

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Luke 10:25-37

Key Verse: 10:28

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

The title of this message is “Who is my neighbor?” How can we be good neighbors to each other? Robert Frost (1874-1963) said in his poem called “Mending Wall” that “good fences make good neighbors.” This is often true in our individualistic society. But Jesus wants us to break down barriers and love our neighbors. Many people around us are wounded and hurt. They need love. Let us think about how we can love them. Most of all, let us learn how our love for others begins with God’s love for us.

I. TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE (25-29)

Look at verse 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?”* This man must have studied the law of God diligently to be called “an expert” in the law. He probably could answer all the Jeopardy questions on the Bible category. But something was bothering him. He did not have the assurance of eternal life. His head was full of knowledge, but he wasn’t sure of God’s love for him. Verse 25 says that he asked the question to test Jesus. He wanted to impress Jesus with his knowledge. However, all his knowledge did not give him the assurance of salvation. He was like some theologians and seminary professors who don’t have the assurance of eternal life. They know so much about the Bible, but personally they are not sure of God’s love for them.

How did Jesus help the expert in the law? Look at verse 26. *“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”* Jesus did not rebuke him directly for trying to test him. Instead, Jesus embraced him and invited him to share his personal understanding of the word of God. Jesus was telling him that the answer was right there in the Bible. The man quickly 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.” Indeed, the lawyer knew his Bible. He immediately quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 which says, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,” and Leviticus 19:18 which says, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” This man summarized the Bible with two key verses. It was impressive. So what was his problem?

Look at verse 28. *“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”* Jesus first complimented the lawyer for his knowledge of the law. It is not easy for us to embrace a proud person. But Jesus embraced him and tried to teach him the truth. Then he said to him, “Do this and you will live.” The man knew in his head the word of God very well, but there was no love of God in his heart. Jesus told him that knowing the word of God was not enough. He had to know God and obey the word of

God in his daily life. He had to believe and obey the word of God to inherit eternal life. We learn that knowing the word of God is one thing, and putting what we know into practice is another.

Jesus' reply, "Do this and you will live," applies to us as well. The commandments, "Love God" and "Love your neighbor," sum up the Ten Commandments. They are the basic principles of life and a key to our happiness. Jesus wants us to put the love of God into action. First of all, we must love God to inherit the kingdom of God. What does it mean to love God? To love God is to know the love of God for us through his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:16 says: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." We must accept the love of God by accepting the blood of Jesus that was shed to wash away all our sins. Then we can love God. We love God because he first loved us (1Jn 4:19). And to love God means to obey his words. The Apostle John says in 1 John 5:3-5: "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

How about "Love your neighbor as yourself"? We usually love ourselves more than others. Our sore throat is more serious to us than someone else's pneumonia. It is especially difficult to love the unlovely people, like some young people who are proud and have no learning minds. How can we love them? We can love them when we accept the love of God who sent his one and only Son Jesus. We can love others when we accept the love of Jesus who died on the cross for us. Again the Apostle John says in 1 John 4:20, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." The cross of Jesus has both the horizontal and vertical bars. The vertical bar shows our love relationship with God. The horizontal bar shows our love relationship with each other. The cross of Jesus shows that loving the unlovely is hard, but if we love God, we can truly love our neighbor.

How did the lawyer respond to Jesus? Look at verse 29. *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* This man wanted to justify himself. He had to admit that he did not love God with all his heart and with all his strength. He couldn't claim that he did. But he still wanted to justify himself. He asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" He felt that he had done a decent job of loving people around him. He loved his wife and children. He loved his parents. He loved his golf buddies. But he couldn't claim anything beyond that. He knew that he didn't love people like tax collectors and prostitutes. In fact, he despised them. What about the Samaritans? He despised them and didn't want to have anything with them. How about the Gentiles? Was he supposed to love them as well? Was Jesus serious? In essence, he said, "Do I love my neighbor? It depends on how you define my neighbor." Like many lawyers today, he tried to split hair using some legal technicality. His question showed that he really did not love his neighbor.

