

## Race

Luke 10:25-37

By [David Strain](#)

April 19, 2015

Let me once again welcome you to First Presbyterian Church. I'm so glad you're with us especially if you're here at the invitation of a friend. Perhaps you're here to see your child play and bless us so wonderfully with their music. If you'd like to talk to anyone, as Billy said earlier, about anything that you hear tonight, I'd be really glad to meet with you afterwards. I'll be down front here after the service or you can use the tear off page in the bulletin or even text the word "eclipse" to the number provided there and we will get back to you quickly. Our agenda tonight is simply to look honestly together in the light of the message in the Bible at some of the big barriers that people have to faith in Jesus. And so far in this series we've looked at money in the way that money can sometimes get in the road of the claims of Jesus Christ. And then last time we looked at sex and sexuality which, in my opinion, is perhaps the single biggest barrier of our culture that causes people to resist the claims Jesus makes upon us in these days. And tonight we're going to think about the subject of race. On the backs of the pews in front of you, you will see copies of the Bible. If you would, take one please and turn with me in it to page 869; page 869. About halfway, actually at the top of the left-hand column, page 869, you'll see verse 25 of Luke chapter 10 and we're going to read from verse 25 through verse 37. Before we do that, would you bow your heads with me as we pray together? Let's pray.

*Lord our God, we do pray that You would help us sit in humility under the teaching of Your Word tonight, even if it stings and convicts us of sin. We pray that our prejudices and our pride will cease to prevent us from trusting in Christ, believing His promises, obeying His commands. We pray for anyone here who rejects Jesus' claims on their lives because of past experiences with the prejudices of those who call themselves Christians. Help us not to measure Jesus by the failures of those who claim to follow Him. Instead, would You help us to hear Christ Himself speaking to our hearts in Holy Scripture and would You enable us to come to Him in repentance and faith? For we ask all this in Jesus' name, amen.*

### **Privileging One Narrative over Another**

Well I doubt I really need to explain why addressing the subject of race and

racism is so important for us tonight. We live in a society, don't we, where the issue of race and ethnicity continues to divide, where tempers flare and defensiveness and anger needs little incentive to boil to the surface. We've seen rioting and protests on our television screens. We've seen a renewed national debate in the media on this subject over the last year or so, which tells me at least however far we have come already on this issue we still have a long, long way to go. And many people noticing persistent racism and prejudice within and between ethnically divided communities actually blame the church and reject its message as a result. They have pointed out that too often, both in the past and in the present, the Christian church has privileged the narrative of one community over another and to the exclusion and detriment of another and so become a willing tool in maintaining social inequalities. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once famously put it this way - "I must admit," he said, "I have gone through those moments when I was greatly disappointed with the church and what it has done in this period of social change. We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution. At 11 o'clock on Sunday mornings when we stand and sing, 'And Christ has no east or west,' we stand at the most segregated hour of this nation." This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this. Now I am sure if the church had taken a stronger stand all along we wouldn't have many of the problems we have. The first way the church can repent is to remove the yoke of segregation from its own body. The church itself will stand under the judgment of God. So there's Dr. King himself recognizing that the church has been, at times, complicit in racism and in perpetuating inequalities and injustice.

### **Religion as a Tool for Racism**

And it's not just in the past, is it? One poll I read says that today in America only about 7% of our churches are multi-ethnic; 7% of all of our churches are ethnically diverse. I don't think that means they include Scottish people in their ranks! What about our own history as a church, often enough on the wrong side of the debate during the Civil Rights era? Or read some of the rhetoric from men who fought for Biblical truth in the years that led up to the formation of the Presbyterian Church in American in 1973. Read them and you will be ashamed, or at least you ought to be, of how easily and brazenly they advocated for segregation while in the same breath standing for the authority of the Bible and the integrity of the Gospel against liberalism. And some people see all of that and they want nothing to do with it. "If that's what religion does, I don't want it." That's what they say. "If following Jesus is compatible with attitudes like that, well then who needs Jesus?" One of the tests of the truth of someone's philosophy and their worldview is how it works itself out in their lives. And if you sing about the love of God and talk about the love of neighbor on Sundays but your instinctive default setting is to assume a position of superiority or suspicion in relation to others whose skin is not the same color as yours, well then your songs and your talk are worthless. And so for many people, the Christian message itself is suspect because those who claim to embrace it, far from challenging racism,

have often used their religion to validate their prejudice. That's not just a white problem; that's across the board. We use our religion to validate our prejudices.

