The Good Samaritan, Mary & Martha: Following Jesus on the Way to the Cross

1. In Luke 10:25–37, who tests Jesus, what is he really seeking, and how does Jesus' response show the true meaning of the Law?

   Jesus is tested by a lawyer, an expert in the Torah, who is not asking sincerely but trying to probe or challenge Him. He seeks a works-based answer to "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"—assuming the Law is mainly about human achievement. But Jesus exposes the deeper issue: the Law is not a ladder for earning life, but must be read in light of God's mercy. Eternal life isn't a matter of what we do, but what God does. And down to the finest nuances, this is where so many theologies go wrong. It is so tempting to think that we have got to do something to initiate a relationship with God and qualifying for eternal life. But this parable stops all of that kind of thinking.

2. While the lawyer seems to have a surface understanding of the true purpose of Torah—showing God's love and mercy—the lawyer's next question implies that he still is blind. Why does the lawyer ask, "Who is my neighbor?"
   He asks because he is looking for a limit. He wants a definition that will narrow his responsibility. Instead of asking how to love more broadly, he asks in a way that suggests: "Who do I actually have to love?" The sermon explains that this reflects the sinful human tendency to justify ourselves and avoid the full demand of God's law. We want to know who counts and who does not, especially when it comes to enemies, strangers, or people we would rather ignore.

3. What do the priest and Levite show us about the danger of religion without love? And why would everyone have been surprised that the Samaritan was the one who showed mercy?

   The priest and the Levite show us something deeply tragic: it is possible to know God's law, speak about holiness, and appear religious, yet have a heart untouched by mercy. They likely knew exactly what God desired. They knew His commands. They knew His will. And yet when they stood before a broken, bleeding man lying helpless on the road, they did not stop. They did not bend down. They did not love.

   Their actions reveal the frightening danger of religion without compassion. A faith that knows the words of God but does not reflect the heart of God becomes cold, hollow, and distorted. Human beings were created to bear the image of God, and God is merciful. God sees the hurting. God draws near to the wounded. So when religion passes by suffering with indifferent eyes, it no longer looks like God at all.

   That is what makes this story so piercing. The men everyone would have expected to stop and help—the respected, the religious, the outwardly righteous—are the ones who walk away. And the man no one expected to help, the one who was despised and thought of as the enemy, is the one whose heart breaks open with mercy. If anyone seemed least likely to embody the love of God, it was him. No one

would have thought that he was a perfect keeper of the Law/Torah—all the rules and regulations of the Old Testament that the pharisees so zealously kept. And yet Jesus makes him the hero of the story.

Why? Because Jesus is exposing the poverty of self-righteousness and the beauty of grace. He is confronting the kind of heart that wants to justify itself, draw narrow boundaries, and love only those who seem deserving. This is further highlighted by the fact that Jesus also seems to make it clear that the man in the ditch is also a Jew. Remember he's leaving Jerusalem and going to Jericho. So not only does the Samaritan do the right thing where as the Priest and Levite do the wrong thing. But he also helps the one he should naturally hate—the Jew dying in the ditch.

And in the Samaritan's mercy, we see a glimpse of the mercy of God Himself. Romans 10:6–11 reminds us that salvation does not come through our own righteousness, our own efforts, or our own worthiness, but through the grace of God given to sinners. God shows mercy to those who could never earn it. He loves those who were far off. He saves those whom He has every reason to reject.

4. So who does each person in the parable represent?

Priest & Levite—Anyone who looks to their own righteous acts and behavior as justification before God. Because it will inevitably make them blind to what God truly wants. Indeed, these two probably thought they "had" to hurry by the wounded man because they were probably on their way to serve at the temple in Jerusalem. They may have thought they had no time to stop and help because they had more important things to do.

The man in the ditch—We know the least about him. But what is most important is that he is the one who receives mercy and total unmerited grace—from the least likely person. He's all of us—all sinners. As Romans 5:12ff says, In Adam, we are all one rebellious man. We are all under a death sentence. We are all ugly with sin in God's eyes. His natural enemies. We are about as bad off as being beaten and left for dead by robbers out in the middle of nowhere. What are the odds that God would care enough to stop and save us?

The Good Samaritan—He is Jesus! The unlikely traveler. The natural enemy of sinners. Read the first part of Romans 5. He travels into this fallen wilderness world and actually cares to stoop low—humbling Himself to the point of death—to bind up, heal, and save poor, miserable sinners like us.

That means this parable is not about telling us to be nicer people. It is calling us to repentance. It is showing us that all of us, in one way or another, are the wounded man on the road—helpless, needy, unable to save ourselves. And it is also showing us what a true child of God looks like: one who has received mercy and therefore becomes merciful.

Those who have truly been touched by the grace of God cannot remain hard-hearted. When God's mercy reaches a person, it changes them. It teaches them to see others differently—not as enemies, interruptions, or burdens, but as fellow image-bearers in need of compassion.