II. THE GOOD SAMARITAN (30-37)

Jesus must have been disappointed by the man's attempt to justify himself. He knew the word of God well, but his life did not match his knowledge. His Bible study was superficial in that all his knowledge remained in his head and did not come down to his heart. Jesus still loved this man and wanted to help him. So he told him a parable. Look at verses 30-32. *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."*

From Jerusalem to Jericho was about a 17-mile journey and a descent from 2,500 feet above sea level to 800 feet below sea level. The road ran through rocky, desert terrain, which provided places for robbers to ambush travelers. In Jesus' parable, a traveler from Jerusalem (presumably a Jew) was robbed and beaten by bandits and left there half dead. A priest first saw the injured man. The priest should have taken care of him, for he was a servant of God. But he passed by on the other side. He had no compassion for the man. He did not have the love of God in his heart. He justified himself using the law concerning ceremonial cleanliness. He probably quoted Numbers 19:11 which says, "He who touches a dead man is unclean for seven days." This priest was not a shepherd for God's flock.

Then a Levite came along and saw the naked man covered with blood. He also passed by the man on the other side of the road. Levites were known as music ministers. Perhaps he sang an impromptu rap song for the wounded man, "You poor soul, how sorry I am for you. I hope somebody will come along to help you. But not me, I have a performance in Jericho. I can't afford to get involved." He hardened his heart and trudged on his way.

Look at verses 33-35. *But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'"*

Perhaps this Samaritan was a businessman. Maybe he was on his way to Jericho for urgent business. One thing we know for sure is that he was a Samaritan. We know that Samaritans were despised by Jews for their racial impurity. And the feeling was mutual. Jews and Samaritans did not associate with each other (Jn 4:9). So this man was the last person who would take care of a wounded Jew. However, this Samaritan was the one who took care of the wounded man. What can we learn from the good Samaritan?

First, his compassionate love. Among the three travelers, only the Samaritan had pity on the man. His compassion for the wounded man overcame all fear of danger. He risked his own life in order to help the man. What if he was attacked by other bandits? He did not make excuses not to help the man like the others had done. He didn't say, "Sorry, man, I wish I could help you, but I am not a doctor. I could call 911 for you but I don't have any signal on my cell phone." The man was badly injured, and there was no medical doctor around. But the Samaritan found a way to help the man. He quickly applied wine and oil to his wounds. He did not stop there. He brought the man to the inn. He was a Gentile, but he knew more about the compassionate love of God than the religious leaders!

Second, his sacrificial love. In order to help a stranger, the Samaritan suffered loss of his own business. Perhaps he missed his bid for a lucrative contract for the city of Jericho. But he could not leave him there to die. He carefully lifted him and put him on his own donkey. He carried the man on his donkey while he walked toward a nearest inn. Once they arrived at the inn, he laid him on his bed and began to apply more medicine. He held up the wounded man's head and began to spoon-feed him some food. Finally the man regained his conscience and began to moan. Then the Samaritan knew the man would live. He breathed a sigh of relief. The next morning he took out two silver coins worth about two day's wages and gave the money to the innkeeper. He told the innkeeper: "Look after him, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have." The Samaritan was a man of heart. What a beautiful story this is!

We call this man a "Good Samaritan." This man was good in God's eyes, because he helped a helpless man sacrificially. The Bible teaches that God created us to be a source of blessing to others, not to be selfish or burdensome. A sacrificial person may have a little less worldly possession than selfish and greedy people, but he knows the deep meaning of God's compassion and Jesus' sacrificial love for sinners. He can learn that "by his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:5).

Who can be like the Samaritan? I believe that this parable teaches us the compassion of God toward sinners. Jesus is the original Good Samaritan. All of us were wounded because of our sins. We were left on the roadside to die. We were helpless. But Jesus came to this world to take care of us. He did not pass us by on the other side of the road. He took pity on us. He sacrificed himself to save us. In the course of healing he sick and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God to stubborn people, Jesus was despised and rejected and became a man of sorrows. Finally, he gave his life as a ransom sacrifice on the cross. Just like the good man in this parable, Jesus' action showed the compassion of God toward the sinful humanity.

Look at verses 36-37. After telling the parable, Jesus asked the 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 expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."* Jesus told him, "*Go and do likewise.*" In response to the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered, "Go and do likewise." The question "Who is my neighbor?" is really the

question, “Who proves he is the good neighbor by his actions?” As God’s children, we must take care of the helpless.