And so there it is. There's the argument. Religion is the problem, not the solution. That's a powerful argument. I want to invite you to turn with me to Luke chapter 10 and the account of the good Samaritan and to look at the words of Jesus here reading from verse 25 because this is one place where the Lord Jesus Christ addresses the subject directly in ways I hope you will find perhaps surprising, certainly profoundly challenging. This is the Word of Almighty God:

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?' 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.' And he said to him, 'You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.'

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'

Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.'

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, 'You go, and do likewise.'

Amen, and we thank God that He has spoken to us in His holy Word.

## **I. Religion is Complicit**

The first thing I want you to see in the passage that we just read together as Jesus engages with this lawyer, this Bible teacher who comes to Christ to put Him to the test, is that Jesus largely agrees with the complaint that very often religion is complicit in the perpetuation of prejudice. Jesus agrees with the complaint. Take a look at the story. In verse 25 we're told this young lawyer, I don't know if he's young, but this lawyer stands up to ask a question of Jesus. The word translated "lawyer" there really means "a scholar of the Torah," a scribe, an expert in the Old Testament Scriptures. So don't be thinking about a

litigator in a courtroom so much as a Bible scholar in a seminary. And he's not coming to Jesus looking for new insights. He's not seeking spiritual answers for himself. We are told he's coming to test Jesus. He's trying to unmask Jesus as a fraud by catching Him in a theological mistake. That's his agenda. So right away we get a feel for this guy, don't we? There's a certain arrogance about him. He is assuming his own superiority. He is testing Jesus. It's not pretty.

And take a look at his question. Verse 25 - here's the test question that he proposes to Christ. "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So there's the test; the theological exam that he is setting for Jesus. And now we imagine him, don't we, sort of locked and loaded waiting for Jesus to slip up so he can pounce. But as it turns out this isn't Jesus' first rodeo and He immediately turns the tables on him. Verse 26 - He directs the Bible scholar back to the Bible and asks for his expertise. "You tell me, Mr. Bible Expert, what is written in the Law. How do you read it?" And now, perhaps eager for the opportunity to show off how much he knows, the scholar immediately and accurately responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind," and Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And now all of a sudden, you see what's happened, Jesus is the one doing the testing. And while this man has passed the theological exam, all he has to do is go live it.

But surprise, surprise as it turns out that is precisely where his real problem lies. Knowing the Bible isn't his issue; living its message is his real problem. Verse 29, "But he, desiring to justify himself" - he's defensive now you see. His conscience has been pricked. "He, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" As soon as the Scriptures are upon this man's lips he realizes he has trapped himself. He is hoist upon his own petard; caught in his own trap. "Those who know God live differently in the world." That's what he just said in answer to Jesus' question. Those who have eternal life, loving God truly, love their neighbors as themselves. Eternal life shows in the details, day by day, of how we treat other people. And if that's true, this arrogant man is in big trouble. And so naturally he wants to limit the scope of the commandment. He wants to find out who among the mass of human beings in the world he's really obligated to love as his neighbor. You see the assumptions in his question, "Who is my neighbor?" He assumes he doesn't need to love some people. Some people, he assumes, are excluded from the category of neighbor and therefore he doesn't need to bother with them; only some people will qualify. That's his loophole. That's how he can get away with prejudice and pride. And if you're here tonight frustrated with religion and religious people because it's been your experience that they are part of the problem when it comes to racism and inequality in this country, if that's how you feel, you probably recognize this man. Don't you? You've met this guy - using his religion to get him off the hook so he doesn't have to care about certain classes and groups of people. That's exactly what he's doing.

But as frustrating as this man and people like him can be, can you see where

Jesus stands in relation to him? It may come as a surprise to you - Jesus doesn't take the side of the religious scholar at all, does He? In fact, if you look at the story Jesus tells to try and help this man get past his prejudice you can see just how radical Jesus is willing to get. Take a look at it with me. Verses 30 and 32 first. A man has been waylaid on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It was a well-known road. Everyone would have recognized it as they listened to the story. A rocky highway winding through the desert about seventeen miles, surrounded on either side by caves that became an infamous hangout for criminal gangs, an obvious place for ambushing victims traveling on this dangerous route. So well before and for centuries after the time of Christ, this particular road was well-known for bandits and robbers attacking people making the journey. And so this man in Jesus' story has just become the latest victim in a long line of victims. And here he lies, at the side of the road, stripped and beaten, robbed and left for dead.

