

do
you
love
your
neighbor?



Before we begin today, let me say something that will sound very strange—something which I do not believe I have ever communicated in a sermon before—but here it goes. For all we will discuss regarding the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we will miss the main point of this passage today. For, although many are quite familiar with this well-known parable of our Lord—perhaps the most famous parable of all—most people never get the main point, and as such they misinterpret and misapply the message Christ is imparting here.

We will not get to that most vital point today either. However, have no fear. The only reason we will not get there today is that there is much to say about this tremendous teaching of Christ that we will not have time to cover the most important point about this parable today. However, Lord willing, we will meditate upon it carefully next week. So if you absolutely cannot be in attendance next week for whatever reason, then I urge you strongly to log onto our website sometime in the latter part of next week and watch the second half there.

-- v. 25 – *“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’”*

-- Although insincere in seeking Christ, this teacher of the Law is asking life’s single-most important question.

-- All of us and everyone else everywhere are going to live forever. No issue is more important than how will we spend eternity.

-- All the powers of hell and all the influences of this world are bent upon preventing us from seriously seeking this question.

-- Even evangelicals are replacing this essential, fundamental question with much lesser questions such as, “How can I have my ‘best life now’?” (Answer: You can’t!)

-- v. 26 – *“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”*

- Jesus responds by pointing the man to God's Word.
- Satan attempts to keep everyone too distracted to even ask this crucial question.
- When, by grace, it does emerge, Satan attempts to turn our hearts to anything and everything except Scripture.
- However, notice how our Lord responds to the man's vital inquiry: He points Him to God's truth from God's revealed His Word.
- v. 27 – The Great Commandments – *“He answered: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*
 - A Monumental Maxim: “A great commitment to the Great Commandments and the Great Commission will grow a great church.”
 - These two greatest commandments outline the structure for the rest of chapter 10.
 - Luke 10:25-41 – Chiastic Structure (ABBA) – A. Love God (v. 27a) ⇔ B. Love neighbor (v. 27b) ⇔ B. Love neighbor (v. 28-37) ⇔ A. Love God (v. 38-42)
- v. 25 – *“...an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus...”*
 - Although his question is vital, his motivation is insincere for we read that he *“stood up to test Jesus.”*
- v. 26 – *“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”*
 - Jesus puts the question back to this lawyer to reveal his insincerity.
- v. 27 – The expert in the Law answers with the Great Commandments.

As an “expert in the law,” this man would have and should have been utterly embarrassed if he had not to know the answer to the question he asked, because he quoted it all the time as the summation of the Law. These Great Commandments come from a portion of the Old Testament known as the “Shema,” which is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and says:

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9 – *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get*

up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

As a regular part of worship in the synagogue, Jews quoted the Shema. Not only that, but these Great Commandments were so central to Jewish identity that Jews actually attached them to their houses and even fixed them to their bodies, based on the stipulations mentioned in the Shema. Even today, if you are ever in the house of an orthodox Jew, you will likely see a little black box on the door or perhaps screwed into the wall. Inside that box is—you guessed it—the Shema. Similarly, if you go to a synagogue, you are likely to see priests wearing phylacteries, or orthodox Jews wearing bulky boxes—either on their heads or tied to their wrists and a box? Contained in there is the same text of Scripture.

What was meant to be symbolic—that is, “tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads” was taken literally. What was meant to inspire Israel to concentrate upon the Law became a visual spectacle. However, the main point here is that this expert in the Law who questions Jesus absolutely knew the answer to his question before he ever asked it. As Luke records, he was testing Jesus to see if he would come up with the right answer.

-- v. 28 – “*‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’*”

-- Jesus exposes his hypocrisy by saying in essence: “Ah, so you already know the answer.”

-- This expert in the Law realizes that his ruse has been exposed and he tries to cover up his hypocrisy with his question in verse 29.

-- v. 29 – “*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’*”

Desiring to justify himself and wanting to look good in the eyes of his peers, he asks, “*And who is my neighbor?*” In other words, he is essentially saying, “I know that I am supposed to love God supremely, and I know that I am supposed to love my neighbor as myself... but what does that mean? I mean, life is complicated, and I need to know what kinds of people I am supposed to love? I mean, surely I am not expected to love *everyone*. Thus, Jesus, when you say, ‘Love your

neighbor as yourself,' who is it that really qualifies as my 'neighbor'? Every race? Every creed? Both genders? Every age?"

Now, the question becomes, "How will Jesus answer?" Well, first of all, we can be sure that our Lord is not fond of this man's question—wanting to divide people into groups that are and are not worthy of our love. There is no question that such discrimination has no part in the heart of God. We see it clearly in the classic words of John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" Therefore, as we will see, Jesus doesn't really even answer the lawyer's misguided question, "*Who is my neighbor?*" Rather, He tells a parable that shifts the focus and reverses the question.