Earlier Jesus had said to the lawyer, “Do this and you will live” (28). Now he told him again, “Go and do likewise.” This is the punch line of this story. Knowing God’s truth is only the first step. What is really important is to obey the word of God practically. The lawyer’s problem was that he knew the Bible very well and taught many people, but he did not obey the word of God. He loaded people down with burdens, but he himself would not lift one finger to help them (11:46). The Bible declares that “faith without deeds is dead” (Jas 2:26). This man did not obey the word of God, so he did not know the love of God, and he did not have the assurance of eternal life. He did not have a living hope in the kingdom of God. He did not have joy in his heart that comes from God. So Jesus told him, “Do this and you will live,” and also, “Go and do likewise.”

As sinful men and women, it is difficult for us to obey the laws of God. We fail to reach the high standard of God. No one can become righteous by trying to be perfect in keeping the laws of God. Then why does Jesus tell us to obey the laws of God? The spiritual secret is that when we struggle to obey God’s word, we come to realize how sinful we are before God and how much we need God’s mercy of forgiveness. We come to know Jesus personally who died for our sins on the cross. The Apostle Paul is a good example. He was a promising young rabbi who had kept God’s commandments meticulously. He tried very hard to keep all Ten Commandments. However, he got stuck with the last commandment: “Do not covet.” He was unable to control the covetous desires constantly arising in his heart. People kept telling him how holy and righteous he was, because they could not see what was happening in his heart. Paul cried out in his agony, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Ro 7:24) Finally, he met the Risen Jesus personally who forgave all his sins and commissioned him to become a missionary to carry the good news of salvation all over the world. So he exclaimed, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Ro 7:25)

We learned through Jesus’ parable that we should love our neighbors practically. However, to be like the good Samaritan means more than just doing a human favor for someone. It is to love others spiritually in obedience to God, as our Lord Jesus did. It is to share the love of God with others so that they may come to God. I want to share D.L. Moody’s story, how a good Samaritan had an impact on his life. He was born in 1837 in Northfield, Massachusetts. When he was only three years old, his father died, leaving behind many debts. The creditors came and took everything the family had. His widowed mother had only a cow and many sons to feed. Dwight’s older brother went to Greenfield to work in a store. One day when Dwight was about 10 years old, his brother came home to take him to Greenfield to work for an old couple, milking their cows and doing odd jobs. He really didn’t want to leave home, but he had to go with his brother. After discovering that the old man was mean and his wife meaner, however, he wanted to go home right away. His brother said, “You will get lost if you start for home now; it is getting dark.” He was frightened and said, “I will go at daybreak tomorrow morning.” Then his brother took him to a store to show him some jack-knives and other things to

divert his mind. He wasn't interested and just wanted to go back home to his mother and brothers. He was crying. Then his brother said, "Here comes a man that will give you a cent. He gives every new boy that comes to town a cent!" He wiped away his tears and saw a man looking at him on the sidewalk. The man took his hat off, put his hand on Dwight's head, and said to his brother, "This is a new boy in town, isn't it?" "Yes, Sir, he is; just come today." Dwight watched to see if the man would put his hand into his pocket to take out a shiny penny. Soon he forgot about it, however, as he listened to him talking kindly about God who sent his only Son to the world, and wicked men killed him, and how Jesus died for the sin of everyone including Dwight's. The man talked five minutes, but he took Dwight captive. Afterwards, he put his hand in his pocket and took out a brand new penny, a copper that looked like gold to Dwight. He took it and never felt so rich before and since. This is what D.L. Moody said later:

I don't know what became of that cent; I have always regretted that I did not keep it; but I can feel the pressure of the old man's hand on my head to-day. Many years have rolled away, and I can hear those kind words ringing yet. I never shall forget that act. He put the money at usury; that cent has cost me a great many dollars. I have never walked up the streets of this country or the old country, but down into my pocket goes my hand, and I take out some money and give it to every forlorn, miserable child I see. I think how the old man lifted a load from me, and I want to lift a load from some one else. Do you want to be like Christ? Go and find some one who has fallen, and get your arm under him, and lift him up toward heaven. The Lord will bless you in the very act. May God help us to go and do like the Good Samaritan!¹

In this passage, we learn that we should love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and love our neighbor as ourselves. May God help us to have the heart of Christ and be like the Good Samaritan!

¹ www.preceptaustin.org/anecdotes_incidents_illustrations