke 10:25–29 if we assume the lawyer was present to hear Jesus' words in verses 21–22, or even 21–24?

Although the interpretation of the parable given in this study does not depend on proving that the lawyer did hear Jesus' words, it is interesting to note that, when Luther preached on this parable, the lectionary reading for that Sunday began two verses earlier at Luke 10:23.

[1] The matter of (self-)justification is raised immediately after the telling of the parable of the dishonest manager (Luke 16:1–13), although the word "justify" does not occur in the parable itself.

[2] The expression καὶ ἰδού (*kai idou*; "and behold") occurs 26 times in Luke and eight times in Acts. Luke's general pattern is to set the scene by means of an opening description and then use καὶ ἰδού (kai idou) to focus on a particular event or development; a good example is Luke 19:1–2. Apart from our passage, the two places where καὶ ἰδού (*kai idou*) may seem to signal a clear break from what has gone before are Luke 23:50 and 24:13. And yet, even for these two passages, it would be very difficult to argue that the καὶ ἰδού (*kai idou*) signals a break from the context. Does Luke intend for us to imagine a large gap in space and time between the women witnessing the death of our Lord and Joseph going to request His body (Luke 23) and between Peter viewing the empty tomb and the risen Christ appearing to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24)?

Setting the Context: The Leading Questions

When studying a parable, it is always important to notice what situation or question serves as the occasion for the parable. (Recall the question above about the relationship between Luke 18:9 and 18:14.) As we read verses 25–29, we see that several questions are raised that set the stage for the parable. Since they lead both the lawyer and the reader into the parable, we will refer to them as "leading questions." Read together Luke 10:25-29 and note the questions below.

LEADING QUESTION NO. 1:
"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? (v. 25, lawyer)

LEADING QUESTION NO. 2:
"What is written in the Law? (v. 26, Jesus)

LEADING QUESTION NO. 3:
"How do you read it? (v. 26, Jesus)

LEADING QUESTION NO. 4:
"And who is my neighbor? (v. 29, lawyer)

Each of these questions is important in its own way, so let's look at them a little more closely.

Leading Question No. 1

The question in verse 25 would be better translated, "Teacher, having done what, will I inherit eternal life?" or "Teacher, after I have done what, will I inherit eternal life?" This is exactly the same question asked by the ruler in Luke 18:18, but it's actually very different from the question asked by the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30 and even more so from the question of the crowds in Acts 2:37. The English translations often obscure the differences, so compare the questions in the Greek (with a more wooden translation beneath each question):

Luke 10:25 διδάσκαλε, τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω;
didaskale, ti poiēsas zōēn aiōnion klēronomēsō?
Teacher, having done what, will I inherit eternal life?

Luke 18:18 διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ, τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω;
didaskale agathe, ti poiēsas zōēn aiōnion klēronomēsō?
Good Teacher, having done what, will I inherit eternal life?

Acts 16:30 κύριοι, τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ;
kyrioi, ti me dei poiein hina sōthō?
Sirs, what is it necessary for me to be doing in order that I may be saved?

Acts 2:37 τί ποιήσωμεν, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί;
Ti poiēsōmen, andres adelphoi?
What shall we do, brothers?

The first two questions, with their aorist participles, suggest that the questioners are looking for a standard, one which they may have already met. "When I have done what" suggests the idea "What is the standard I need to meet? Please tell me, so that I will know if I have already met it or not." The jailer's question is already more urgent: the με δεῖ (*me dei;* "it is necessary for me" = "I have to") suggests that he wants to know — because he doesn't — what he has to do. The present tense of the infinitive places the focus on what he needs to *be doing* now, and the ἵνα-clause (*hina*-clause) shows that he has a purpose in all of this: he wants to be saved. The most desperate question of all is the question of the crowd in Acts 2. The deliberative subjunctive ποιήσωμεν (*poiēsōmen;* "shall we do?") shows that they are searching for alternatives and that they're hoping the apostles can give them some possible way out of their desperate situation. The lawyer in our text, remember, is "testing" Jesus. It's not so much that he desperately needs to know what to do; rather, he wants to find out if *Jesus* has the right answer. And it's at this point that we readers really wonder if the lawyer had heard Jesus' earlier words in Luke 10:21–24: Was Jesus saying that "these things" had been hidden from the lawyer? How would this teacher, who claims to know "all things" make plain the Father's will?

