

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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**“How’s Yours Going to End?”**

Luke 10: 25-37

July 15, 2007

The wisdom flowing from and in and around Jesus is so amazing... Sometimes, we here centuries later who’ve grown up toting bibles and learning stories, have trouble seeing just how amazing it is.

How careful Jesus is...

How brilliantly he responds...

How appropriate and loving.

It’s just hard for us to see it, I think, and appreciate it. We read the gospels and sort of picture Jesus walking about throwing out this line and that one about the kingdom of God... He’s like a traveling preacher who just sort of free-associates and spouts wisdom.

**“You... you go and sin no more.”**

**“You... Um... how ‘bout a parable... ever heard the one about the fig tree? I tell it really well.”**

**“And while I’m teaching we may as well cover money. Have I told you yet about not serving two masters? Have we covered that?”**

**“You over there... verily, verily and all that.”**

I just think it’s really hard, given our separation from the moment by time and culture, and given our familiarity with the story, to see the brilliance of what Jesus is up to.

He rarely responds the same way twice. Read through Luke and see, I only saw one response repeated. No one gets some rehearsed thing...

In the very next story, Martha is all busy and fussy and Jesus says, **“You’re just way too worried... being with me is the point... not being busy for me.”** Lots of Christians need to hear that one, huh?

To the Rich Young Ruler he says, **“Go and sell everything.”**

To Thomas... **“touch my wounds, get out of your head.”**

To Peter... **“want to go fishing?”**

To a healed Leper, **“You need to go to the temple now...”**

To another, **“I’m telling you... there are few who enter by this narrow way.”**

And one of my favorites... **“Who knows when the Kingdom will come... it’s hard to tell really seeing how it is within you?”**

Jesus is dealing with people and wisdom is flowing through him. He’s never canned and rehearsed and every encounter reveals that.

When I was growing up (lots of you will remember this) we were taught how to witness and share the faith... Which isn’t a bad thing at all. Our hearts were in the right place but I’m not so sure our methods were. That was problem... we had methods. Charts literally... like one of those sales calls you get.

**“You ask this, if they say that... then you say...”**

**“If they say this, then you say...”**

It all started with the question, **“Hey... if you died tonight and went to heaven and God asked you why he should let you in... what would you say?”** (anyone learn to ask that?)

That’s the way we were to start every conversation. It was sort of always the agenda and if we didn’t from time to time bring that into a conversation, we felt guilty.

I had a friend in seminary who was feeling convicted that he hadn’t witnessed lately... gone “soul winning” “led anyone to the Lord”... that sort of thing. And he was driving along on the freeway one day, feeling all that guilt and saw a hitch hiker so he pulled over figuring this was his chance.

My friend was a big burly guy...

Bald...

Thick beard.

Former army guy (Vietnam vet) who had his fatigues on that day... And he drove this living room of an old car. All messy... junk everywhere in the back seat... Jack-In-the-Box wrappers. Got the picture?

So, he picks this hitchhiker up and he's got those, "I need to witness butterflies" and that question we all learned was just antsy to get out of his mind. And my messy, burly, decked-out-in-fatigues friend, sort of bobbled his opening when he said...

**"Hey, let me ask you a question. What would happen if I killed you right now?"**

Our canned programs can get in the way... can't they? Jesus has no program.

Jesus is so there with people... so present and intuitive. He's not living a rehearsed life. There's not one answer... even though, often folks were looking for one.

Like this expert in the law. This guy is used to definition. He's a "definer." He came to test Jesus... see if he knows the right answer to the question. **"Jesus, if you died today and went to heaven and God asked you why he should let you in, what would you say?"**

Well... his question was sort of like that... it was about eternal life ... and whether he was asking about fullness here or duration there or both we don't know. But we do know he was checking to see if Jesus was going to get the answer right. He's listening for something...

The right buzz words...

The correct interpretation...

Some clue as to his acceptability.

You know how we are... We all do this... size each other up by how we answer the question or talk about our faith... express it.

**"Hmmm he read his prayer... didn't pray from the heart. Maybe he's not really walking with the Lord."**

**"Did you hear that... she didn't use inclusive language... Called God "him." She's clearly not very enlightened."**

You know how we are? Sort of unconsciously testing and sizing one another up. We just can't help ourselves. **"Well, he talks a lot about *the journey of faith* he must be one of us."**

**"You mean, you haven't read the Purpose Driven Life?"**

Everyone does this.

**"Why should God let you into heaven?"** What are you going to say to that? Is there only one right answer?

**"Well, I'm in God's Church... I go to mass every Sunday at Saint Stephens..."**

Of course, for some of us, the alarms are sounding... **"Wrong answer, wrong answer... You failed the test. The only correct answer is, *I trusted Jesus as my personal Lord and savior.* I'm sorry but you lose the big prize behind door number one. And look what we have waiting behind door number two."**

Jesus would have failed our test. Didn't you notice? **"What must I do?"** they asked him. He didn't say, **"It's easy, just say the sinner's prayer."**

What he said was, **"How do you read it?"** See how smart he is... He gets with the lawyer... **"What's your take?"**

**"Love God with all you are and your neighbor as your self."**

**"Bingo... do this and you will live."**

Jesus wasn't following a memorized text. He was meeting a lawyer where he was. To Zacheus he says, **"Let's do lunch?"** To the women caught in adultery, **"I'm not condemning you."**

To the woman so wearily drawing water from the well, **“Mam, I’ve got some water you just wouldn’t believe.”**

From this expert in the law, **“Okay...if you go love God with all you are and your neighbor as if there’s no difference in the two of you, you will live.”**

And we’re not sure what the motivation is, but the guy wants more. Is he still testing? ... trying to get the upper hand back? Or is he now wanting to make sure he’s covering his eternal bases? We don’t know why he asks, **“And just who, exactly, is my neighbor?”**

Jesus says, **“That puts me in mind of a story.”** And did you notice that Jesus didn’t answer the question? He’s asked about who the neighbors are and his answer is about what it looks like to be neighborly. Got that? The question is, “tell me who to love” and the story is about who was loving.

