

"Becoming Someone's Neighbor"

Scripture: "Luke 10:25–37"

April 26, 2026

by Rev. Hiroyuki Yamaoka

Scripture: "Luke 10:25–37" (PowerPoint)

Greeting

Good morning. There may still be some among you whom I am meeting for the first time. Allow me to briefly introduce myself again. My name is Hiroyuki Yamaoka, and since the middle of March I have been serving at Tsuchiura Megumi Church as an evangelist and director of Christian education. Thank you very much, and I look forward to working with you.

It has been only one month since I assumed this position, but various things have already happened. Just when I thought, "Now I will begin my work," all the data in my mobile phone memory disappeared; just when I thought I had been helped by receiving a bicycle, before I knew it the bicycle had disappeared from the parking area at my home; just when I thought I had eaten my fill and was satisfied, I suffered from food poisoning—so it has been quite difficult.

However, many people of Tsuchiura Megumi Church have helped me, and now an environment has been prepared in which I can concentrate on my work. I am grateful for your love. From here on as well, while being prayed for, encouraged, and supported by you, I would like to humbly devote myself to this ministry.

I will conclude my greeting here, and from this point we would like to listen together to the Word from the passage called "The Parable of the Good Samaritan." Now then, let us read together starting from verse 25.

Verses 25–28: Dialogue with Jesus

First half of verse 25: "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying,"

A lawyer is a teacher who teaches the Law to the people. They interpreted the Law written in Scripture and taught people how to apply it to daily life. This lawyer, trying to test Jesus' understanding of Scripture, said the following.

Second half of verse 25: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

To ask such a question to Jesus, who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), makes one think he is quite fearless; however, Jesus gives serious responses to such bold questions concerning truth.

Verse 26: "And He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?'"

At first glance, this may look like answering a question with another question and avoiding the answer, but that is not the case. Jesus did not teach one-sidedly; rather, He first asked, "What do you think?" and sought to know, through dialogue, how the lawyer understood eternal life. In response to this question, the lawyer answered as follows.

Verse 27: "And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your life, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.'"

This is an answer that combines Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 from the Old Testament. The lawyer thought that keeping and practicing both love for God and love for neighbor was necessary in order to inherit eternal life. To this answer, Jesus replied as follows.

First half of verse 28: "And Jesus said to him, 'Your answer is correct.'"

Just as Jesus Himself speaks of love for God and love for neighbor as the greatest commandments in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, this lawyer's answer was correct (Matthew 22; Mark 12). However, Jesus further commanded the lawyer as follows.

Second half of verse 28: "Do this, and you will live."

In Jesus' words here, we notice that the terms "eternal" and "inherit," which the lawyer used in verse 25, do not appear; thus we realize that the dialogue between the lawyer and Jesus was actually at cross purposes.

The reason for this mismatch in the dialogue is that Jesus' understanding of "eternal life" and the lawyer's understanding were different.

For the lawyer, eternal life, as expressed by the word "inherit," was something to be given by God in the future as a reward for keeping the Law. In other words, it was something to be received from God as a reward for one's own righteous actions.

However, for Jesus, as it is written in John 17:3, **"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent,"** eternal life existed in the loving fellowship between God and us who live on this earth now.

That is, it is not something received by one's own righteousness, but something continually received from Jesus within fellowship with Him, as those whose sins have been forgiven.

Not only that. As it is written in John 6:47, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who believes has eternal life,"** the one who believes in Jesus and abides in His word already possesses this eternal life.

Therefore, through this dialogue, Jesus was inviting the lawyer to abide in His word, to live according to God's word—to love God and love neighbor—and to enter into a loving fellowship with God.

"Believe in Me, love God as I do, and live in love toward your neighbor. Then you will experience God's love. Within you, who live in this way, there is already the eternal life given by God." It seems that this is what Jesus wanted to say.

Therefore, at this point, the lawyer should simply have said, "I understand," and lived according to Jesus' words—in love for God and love for neighbor. However, the lawyer was not satisfied with Jesus' words.

Verse 29: "But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

From here we understand why the lawyer asked Jesus about eternal life. Rather than living eternal life, he wanted to demonstrate his own righteousness. He wanted Jesus to acknowledge that he was a righteous person who loved God and his neighbor.

While leading the lawyer toward eternal life, Jesus likely recognized this hypocrisy from the beginning. By saying, "Do this," He pressed the lawyer, asking whether he himself was truly living according to God's word.

Confronted in this way by Jesus, the lawyer seems to have become anxious about whether he was truly living in love for God and neighbor.

