

TO SEEK AND TO SAVE

## SATURDAY

### THE SELF-DEFENCE LAWYER

*Luke 10:25-37*

These verses contain one of the most famous parables in the New Testament. Can you picture the scene?

Jesus is busily engaged in his ministry, teaching about the kingdom of God. A distinguished figure stands up. Perhaps his accent or tone of voice gives him away. He is a lawyer and is planning to put Jesus to the test. Perhaps he even wants to put Jesus in his place as an uneducated Galilean with no legal or biblical training! So, he asks a question calculated to trap him but thinly veiled as a genuine theological enquiry: How do I find eternal life? It's a great question, isn't it?

Jesus asks the lawyer to tell him what the law says. It reminds us of the adage, "Why does a rabbi always answer a question with a question? Answer: why not?" There's a lot of wisdom in that principle; Christians need to learn it.

Jesus has already put this lawyer on the back foot. He has taken over the questioning! Love God and love your neighbour is the reply. Well, says Jesus, live like that!

The lawyer is probably now wishing he had never asked the question in the first place. He tries to “justify himself” with his own question: “Who is my neighbour?” (v 29). He wanted to test and best Jesus in subtle theological debate; but he now finds that Jesus is testing his lifestyle. So, he answers back, Just tell me who my neighbours are, then! Give me a list of them! He is ready to engage in some theological hair-splitting with Jesus.

The lawyer should have known better. For the Saviour went on to tell the story of the Good Man of Samaria who stopped for and cared for the Jew who “fell among robbers” (v 30). But do not gloss over Jesus’ punch line in verse 36. He throws the lawyer’s question into reverse gear. In essence, he tells the lawyer that he isn’t even asking the right question! The real question is, Who proved to be a neighbour to the man in need? Answer: the Samaritan.

At this point the smart lawyer must have realised he had dug himself into a hole. He wanted to limit his responsibilities. (Tell me who my neighbour is, and I’ll love him.) But Jesus tells him there are no lists that he can tick off. Rather, he says, God calls you to be a loving neighbour to anyone you see in need, irrespective of race or religion, and to go out of your way to help them, even if it is inconvenient and costly. Silence reigned.

I spoke on this parable one day at a lunchtime gathering in our church. I remember applying it in some such words as: “Given the number of people in this room,

it is likely that at least one of us will be tested on this parable before the day is done”.

Four hours later, I was walking through the churchyard in the twilight, heading to another meeting. In the gloaming I saw a heap on the ground among the headstones. “Somebody has dumped something” I thought, and like the Levite in Jesus’ story I “came to the place and saw...”, yes, “him”. A homeless man was huddled on the ground, cold and hungry. So “one of us” was indeed tested before the day was done. I had not expected to be that one!

Here, in Luke 10, is a man who thought he was testing Jesus. But the reverse was actually true. There was a sting in this tale! It is always that way with Jesus.

## REFLECT

- Many people will be reading this page today and reflecting on 10:25-37 at the same time. At least one of us will be tested, surely. How will you respond if it is you? Pray that you will be ready.

## RESPOND

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