4. When you find yourself thinking about your salvation, which of the questions above are you most likely to ask? Do you think in terms of a standard you need to meet, of a minimum entrance requirement? Do you simply wonder what can be done?

Leading Questions No. 2 and No. 3

Jesus responds by asking two questions of His own, and His two questions remind us that there are two very important ways we can go astray when trying to find answers to our questions about salvation. First, do we know what God has said in His Word? Second, have we understood God's Word correctly? How have we read and interpreted it? Either ignorance or misunderstanding can lead people to incorrect answers to Question No. 1. In our passage, the lawyer knows what God has said in His Word, and Jesus responds

that the man has answered correctly. The problems, if there are any, will clearly be with respect to understanding the Scriptures correctly.

Leading Question No. 4

The lawyer's follow-up question seems a perfectly natural one, given the way the conversation has progressed. And quite often, we're so eager to get to the parable itself that we don't think about this question carefully enough. Two points stand out as especially important for our present study of this passage.

- Notice that the lawyer asks only about his neighbor — he does not ask about his God. In one of his sermons on this passage, Luther wrote,

  He does not ask: Who is my God? As though he would say: "I owe God nothing, with God I am in good standing. I am also inclined to think that I am under obligations to no man; yet, I would like to know who my neighbor is?"[3]

  It is extremely ironic that the lawyer does not ask, "And who is my God?" since the lawyer's God is standing right in front of him and he does not recognize Him.

- Luke gives us the lawyer's motivation for asking this question: ὁ δὲ θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν (*ho de thelōn dikaiōsai heauton;* "But he, desiring to justify himself"). Since we are asking what this parable teaches about justification, it is especially important for us to note that the lawyer's question comes in an attempt at self-justification. And yet, we need to ask, "Why should this lawyer need to justify himself? Justification for what?" Plummer's discussion is brief but to the point:

  > Not merely "willing," but "*wishing* to justify himself." For what? Some say, for having omitted to perform this duty in the past. Others, for having asked such a question, the answer to which had been shown to be so simple. The latter is perhaps nearer the fact; but it almost involves the other. "Wishing to put himself in the right," he points out that the answer given is not adequate, because there is doubt as to the meaning of "one's neighbour."[4]

It would, then, be putting too much theological weight on this infinitive to understand it as "wishing to justify himself before God," but Plummer is correct that this greater matter of justification is not lurking far in the background. The connection between the two — that is, between a person's behavior among his "neighbors" and his standing before God — will be raised again by Jesus' words following the parable.

Looking Ahead

In our next session, we will carefully read through the parable together, but this is most likely a very familiar parable to most of us. After our discussion in this session, where do you think these "leading questions" are leading us? What would you say the parable is about? What is its message for us? [The leader should not try to respond to or correct the students' answers to these two questions, but he may want to take note of them for his own sake. The remaining sessions of the course will address these questions.]

[3] Martin Luther, "Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity," vol. 3, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 26–27.

[4] Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, *International Critical Commentary*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 285.

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Session 2:
A Story to Answer Questions and to Reframe Them

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Session 2:
A Story to Answer Questions and to Reframe Them

Luke 10:30–35

Introductory Remarks

Although this is not the place for a comprehensive review of the interpretation of parables, a few introductory remarks ought to prove helpful here. Some instructors and students may be familiar with the history of the interpretation of *this* parable. Almost without exception, from the earliest commentaries we possess until the interpretation of John Calvin, the parable of the Good Samaritan was interpreted as an allegory of salvation in Christ. The man traveling to Jericho was understood to be a picture of fallen humanity, and the Samaritan who rescued him was understood to be a picture of Christ. This approach is quite evident in Luther's preaching on this text. There will not be time to present the detailed ancient and medieval interpretations of the parable and then ask for student response. It is very likely that even raising the issue of whether the parable is to be read as an allegory or not will derail the discussion so that it never returns to a careful reading of the text itself. Even modern interpreters often present the student of the parable with a false dichotomy when they suggest that the parable is *either* an allegory about Christ *or* a story about human love and compassion. Rather than raise such big issues with neither preparation nor time to deal with them satisfactorily, this study suggests the parable be introduced as follows.