"So who is my neighbor?" he asked—how far does my neighbor extend, and what kind of people should I love? He asked Jesus about the scope of "neighbor."

At that time, lawyers seemed to limit the scope of "neighbor" to fellow Jews and to devout people who lived according to the Law. Within this self-defined boundary, the lawyer likely had confidence that he was living in love for his neighbor.

However, choosing for oneself whom to love—such love is not the love for neighbor that Jesus teaches. If there are any among us who choose whom to love, then we need to listen carefully together to the parable that Jesus tells next. Let us read verses 30–35.

Verses 30–35: The Parable of the Good Samaritan

30 "Jesus replied, 'A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving

him half dead.

31 And by chance a certain 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 certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion.

34 And he came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own animal 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."""

This parable of "the Good Samaritan" has been interpreted in various ways within the church since ancient times. For example, there is a reading called an "allegorical interpretation," in which the characters in the parable are replaced with figures from Scripture.

In that reading, the certain man is Adam, the robbers are sin and the devil, the Samaritan is Jesus, and the inn is the church; thus it is understood that Jesus saving us, who are wounded by sin, is hidden within this parable. This interpretation is also interesting, but today we would like to read the Scripture a little more straightforwardly.

Looking at **verse 30**, we see that a certain man was going down from Jerusalem to the town of Jericho and was attacked by robbers and left half dead. Since this "certain man," unlike the Samaritan who appears later, is not identified by nationality, he is thought to have been a Jew.

Also, in the time of Jesus, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was in fact a dangerous road with many robbers, and the distance between Jerusalem and Jericho was about 30 kilometers in a straight line. For this reason, many priests who served at the Jerusalem temple actually lived in Jericho.

Just as in the situation of that time, in **verse 31** a priest comes walking toward the road where a certain man is lying. Normally one would think that, since he is a priest who serves God, he would help; however, astonishingly, this priest, when he saw the man who had been left half dead, passed by on the opposite side.

We may wonder whether he is truly a priest who serves God, but in Numbers there are regulations such as in **19:11**, "Whoever touches a dead person, the body of any man, shall be unclean for seven days," and in **19:13**, "Whoever touches a dead person, that is, the body of a man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord; that person shall be cut off from Israel."

Therefore, if this priest were to touch a dead person and become unclean, he would not be able to enter the temple and would be unable to perform his duties; thus, thinking that the man who had been beaten half to death appeared dead, he likely avoided him without helping.

Also, upon seeing the fallen man, even if he were alive, he may have thought, "I do not want to get involved, I want to avoid trouble, I want to prioritize my own schedule. Well, I am living for God, so it cannot be helped," and may have had thoughts that justified not helping.

The Levite in **verse 32** likely did not help for similar reasons. This is because Levites, like priests, were people who served in the temple. And both priests and Levites were people who knew the Law well.

From here, do we not see that knowledge of the Bible and the practice of love are not necessarily connected? Even if there is knowledge of Scripture, it is possible for there to be no love.

I too am made to reflect whether, like the priest and the Levite, I hear the Word of Scripture, speak the Word, and know it well, and yet am not living according to that Word. Also, whether I may be assuming that I am living according to it.

However, when we look at **verses 33–35**, it is told that a Samaritan, who was not a specialist in the Scriptures, felt compassion for him and helped him. Moreover, he

did not merely help; he treated him to the fullest extent of what he could do, and perhaps he himself got down from the animal he was riding, placed the man on it, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

Then, on the next day, he paid two denarii to the innkeeper. Since one denarius was a day's wage at that time, if we consider a modern daily wage in Japan to be about 10,000 yen, he paid approximately 20,000 yen without hesitation; and he even said that if more expenses were required until the man recovered, he himself would pay them upon returning. This is astonishing love for one's neighbor.

Not only that. In the time of Jesus, Samaritans were regarded as Gentiles of mixed descent between Jews and foreigners, and were a people in hostile relations with the Jews. Also, Samaritans possessed their own sacred text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, rather than the Pentateuch of Moses, and were religiously opposed as well.

Thus, Samaritans were people who differed from Jews both ethnically and in their understanding of Scripture, and for Jews they were not considered neighbors. Yet he helped the man who had been left half dead with all the strength he had at that moment. Completely unlike the priest and the Levite, who ignored their fellow countryman, it was this Samaritan who lived in love for his neighbor.

Verses 36–37: Go and Do the Same

Jesus' parable ends here, and once again Jesus asks the lawyer a question.

