

## Love Your Neighbor

Unfortunately, for many modern day Christians, there seems to be a view of the bible, and the teachings of the Lord Jesus as being just really good and Godly instructions to live by. That the most important purpose of these New Testament scriptures is that they are a good “guidebook” for us to take with us as we go about our day.

And while yes, those thoughts and ideas have some validity. They are by far a secondary purpose for these words that we read here in this Book. The first and greatest purpose for all of these truths that we read in this sacred text is that these words tell us about the Lord Jesus, who He is, and how if we have His saving Holy Spirit within us, we can then begin to be like Him.

May I say that again, this bible is not first and foremost about us, about you and me, it is first and foremost about the Lord Jesus. And as we study these words, I would challenge you and me to first see the Lord Jesus in all that we read.

With that being said, may we begin today by again reading these precious words given to us in Luke chapter 10, beginning in verse 25.

<sup>25</sup>. . . behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Jesus, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>26</sup>He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”

<sup>27</sup>So he answered and said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”

<sup>28</sup>And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup>But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup>Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup>So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to

an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' <sup>36</sup>So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

<sup>37</sup>And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:29-37)

Over the past two weeks, as we have studied about this encounter that Jesus had with this Jewish lawyer, we've noted that while this man was deliberately using the opportunity to "test" Jesus, perhaps hoping to trick Him into saying something that might discredit Him, all such encounters were never a surprise to Jesus, but to the contrary, they were opportunities that were deliberately orchestrated by Him.

Here, while the lawyer had deceitful motives, Jesus was ever and always carefully following the mission He was sent to carry out, that of "seeking to save those who are lost".

And while the lawyer was probably well trained in the use of his words, he was no match for the Lord Jesus. And so, Jesus turned the man's question back upon him and led the man's answers directly to the points that the man needed to know.

First, Jesus turned the man's attention back to the holy scriptures, the only source of truth that is trustworthy for guidance in such matters. And there, the man was led to the exact words that would begin to answer his question for him. Listen again! The man asked,

<sup>25</sup> . . . "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"

<sup>27</sup>So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

<sup>28</sup>And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." (Luke 10:25-28)

As we said in an earlier message, these words tell this man clearly that the pathway to eternal life begins with "love". A special kind of "love" that is different from any other kind of love anyone has ever known before, a love that

extends first to a deep “love for God” and then on out to a deep “love for people”, “love” beyond any measure that a human mind has ever loved before.

And then also, as these words tell us, that love would need to come forth not only from a person’s mind, their intellect, it would also have to come forth from their heart, soul and strength.

And in another place in these scriptures, Jesus said that all of the laws and the prophets are wrapped up within this kind of love, that if we have and we show this kind of love, we will never sin against God nor against our neighbor.

And because that is true, Jesus was able to add the next necessary step saying,  
28. . . “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” (Luke 10:28)

In other words, as we learn from the Book of James, a person must be a “doer” of the Word and not just a “hearer” of the word.

And also, as we are told in several places within these gospels, the Lord Jesus was able to know every thought that flowed through the minds of everyone He encountered. And here, no doubt, He knew the mind of this Jewish lawyer and knew that the man was well-versed as a “hearer” of the word, but that he fell short of being a good “doer” of the word. And Jesus told Him to first go and become a “doer” of the words he was quoting.

And although this conversation and these instructions from the Lord Jesus were in the context of Old Testament law, here, He would introduce New Testament truths and principles into the conversation.

To do that, when the lawyer asked the next question about who his neighbor might be, Jesus very wisely led this man’s thoughts through some of the responses that men might have to the needs of an injured man on the street, first that of a priest, then of a Levite and then of a Samaritan.

And in the response by the Samaritan, Jesus clearly illustrated the truth of the words that were given within the Book of the Law, that of the need for a person to “love” their neighbor. And within this same parable, Jesus was implying that His people, the Jews, were falling short of the commands and the law of God.

And this principle about “love” would be one of the strongest emphasis that Jesus would teach within His gospel, that of first loving the Lord our God, and then flowing out from our love for God must be our love for people.

And that truth is made especially plain in the Book of 1st John. There we are told,

<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:19-21)

And in the Book of John, chapter 13, Jesus spoke these same words as He taught His disciples about how they must conduct the ordinary behaviors of their daily lives. There Jesus said,

<sup>34</sup>A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

In these words, Jesus went a step further in explaining the last portion of the command to “love our neighbor as ourselves”. Here, He tells us that we must not only love people in the same way that we love ourselves, we must also love people with the same intensity and to the measure that He, Jesus, loves them, willing even to die for them.

May I pause here for a moment and add in a current day example of the question that is being considered here in this parable of the “Good Samaritan”. And it comes from a question that was asked in a bible study that I attend each week. The question is, “can one person observe another person and know if they are truly a Christian?”

Or in the case of this Jewish lawyer and the three men in this parable, the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan, can we observe their behavior and determine if they might have a relationship with God.

While only the Holy Spirit can truly know for sure if a person is saved, or as in the case of Old Testament Jews, if they truly had a relationship with God, it seems that Jesus is telling us that by our observing a person’s behavior, we can get a pretty good estimation of their relationship with the Lord.

Again, the scripture verse we just read in John chapter 13,

<sup>35</sup>By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

And also, in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus said that we should be able to recognize a person's relationship to God measured by their "fruits". Listen.