I’m thinking... the guy already knew this though. Jews knew to care for the person in jeopardy. So, this isn’t a neat little story about social ministries. You’d be yawning if it were... Parables are never to be yawned at.

They are for awakening and Jesus uses them very intentionally. And tells them almost always in response to someone who is stuck... as Luke puts it **“to Pharisees muttering because he’s associating with sinners, to those confident of their own righteous, to those who know who’s going to be at the big banquet table, to those bickering about an inheritance.”**

Jesus is very intentional. He doesn’t, here, toss out a little teaching about social ministry to teach a lesson that any descent human being ought to be able to figure out on their own. Nope... he tosses a spiritual grenade into this lawyer’s faith. He’s always up to more than making us moral... it’s always about transformation. So, this isn’t a nice story about being nice.

And again, it’s so hard to hear this, removed as we are... So hard to hear this parable where the dreaded, hated Samaritan is not only the neighbor but by implication, the one who “inherits eternal life.”

Remember... Luke’s pretty set on pushing the gospel and God’s work beyond their boundaries... and ours, by the way. So... I guess the parable might have to be told like this.

*A certain man traveling in Iraq was hurt by insurgents. A relief worker came along by herself and understandably past by in fear. Then a visiting US Congressman was passing by and his aid got a picture. But a conservative Shiite stopped to help. How’s that?*

Oh... that’s still too predictable and not unsettling enough.

*Verily... a certain man had one son who came out of the closet and it was so devastating. And it got around ... everyone knew... at the high school... all over the little town. At the office his coworkers didn’t know what to do. They felt for him. One of them emailed him a link to a Christian website that’s supposed to help gays be straight. Another, a fellow deacon at his church, patted him on the back as they were getting off the elevator and said, “you’re in my prayers.” Most avoided him. They just felt so... awkward.*

*The atheist boss who was often dismissive of Christians and who occasionally used offensive language at the water cooler... invited the man to lunch so he’d have someone to talk to.*

How are you doing now?

Jesus doesn’t tell *earthly stories with heavenly meanings*. The Pharisees didn’t get teared up when they heard the Prodigal Son... they got shook up... shook up that God didn’t seem to be all that concerned about His honor. *Terrible son comes home... and dad throws him a party?*

In this case, the lawyer doesn’t walk away thinking, **“Well, glad that’s all cleared up... I know now that I have to care about everyone.”**

He walks away thinking about his question... about life eternal and who’s living it. Maybe thinking even about the possibility that someone he hates has it. He’s got a story bouncing around in him and he’s wondering if God’s work can ever be boundaried.

Can he as a lawyer, nail down anymore who *the party of the first part* really is? I think he's less certain of that... there's no such thing as an Eternal Brief.

He came to test Jesus... see if Jesus knew the right answer to the question about eternal life. And he leaves wondering if he does.

Or is he just mad...

Or nervous like some of you are right now.

If your mind is racing in protest to or fear of where I'm headed... then I may be on the right track because in Luke's gospel that's exactly what's happening on most every page. Jesus saying to them that God's work is not going to be limited by who they are... period. You just never know, God being God, who the real neighbor might be.

Who God might be using to bind somebody up.

Where God might chose to be revealed and how.

God might use a Samaritan...

Or a Shiite... or an obnoxious boss.

Or someone who came out of Nazareth... you just never know.

You're nervous, some of you. And wanting me to hurry up and say, **“now this doesn't mean we aren't to be convicted about our convictions...”** And that's true. Feel better?

Yes... We believe something that has been revealed and that we have seen and we're called to say so. But... never, ever invited to confine God by it. And we do... all the time.

Who's close to God? Who's far away? Who's in? Who's out? You sure? Who's loved a neighbor and what does that mean for them? Where is God? What exactly is God is? How do I inherit eternal life? Are you sure there's only one way to answer that question? What should I say when I get to heaven's gate and someone asks why I should be let in? I think that Harrison had the best answer I've heard... “Heck if I know.”

Gregory of Nyssa, one of the Capadocian Fathers who helped us to really understand the Trinity said, **“The closer one approaches the vision of God, the more one recognizes the invisible character of the divine nature.”** (Light Through Darkness, 60)

**“The more we know, the less we'll know.... And we'll know it.”**

In the fourth century, Evagrius said, **“God cannot be grasped by the mind, if he could he wouldn't be God.”** (LTD, 61)

Well, does it feel like we've drifted from the lawyer and his question and Jesus' story? Maybe we have... but I'm pretty sure that's what the Bible invites us into...a kind of drifting. The Bible always wants us to finish the story. There's never really a conclusion to any of Jesus' encounters.

The narrator never says, **“And the lawyer returned to his practice and never again was prejudiced towards Samaritans... and after instituting affirmative action in Jericho, lived happily ever after. The end.”** Never happens... no endings.

**“And the next morning over a wonderful bagel breakfast... the prodigal son awoke and having repented, asked his father what chores he would like for him to do that day.”**

No story's ending is told... **And the blind man who was healed became a deacon at First Church, Jerusalem and started a ministry for the blind by selling candles.”**

Like the lawyer and so many others, we go to Jesus... ask our questions and he gives us what we need for the moment. Something just for us that meets us where we are and gets us on the road.

A healing...some wisdom...some one...some community. Maybe silence.... maybe even a parable that shakes us up. And sends us into our own gospel story.

How's yours going to end?