To see what I mean notice that, in verse 29, the parable begins with a lawyer attempting to justify himself by asking the question "*Who is my neighbor,*" yet it ends, in verse 36, with Jesus asking, "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor?*" Thus, in response to this insincere, self-justifying, religious elitist, Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. And here is the main point that we are blessed to notice about this parable this morning: **In telling the parable, Jesus masterfully changes the question from, "What type of person is my neighbor?" to the much more important question "What kind of person am I?" He alters the issue from, "What status of people are worthy of my love?" to "How can I have a compassion that disregards status?"**

Therefore, as we quickly progress through this timeless parable this morning, let these questions be on our hearts, because they are vital questions that Christ presses upon our hearts for our good and His enduring glory.

-- v. 30-33 – "*In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.'*"

Notice how quickly Jesus has shifted focus. The lawyer's question about what kind of person he is supposed to love has already been answered—his neighbor in this instance is this man in desperate need. However, that is all we know about him. Notice that, although Jesus is quite specific about what type of people are walking by, He offers no specific details about the identity or status of the dying man. That question is not the issue anymore. In fact, the entire focus now falls upon the types of people who are passing by.

And their identities are quite compelling. The first two are a priest and a Levite. Men like them were well-respected religious leaders of Israel. Priests officiated the sacrifices and maintained the temple, and Levites assisted them in these honored duties. Samaritans—like the third man—on the other hand, were absolutely despised by Jews, and this utter disdain was mutual. In fact, so great was the hatred between Jews and Samaritans that Jesus' Jewish opponents could think of nothing worse to say about Him than this: "*Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?*" (John 8:48)

And, yet, surprisingly, this parable is known as "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," isn't it? You know, to the Jews of Jesus' day, this title would have sounded as ridiculous as "The Parable of the Good Al Queda" sounds to us today. But that is just the point. Remember that Jesus has intentionally altered the question from, "What kind of person is my *neighbor*" to "What kind of person am *I*?" ... from, "*Who* am I supposed to love?" to "*How* am I supposed to love?"

Therefore, our Lord has intentionally structured the story to make the personal identity and status of every character in it rather irrelevant, and He does so in order to emphasize that loving your neighbor has nothing to do with your nationality or proximity or social status. No, loving your neighbor is not about who you *are*; it's about what you *do*.

And what truly neighborly love does is clearly revealed in two verses of this passage. The first is verse 33, when Jesus says of this Samaritan passer-by, "*He took pity on him.*" (Most translations say "compassion.") Of all that is mentioned about the characters in this parable, this is by far the most important one. This

“Good Samaritan” took pity. He had real compassion in his heart for the desperate, dying man. The second is seen in verses 36-37. When Jesus asks, “*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*” The expert in the law replied, “*The one who had mercy on him.*” Jesus told him, “*Go and do likewise.*”

Compassion. Mercy. The first two men felt no compassion. It didn’t matter that they were high and mighty members of society. What mattered was their hearts, and in their hearts there was no compassion to be found. The Samaritan, however, was a different kind of person. And when we arrive at the end of the parable, notice the question posed by our Lord. He didn’t ask, “So, do you think the wounded man was a neighbor?” No. That wasn’t the most important question, was it? Rather, Jesus asked this expert in the Law, “*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*” “*The one who had mercy on him.*” And Jesus told him, “*Go and do likewise.*”

Look, the urgent truth is that there are people just like this dying man all around us every day. We may not encounter many people who have been nearly beaten to death with fists and sticks—although, somehow, that seems more and more likely every day. However, what is even worse is that we constantly encounter people who have been bludgeoned by spiritual attacks from Satan and beaten down by the brutal deceptions of this world. Their bodies may be healthy, but their spirits are desperate and dying. Whether they realize it or not, their souls lie on death’s doorstep.

Whether the need is spiritual or physical, you and I are called by Christ to live lives of compassion and mercy. However, we do not love because we are trying to earn anything. We love because Christ first loved us. We do not seek to be compassionate because we want the praise of people, but because God has poured such unfathomable compassion into our hearts.

Seeking to justify himself, this lawyer came to Christ asking who he was supposed to love so that he could be sure he had earned eternal life. Yet Jesus doesn’t answer his question. That is, He gives no response to the question, “*Who is my neighbor?*” Instead, He shifts the focus and gives this command: Be

neighborly. That is, be made new. Seek and receive the compassion and mercy that can only come from the God of all compassion and mercy.

And remember, our Lord did not die in vain. He died so that, among so many other precious promises, we might live in the light of the compassion that Christ modeled. Indeed, this is the promise of the new covenant we have received in Christ. In Ezekiel 36:26, we read, *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”* And at the last supper Jesus said, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you”* (Luke 22:20). As John Piper has said, *“Those who follow Jesus all the way to the cross will see him there paying for their new heart.”*