We have already seen how the story that Jesus tells is in response to the lawyer's questions. Although his two questions are related, the parable is most directly a response to his second question. Try to imagine yourself in the lawyer's place. How would you expect the story to answer your question? Because we know the parable so well, we usually don't take the time to ask about what the *lawyer* would have been expecting and how *he* might have heard it. If Jesus is going to answer the lawyer's question at all, wouldn't you expect the story to be about a man who has to decide or who learns how to decide who his neighbor is? Wouldn't you expect the story to begin, "Oh, so you want to know who your neighbor is? Let me tell you a story about a man who had to

discover the answer to that very question. Let me tell you a story about a person just like you. There once was this man. …"? The fact that this "certain man" is assigned no ethnic identity allows every hearer to identify with this character.

Read together Luke 10:30–35. Because this parable is such a familiar one, the instructor should lead the students back through the text, pointing out the following:

1. Luke 10:30: "he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead."

The man loses much more than his money. Whether or not the beating indicates that the man tried to resist or simply indicates the utter cruelty of the robbers is not important for the story. What is important to notice is that the man is left with absolutely nothing by which he can slow his dying or save his own life. He has no clothing. No strength. No money. No food. No transportation. Was he conscious? We don't know, and the strange description ἡμιθανῆ (*hēmithanē*; "half dead") is not very precise, but in the story he makes no sound or movement to attract attention to himself as a plea for help. This does not bode well for us, does it? The character who was supposed to provide an answer to the question is now helpless and speechless. The protagonist is now a victim.

2. Luke 10:31–32: "a priest … [and] a Levite"

Why these two characters? Fitzmyer notes that both priests and Levites enjoyed a "privileged status" in Palestinian Jewish society: "their levitical and/or Aaronic heritage … associated them intimately with the Temple cult and the heart of Jewish life as worship of Yahweh."[1] And both Fitzmyer[2] and Just[3] provide additional background concerning the connection of purity and defilement with the parable. Neither Jesus nor Luke, however, draws our attention to these things. Although the respect that a priest or a Levite may have enjoyed at the time is likely behind their being "cast" this way in the parable, the importance of the laws concerning "corpse defilement" has been questioned in more recent discussions of the parable.[4] If we are still trying to hear the story along with the lawyer, a somewhat different concern emerges here. From such a perspective, we find ourselves thinking, along with the lawyer and the half-dead man, "I can't believe neither of them would stop. I would have stopped to help a priest or a Levite in need!"

The word ἡμιθανής (*hēmithanēs*; "half dead") occurs only in Luke 10:30 in the New Testament, and it is a rare word in ancient Greek generally. It does occur one time as well, though, in the Septuagint, and it is interesting to compare that passage with our text. 4 Maccabees 4:1-14 gives an account of an attempt by a certain Apollonius to plunder the riches of the Temple in Jerusalem. As Apollonius approached the Temple with his forces, a cavalry of angels rode down out of heaven brandishing weapons that flashed with lightning. At such a sight, Apollonius fell to the ground "half dead" in the Court of the Gentiles and implored the people there to intercede for him. In this case the high priest did intercede and Apollonius was delivered. This story from 4 Maccabees may suggest to us what would have been expected to happen in our parable: the priest — whose very vocation was one of intercession — would have offered the saving help to the man and provided the story with a perfect illustration of biblical neighborliness. But, the expected rarely happens in parables.