And who should come along, verse 31, but a priest. Perhaps this priest is coming back from performing his sacred duties in the worship services at the temple in Jerusalem. When he sees the man he immediately passes by on the far side of the road. Maybe he thought this man was already dead and according to Jewish ritual requirements he didn't want to touch the body and so become unclean and so he excused his guilty conscience by an observance of external regulations. Maybe he thought if he stopped he would become a target himself and so driven by self-preservation he passes by and keeps his head down and just keeps on going. Either way, he shows no concern for the man lying in the ditch and he keeps moving. Then next comes along another member of the religious elite, this time a Levite. A Levite served as a priest's assistant, a temple functionary who had ministered the lesser details of religious ritual and obligation in Jesus' day. He is an important figure, in other words, in the spiritual life of the people. And verse 32 actually seems to suggest that the Levite this time comes all the way to the spot where this man is lying, slowly bleeding out. He came to the place and saw him and then he too crossed over the road and went on his way.

It is a stinging indictment on the religious establishment. They take one look at this man, at an absolute extremity of need, and they don't want to help. So much for their religion. And the shock of the story is that Jesus completely agrees. Religion, mere outward religious performance, hardly helps and may in fact make prejudice and injustice worse. It certainly did for these two clowns on the Jericho road, too full of their status and privilege to care. So that's the first thing that I want us to be sure we get clear. If you're frustrated that religion has contributed to or fueled prejudice and racial disharmony at times, you might be surprised to discover that Jesus stands right there with you in that complaint.

## **II. Knowing God Changes Everything**

But then I want you to see in the second place that although mere religion

doesn't help, knowing God changes everything. Knowing God changes everything. I'm quite sure Jesus' story so far has been disturbing for this Bible expert. It's been quite a critic of empty religion. But as we read on, it's clear he hasn't seen anything yet. Look at verses 33 through 35. Clearly Jesus' parable is building up to the climactic hero, the third person to come along, the third traveler to come along the road and find this poor victim lying there. And in Jesus' culture, you know, there was a trio of religious officials that commonly went together - the priest and the Levite and then there's a third, the very class to which Jesus' discussion partner here belongs - the scribe. The priest, the Levite, and the scribe - another religious professional. The Bible scholar; this man. The third person in the story we expect Jesus to say is about to appear on the scene is this man himself, you see. He thinks he's going to be the hero of the story, to swoop in and save this poor, broken, dying man.

But take a look at the text. A Samaritan came along and found the dying man and Jesus says he had compassion, the Samaritan. You may know for the Jews, Samaritans were an unclean class of people. Eating with them, for example, was considered the equivalent for a Jew of eating pork. They were disgusting, untouchable, inferior, to be treated with suspicion and contempt in the minds of many devout Jews. And in Jesus' story it's the Samaritan who cares for the man. An extraordinary personal expense. Look what he does. Caring for his wounds as best he can at the roadside, verse 34, he eventually puts him on his own animal, leads him to the nearest inn, spends the night looking after him personally, then the next day when his own affairs require him to move on, he doesn't leave before paying the innkeeper two denarii. That is enough to provide for more than three weeks' room and board. He even promises to come back and pay the difference if the money runs out. He's pouring out his own resources in a frankly breathtaking demonstration of kindness to a complete stranger which the religious do nothing. Stunning.

And then comes the sucker punch. The Bible scholar, remember, asked, "Who is my neighbor? Who do I have to love?" But Jesus now asks a different question, doesn't He? While he's still spluttering and outraged that a Samaritan should take his place in the story, Jesus asks this man not, "Who is my neighbor?" but "Who showed themselves to be a neighbor?" Verse 36. And though he still can't overcome his prejudice enough to say the word, "Samaritan," he really can't escape the force of Jesus' message either and so I picture him rather through clenched teeth admitting, "The one who showed mercy." The Samaritan is the one who loves his neighbor.