Verse 36: "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

Jesus asks, among the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan, who became a neighbor. This is not the question, "Who is your neighbor?" but "Who became a neighbor?"

In other words, Jesus did not teach the lawyer, who had asked, "Who is my neighbor, and how far does my neighbor extend?" by defining the boundary of

neighbor; rather, through the parable, He taught what kind of person a neighbor is. The lawyer answers this question of Jesus.

First half of verse 37: "And he said, 'The one who showed mercy toward him.'"

This is correct, but it is somewhat indirect. It would be clearer if he had said, "That Samaritan." Perhaps the lawyer could not bring himself to acknowledge that the Samaritan, whom he usually despised, had become the neighbor, surpassing the priest and the Levite.

However, he seems to have understood that a merciful way of living makes a person someone's neighbor. And finally, Jesus says this:

Second half of verse 37: "And Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same.'"

To the lawyer who had been choosing whom to love as his neighbor, Jesus, through dialogue and parable, made him realize that "a neighbor is one who becomes such through a life of merciful love," and commanded him to live in that love.

Therefore, having the position of a lawyer does not automatically make one someone's neighbor.

I too have been given the way of life as an evangelist and director of Christian education from God and the church, but that does not automatically make me someone's neighbor. While conveying God's love, I myself also live in that love together with Jesus; that way of living makes me someone's neighbor.

You also have been given the way of life called "Christian" from God. A Christian means "one who belongs to Christ." However, being a Christian does not automatically make one someone's neighbor. To love God and love neighbor—to live together with Jesus like "the Samaritan who became a neighbor"—that is what makes you someone's neighbor.

Loving the Enemy

To summarize: up to this point, from the dialogue between the lawyer and Jesus, and from Jesus' parable, we have seen not who my neighbor is, but what kind of person a neighbor is. In this, I believe you have come to understand that "a neighbor is one who becomes such through a life of merciful love."

Also, as those who have read the Scripture together up to this point have surely noticed, just as the Samaritan helped a Jew who was his enemy, this parable teaches the love of Jesus—"love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44)—a love that loves not only close friends but also one's persecuting enemies.

I too can do good to those who treat me well, to those whom I wish to help. Within the limits that I set, I can love people. However, toward those who are hostile to me, those who hate me, although I may be able to speak kind words, I am not fully able to demonstrate the love of Jesus in my way of life.

I am made to realize that I am not "the Samaritan who became a neighbor," but rather, like the lawyer, the priest, and the Levite we have seen today, "a teacher who did not become a neighbor." Even while teaching God's Word to others, I am unable to keep Jesus' word, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"; that is, I realize that I myself am opposing God.

However, for me, who was in such opposition to God, Jesus died on the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself became my neighbor, showing merciful love to me who was His enemy.

I desire to be one who, compelled by this love of the cross—the love that even loves enemies—lives following Jesus. I desire to be one who lives according to Jesus' word, "Go, and do the same" (verse 37).

"For you also, go and do the same"—for the lawyer who did not yet know Jesus' salvation, this word was to shatter his self-righteousness, by which he thought himself righteous, loving God and loving neighbor. It was to make him realize that not loving one's enemy is the same as not loving God.

However, "Go, and do the same"—for those whose own righteousness has been broken, who have been forgiven of their sins through the cross of Jesus and have been born anew, who seek to live in love for God and neighbor, who are living eternal life—this word is, I think, an encouragement from Jesus, a gentle push of love that sends us forward.

Jesus says to us, "Just as I loved my enemies on the cross, just as I loved you who were once at enmity with Me, just as I became your neighbor, live a life that loves anyone—even an enemy. You who have already received eternal life—go, and do the same." In this way, is He not gently giving us a push forward?

As a response to this Jesus, as a first step, as those who are made to live in the love of Jesus, for this coming week, let us not only love those who love us, but if there is someone in trouble, try speaking to them; try praying for someone; try living for someone; become someone's neighbor. Let us, together with Jesus, all of us, go forward walking in this love of Jesus.

Prayer

Merciful Heavenly Father, today from the parable of the Samaritan who became a neighbor, we have learned that loving our neighbor is to live out the love for enemies that Jesus demonstrated. Who is the neighbor we wish to avoid? Who is our enemy? To love enemies like Jesus is a very difficult practice of love, even for Christians who have received eternal life from Jesus.

Yet, as those who have been cleansed by the cross of Jesus, and above all, being compelled by the love of Jesus who loved even us who were in enmity with God, please make us those who live this love of Jesus together with Him. We pray this prayer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.