One further point should be made here, and it has to do with our Lord's reason for teaching by means of parables. At least one way that we "hear but do not understand" (Luke 8:9-10) is when we hear the Word and force it to say what we want it to say, when we hear the Word in a way that only confirms our current misshapen or inadequate knowledge of God and His ways. It would, in this case, be a terrible and tragic irony if the telling of this parable only served to reinforce our prejudices about certain kinds of people. We instructors of the Word must do all in our power to guard against our people hearing the parable in such a way that it teaches that all Jews are hypocrites or that all outwardly religious people are self-righteous and sanctimonious. Or that minority groups, marginalized people and outsiders in general are all righteous simply because of their membership in those categories. Jesus tells a story that breaks down old categories of thinking and forces the hearer to re-think his questions. We must not let the parable become a "biblical ethnic joke" — as if there could be such a thing.

[1] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV*, vol. 28A, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 883.

[2] Fitzmyer, 883.

[3] Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 9:51–24:53*, *Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 447–448.

[4] See, for a good example, Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 355. On this point, it is also worth noting Joel Green's point: "[I]t is remarkable and probably significant that no inside information regarding the incentive(s) of the priest and Levite is provided. The stark reality is simply that they do nothing for this wounded man." See Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 430.

3. Luke 10:33–35: "A Samaritan"

Here again, the commentaries and parable studies will provide abundant social and historical background on how a Samaritan would have been regarded by Jesus' original hearers.[5] And here again, we need to be careful that we don't lose sight of the story for the sake of the background. Still, the centuries-long animosity between Jews and Samaritans would certainly have determined the lawyer's response to this unexpected twist in the story. The Samaritan is just the sort of man that the lawyer seems to want to exclude from his own legal and moral responsibility, the sort of man he desires not to have to love, and this is certainly not the quarter from which he would want rescue to come were he actually the half-dead man in the story.

Two minor details, often unnoticed, merit brief mention. First of all, notice that this is the first character who is *not* described as "going down" the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Perhaps not for the lawyer but certainly for the reader, Jerusalem has taken on very foreboding connotations. Jerusalem is the place where Jesus is headed right now in the Gospel narrative, and it's the place where He is going in order to die. As in the story, deliverance, rescue and life do not come from Jerusalem, so also Jerusalem will not be the place from which life comes until the Jerusalem of temple and Law is fulfilled and transformed into the Jerusalem of the cross and the empty tomb.

Second, we are perhaps too quick to suppose that the lawyer was driven by his loveless sense of freedom from responsibility toward Samaritans and others that he could not regard as God's chosen — and that this shows how far he was from being a student of the Christ. Turn back for a moment to Luke 9:51–56. Had not James and John, *His disciples*, just wanted to see an entire village of Samaritans consumed by the fiery wrath of Heaven? The lawyer was likely not the only one there who was uncomfortably unhappy with a tale of a *good* Samaritan.

Our Lord, however, spends no time whatsoever with the man's ethnic identity, and what impresses the hearer of the story is the comprehensiveness of this man's compassion. He sees immediately to the wounds, applying soothing oil and cleansing wine, then binding them. His compassion for the man not yet nearly exhausted, he transports the man to a place of shelter from threat and element, where healing can begin. As with his resources, so is the Samaritan generous with his time: he spends the night caring for the stranger. Knowing that more will be needed to ensure the poor man's return to health, he contracts with the innkeeper to make sure that the care will continue as the Samaritan continues toward his original destination.[6] All expenses are to be charged to the Samaritan: the ἐγώ (*egō*; "I") of verse 35 is emphatic, meaning, "I, and not the wounded man, am responsible for payment."[7] No matter what is required to restore the man, the bill will be settled in full by the Samaritan when he passes that way again on his return trip.

More impressive still is the fact that Jesus offers no explanation for this Samaritan's extravagant compassion.

Looking Ahead

Are you beginning to think differently about this parable? What questions do you have about what was covered in this session? What questions do you still have about this parable?

[5] See, for example, Just, 448; Green, 431 and 404–405; and Snodgrass, 345–347.

[6] It is notoriously complicated to "convert" ancient currency into contemporary value. Lenski is correct, though, that we should not get the impression that this is a fairly modest amount of money. Contrary to our situation, where a couple of days' worth of wages would not keep you long at a hotel, including full room service and nursing care, Lenski provides good evidence that the Samaritan's two denarii may well have covered two months' worth of the invalid's expenses. For the details, see R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), 607.

[7] Plummer, 288.

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