<sup>16</sup>You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup>So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:16-20)

This Jewish lawyer who was talking to the Lord Jesus was asking an essential question of life that concerned his own soul, about how to gain eternal life. But Jesus, knew that this question was not as "small" as the man seem to make it. It had a much broader meaning. The question was about himself, yes, but it was also inseparably linked to his relationship with his neighbor.

And again yes, as we are told here, the motive behind the question that this Jewish lawyer asked had deceptive intents within it. But as we've said, while this man had his own deceptive motives, God also, at the same time, had His plans and His motives for this man's soul. And God's plans are always righteous and purposeful. God wanted both this man and also you and me to know the real and righteous answer to this man's question, so that both He and we could know what it would take to not only gain the eternal life that this man was seeking, but also that both he and we can know for sure when we have it.

It would seem that this question being asked "Who is my neighbor" is a simple one. But it's not as simple as we sometimes make it out to be. As I sat and studied through these words, I thought about the people who live in the houses near to mine. Those are the people we most often think to be our neighbors.

And I pondered about my relationship with them, how much actual contact and interaction that I have with each of them, I was saddened by the realization that I barely know some of them. There are two or three of them that I have a relationship with, but many more that I do not.

But are those people my only neighbors, especially as God would define the word neighbor? The words of this parable about the “Good Samaritan” would suggest that God considers my neighbor to be most any person other than myself, even strangers that I meet along my way each day.

And while this command itself is about “loving” our neighbors, it seems from this and other scriptures, that the very word “neighbor” itself implies a measure of caring and love within its core meaning.

I confess that I am influenced in those thoughts by the many years that I watched the television program about “Mr. Rogers”. It was called “Mr. Roger's Neighborhood”. And it was filled with loving, caring people, people who demonstrated all the many characteristics of love, from the people who lived next door, to the mailman, to the fireman, to the policeman and more. And all of them were Mr. Roger's neighbors.

And no, a television program is not a final definition of “who is my neighbor”, but it helps with our understanding. Our neighbor seems truly to be anyone other than our self.

But again, I want us to see from this passage that this circumstance and this question involving this Jewish lawyer and the Lord Jesus is far bigger than our small minds might imagine it to be.

As we consider the words of this passage here in Luke chapter 10, several thoughts come to my mind. Jesus was fully aware that the command to love God with all of his heart, soul, strength and mind was an impossible task for this man, this Jewish lawyer, especially without the help of the Holy Spirit. And knowing that, Jesus went ahead and used the question about who the man's neighbor might be as a teaching moment.

The Jewish lawyer had evidently done that. He had examined himself as to whether he had eternal life and had come up doubting. And again, while his question was formed in a deceptive manner, and he meant it for harm to the Lord Jesus, God the Father meant it for good, and had intentionally drawn that man to Jesus so that he could find the answers about eternal life he was seeking.

Here, in this passage, in answer to this man's question about who his neighbor might be, Jesus slowly walked him, and us, through a word picture of some observable fruits and behaviors seen clearly within the responses of these three men, a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. And these responses not only tell us who our neighbor is, they also reveal both the character within the souls of these three men and also these men's probable relationship with God.

In this account, a man, a traveler, whom we will assume was a Jew, was traveling towards Jericho, when he suddenly fell among thieves, was beaten, badly injured, and left for dead.

And then here, Jesus describes for us three kinds of responses, three kinds of fruits and behaviors that we are able to observe. Listen again!

<sup>31</sup>Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup>So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' (Luke 10:31-35)

With this story, Jesus was able to illicit a right answer from the Jewish lawyer about who this man's neighbor was. In verse 36, Jesus asked,

<sup>36</sup>So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

<sup>37</sup>And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:36-37)

These word pictures that Jesus often uses are so very revealing to us. They especially reveal to us the heart and the character of the Lord Jesus Himself. You might recognize that the loving compassion shown by this "Good Samaritan" is very much like the loving compassion shown by the Lord Jesus. He gives us help and comfort in our darkest hour, and then He makes provision for our future. What a loving Savior Jesus is.

We aren't told what took place next in this encounter between Jesus and this Jewish lawyer. I would love to know what this man's next response was. Did he ask more questions or did he simply turn and walk away.

As I mentioned on another occasion, there was a similar encounter with another member of the Jewish Ruling Council, a man described as a "Rich Young Ruler". On that occasion, the man seemed genuinely interested in gaining eternal life. But he was wealthy and he treasured the riches of this life. In that man's encounter with Jesus, we are told that he turned away sadly and walked away.

And regrettably, that is often the response that people have to the offer of salvation and eternal life. Love for this world and the things of this world is so very strong and compelling.

But folks, we must not be discouraged. As disciples of the Lord Jesus, you and I must love our neighbors enough to be willing to keep giving them these words of life, these words that can bring them to salvation and eternal life.

Simply put, these closing words from the Lord Jesus in this passage are a command that you and I must not ignore, simple words, but demanding. Jesus tells us simply to, "Go and do likewise."

One last thought before we close. As Christians, people will be drawn by God the Father to you and to me and they will ask this same question of us. They may phrase it differently, but it will essentially be the same question, "What must I do to gain eternal life". And we need to be ready with the right answer. And I find no better answer than that given in 1 John 5. Listen!

<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11-12)

So then, be a good neighbor to the next person in need and give him or her all that God has asked that you give to them.

Let's pray!