5. Read Luke 10:38-42. What is the key difference between Mary and Martha in this passage?

The key difference is not simply serving versus not serving. Martha's service was good, necessary, and loving. The problem was that she became distracted by her service, while Mary was focused on Jesus and His Word.

Jesus says Mary chose "the good portion," meaning that she recognized that hearing His Word was the one thing necessary above all else. Meals, chores, and hospitality matter, but they are temporary. Christ's Word gives eternal life. The issue is that Martha's service had begun to displace devotion to Christ.

6. How can Christians today become a "Martha?" In contrast, what does it look like to imitate Mary's example?

Christians fall into Martha's danger when they become so busy with church work, family duties, careers, or daily obligations that they neglect prayer, worship, and Scripture. Like Martha, we can begin to think our activity proves our faithfulness, compare ourselves to others, or assume Jesus must be more pleased with us because of how much we are doing.

Christians imitate Mary when they prioritize being with Jesus—hearing His Word, attending worship, praying, and receiving His gifts. Mary reminds us that discipleship begins not with what we do for God, but with what God gives to us in Christ. The Christian life starts with receiving.

7. How do both Mary and Martha reflect faithful discipleship, and why must service remain rooted in devotion to Christ?

Both sisters reflect something important. Martha reflects faithful discipleship through service and hospitality. Mary reflects faithful discipleship through listening and receiving. The lesson is not that one personality is holy and the other is not. The church needs both service and devotion.

But service becomes spiritually dangerous when it is no longer rooted in Christ. Church work can feed pride, resentment, burnout, or self-justification if a person stops receiving God's Word with humility. Service is good, but when it becomes a source of identity or superiority, it gets in the way of simple trust in Christ.

This is also why we should not judge how others are serving in the church. Not all service is visible, and not everyone is in the same season of life. Some carry public responsibilities; others serve quietly or are enduring difficult burdens. The church is one body with many parts, and each member serves differently.

8. Why does the Gospel matter so much in this passage, especially for the weary, busy, or burdened?

The Gospel matters because without it, this passage can sound like just another burden: "Do less. Be more like Mary. Try harder to be spiritual." But Jesus does not come to crush the weary. He comes to give rest.

The good news is that our standing with God does not depend on how much we accomplish. Christ has already done what matters most for our salvation. The “one thing necessary” is Christ Himself, received through His Word and promises.

In that sense, “be still, and know that I am God” means recognizing that our frantic activity cannot replace God’s saving work. It means resting in who God is and in what Christ has done, instead of living as though everything depends on us.

The Gospel also frees us in both directions:

- It frees us from laziness, because faith produces love for God and neighbor.

- It frees us from frantic busyness, because our worth and salvation are already secure in Christ.

9 What practical lessons does this passage teach for personal devotion and life together in the Church?

Personally, this passage teaches us to examine what distracts us from sitting at Jesus’ feet. Those distractions might be work, family schedules, stress, entertainment, social media, endless obligations, or even church activity itself. Martha’s complaint also shows how stress can distort our perspective. When we are anxious and overburdened, we may judge others unfairly, assume the worst, or even question whether Jesus cares. That is often a sign that we need to pause, pray, and return to Christ’s presence.

For the church, this passage teaches us to encourage both “Marys” and “Marthas.” A healthy church should:

- honor service without idolizing busyness,

- encourage rest in Christ without excusing passivity,

- thank those carrying visible responsibilities,

- make room for those in hard seasons of life,

- and keep Word and Sacrament central.

The goal is not to produce exhausted workers, but joyful disciples whose service flows from hearing and trusting Jesus.

The Good Samaritan, Mary & Martha: Following Jesus on the Way to the Cross

1. In Luke 10:25–37, who tests Jesus, what is he really seeking, and how does Jesus' response show the true meaning of the Law?

2. While the lawyer seems to have a surface understanding of the true purpose of Torah—showing God's love and mercy—the lawyer's next question implies that he still is blind. Why does the lawyer ask, "Who is my neighbor?"

3. What do the priest and Levite show us about the danger of religion without love? And why would everyone have been surprised that the Samaritan was the one who showed mercy?

4. So who does each person in the parable represent?

   Priest & Levite—

   The man in the ditch—

   The Good Samaritan—

5. Read Luke 10:38-42. What is the key difference between Mary and Martha in this passage?

6. How can Christians today become a "Martha?" In contrast, what does it look like to imitate Mary's example?

7. How do both Mary and Martha reflect faithful discipleship, and why must service remain rooted in devotion to Christ?

8. Why does the Gospel matter so much in this passage, especially for the weary, busy, or burdened?

9 What practical lessons does this passage teach for personal devotion and life together in the Church?

- honor service without idolizing busyness,

- encourage rest in Christ without excusing passivity,

- thank those carrying visible responsibilities,

- make room for those in hard seasons of life,

- and keep Word and Sacrament central.