Now you remember the question that provoked this whole discussion back in verse 25? "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and the answer, "You must love God and you must love your neighbor." That's what you must do. You must be rightly related to God and when you are it will start to show in right relationships toward your neighbor. You can't have the one without the other. The priest and the Levite, the religious elites, who should have been right with God,

demonstrate just how far being right with God they are by their cold indifference to this man's needs. But the Samaritan, the most unlikely candidate for one who loves God and who loves neighbor, isn't Jesus implying the only explanation for the Samaritan's extravagant generosity is that it is the Samaritan who is the real lover of God. The one who really knows the Lord. Not the priest, not the Levite, not the Bible scholar to whom Jesus is speaking. The outcast, unclean Samaritan. Actually the ministry of Jesus Christ to unclean, outcast Samaritans is an important sub-theme in the gospel according to Luke. So Luke 9:52 - Jesus goes on an unprecedented preaching mission into Samaria. Later in chapter 17 verse 16 when Jesus heals ten lepers, it's only the Samaritan who returns worshiping God and trusting in Christ. One of Luke's themes is that Jesus has grace for the outsider, even when we don't, and receiving that grace changes everything.

And now I hope you're beginning to see the point. The Bible scholar, Jesus is saying, needs to come sit at the Samaritan's feet. That's the message. The Samaritan fills the role in the story the scholar expected to fill himself because the Samaritan does what the scholar should. The religious expert does not yet know the first thing about being rightly related to God and it shows in his superior attitude toward Jesus and his poisonous prejudice toward Samaritans. But the Samaritan himself, he loves his neighbor in an extraordinary way thereby demonstrating that he truly knows God. And so when Jesus says to the Bible scholar at the end, "You go and do likewise," He is calling for much more than a better effort to be a nice guy. He's calling us all to a radical change of perspective not just on who our neighbor is but on what it means to know and love God and how that should show in our lives. And so it's true. Religion very often is the problem, at least the kind of religion we find in the hearts and lives of the priest and the Levite and the Bible scholar in our passage. Prejudice thrives in a religious context like that one. And Jesus has absolutely no tolerance for it at all. But it isn't mere religion that Jesus offers us. It is a right relationship with God, the right relationship this Bible teacher himself has been speaking about and doesn't know the first thing about. Jesus offers it to us. He can give it to us. You see, Jesus practices what He preaches.

There's a sense in which Jesus Christ Himself is the perfect Good Samaritan. We are like the man lying in the ditch - helpless, destitute, broken. And Jesus finds us. He doesn't leave us but at profound personal cost He rescues us and heals us and delivers us and saves us. At the cross, He gave the most expensive, paid the most expensive price. He paid with His life that you might live. And when you trust in Jesus, you become rightly related to God at last and when you are, the old walls begin to crumble and you begin to love your neighbor, you begin to be a neighbor, you begin to be a good Samaritan because you yourself were once dying in the ditch under the wrath and curse of God for your sin and Jesus Christ, who by rights should have dismissed you, found you and delivered you and saved you. You were the recipient of the love of a Good Samaritan and when you know this Jesus you become a good Samaritan

yourself showing you know the love of God in Christ by the way you love your neighbor, the way you care for people who don't look like you, who don't earn what you earn, they don't care about the things you value. Loving them, learning from them, serving them, being embraced by them and embracing them - it isn't more religion that we need, is it? Who needs that if it makes you like the Levite and the priest and the Bible scholar in our passage? What an ugly, twisted perversion of the gift that Jesus gives. That's what we need. We need the Good Samaritan Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, not mere religion but the Redeemer. And when we trust Him, truly and really, everything begins to change and we cannot remain the same and our old barriers and prejudices must, must come down. Like the Berlin Wall, they must tumble and crumble to the dust because the Good Samaritan will make you a good Samaritan like Him. Let's pray together.

*Our Father, thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect Good Samaritan who found us beyond hope, destitute, bereft, and saved us and poured out His love at the most extravagant expense giving His life for us. As we hear the Gospel and receive again the grace of the Good Samaritan, would You make us good Samaritans too? Show us how, being rightly related to God, should change the way we relate to our neighbors. Teach us new humility. Help us to listen and to love and to become ourselves good Samaritans. For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.*

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

*This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.*

*Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.



**Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).