



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

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.

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.

² The expression *kai idou* (*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 *kai idou* (*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 *kai idou* (*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 *kai idou* (*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.

