

Sunday Sermon: August 3, 2019

Sermon Text: Luke 10:25-37

Sermon Theme: The Command of Love

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>26</sup> “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

<sup>27</sup> 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.’”

<sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

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

<sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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.’

<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

People are pretty good at focusing on the things that are good and ignoring and overlooking the bad in our life. Maybe we focus on our eyes which still sparkle instead of the many more wrinkles that show our age. Maybe we focus on how well the car drives instead of the many dents, rattles and clunks. Maybe we focus on the great moments of the vacation instead of the things that didn’t go well. Focusing on the good is part of our human nature.

Focusing on the good can be a very good thing when it helps us enjoy our life, but there are some things that we need to be objective about. We need to look at the bad in order to take care of it. We can’t just focus on the 1 hour that we were productive at work when we have an 8 hour work day. We can’t focus on the one good grade we got in school, when the rest of the grades are really bad. We can’t focus on the one area of our relationship with our husband or our wife, when there are other areas that need work.

Sometimes ignoring the bad is not the right thing to do.

The man that approached Jesus was an expert in the Law. He was an expert in focusing on the good that he did and ignore any sin that he might have in his life. Because he focused on that good, he did not see the sin that lived in his life that caused him to not follow the Command of Love that God had given to him.

When we hear about these Jewish religious leaders, we often get the idea that they were some sort of religious radicals, fanatics, who just wanted to get rid of Jesus.

It is closer to the truth to say that these religious leaders were deeply connected to their history and culture and a very big part of that culture was religion. Anytime someone would come and say that they weren’t believing the correct things, that was an attack not only religion, but also on who they were as Jews. We know that Jesus was teaching that they weren’t really following what God wanted them to do.

This expert in the Law comes to test Jesus. Maybe there is a little pride there. Maybe he wanted Jesus to tell him that he was doing a good job and that he was good enough to go to heaven. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus answers the man’s question with a question. “What does the Law say? How do you read it?” The man’s answer was a common summarization of the two tables of the Law: Love your God with all your heart, soul and mind and Love your neighbor.

Jesus said, “Do this and you will live.”

After this answer, we see that the man is not so comfortable anymore about earning his salvation. He was probably very frequent in his worship and his observation of the customs and ceremonies of the Jews. He probably treated his family and friends nicely.

Yet, there was that thought in the back of his mind that showed he knew he had not fulfilled the command that God had given to love others. He wanted to justify himself and so he asked, "And who is my neighbor?" He wanted to clarify exactly who it was he needed to love and which people he didn't.

He wanted to justify himself for those times that he wasn't nice, that he didn't speak with others well, that he was rude, selfish, arrogant and so on. He wanted to justify himself for the grudges he held in his heart and for the times he looked down on other people.

He was trying to find a reason that he might be right in all of those occasions where he was not showing love.

Jesus answers his question with the parable. Of the 3 men that were walking by the man who had been hurt, the least likely to help the man was the Samaritan. The priest and the Levite had social and religious reasons to help this man. If anybody was going to help a Jew who was broken and beaten it was these men. To follow the Law, they were to show love to the one who was injured, but they had "good reasons", excuses, why they did not follow the command of love and stop and help him.

On the other hand, this Samaritan had no reason socially, culturally or religiously to help this Jew. The Jews and the Samaritans had a history of distrust and even hatred that went back centuries. The Jews called the Samaritans dogs who were not worthy of being part of Jewish society. In many cases, the Jews even thought that the Samaritans were not worthy of going to heaven, even though they were part Jew.

The Samaritan did not know him, he was not the same nationality, there was the background that would have told him that Samaritans don't help those Jewish people, there isn't even the bond of a shared religion between these two men. Yet, he was the one who was the neighbor, he answers the basic command of love and helps the man.

Not only does he help the man, but he goes well beyond what was necessary. He didn't just drop him off at the emergency room. He bandages him himself, takes him to the inn and pays for the innkeeper to look after him while he recovers. That is like paying for the man's hospital bills. He went above and beyond what many of us would consider necessary.

Do you see the point of the parable? The expert in the Law was trying to justify himself. But he really wasn't following God's Law of Love because he was trying to put limits on God's love. He was nowhere near the he was trying to earn for himself because he wasn't following the command of love God gave him.

The question that was going through his mind should be the same that goes through ours. Can we ever love God enough, and obey him enough, to gain heaven for ourselves? The answer is no. We will never be good enough for God because God demands perfection. We will never be free from the sinfulness that places our wants and desires above what God tells us to do. We will never be free of the sinful nature which thinks it knows better than God. We will never be able to follow our God with our whole heart, soul and mind because we are sinful.

Can we ever love our neighbor enough to gain heaven for ourselves? The answer again is no. We will never be free from the sinfulness that treats some well and others poorly. We will never be free from the sinfulness that has an attitude with some and speaks poorly of them and not of others. We will never be free of the sinful grudges that we hold in our heart. We will never be free from the sinfulness that tries to justify all these things as a normal part of life. We will never be free from the sinfulness that tries to forget about that sin and focus on the good.

How can we be saved? We can't rely on our actions because they are sinful. We rely on the actions of another, our Savior Jesus. He lived perfectly, showing perfect love because we couldn't. He satisfied the level of perfection that God demands. Then he took our sins to himself and removed them forever. Then we don't have to say, "What must I do to inherit eternal life." We can say, "What has Jesus already done for me to give me eternal life" He has won the victory and he gives me that victory freely and fully.

Now as believers who know that our salvation is all from Jesus we can understand the point of the parable: because Jesus has loved us, we should love others. The point Jesus is making about the command of love is really the same lesson that we saw in our Old Testament lesson. We follow these laws and commands not to gain heaven, but to thank God for his grace, mercy and love to us.

In that reading we heard Moses give some wonderful parameters for how the Israelites could show love. Do not withhold justice from anyone, or keep from the widow what she needs. Do not be so greedy when you are in the fields, vineyards or groves that you have all for yourself, instead, make sure to leave some for the poor.

Why were they to do that? Why were they supposed to be kind to others? **Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there.** Remember that the Lord loved you first. They were to show this love because God has shown love to them first. God had given them the promises through Abraham that he would bless them and bring them home. He had heard their cries and had brought them out of slavery. He had blessed them in many ways and with many things. Because of all that, show love to others.

Jesus has given us the command of love to love others as he has loved us. Sometimes we can be like that man who focused on the good. We focus on the good and not the sin that lives in our lives. When we see our sins, we ask our Teacher, our Savior and our Lord and ask for forgiveness. We repent of these sins that live in our lives. Then we live in the love of a merciful and forgiving Savior who has already told us that our sins are fully forgiven now and forever. We live in the knowledge that we can go in peace because of what Jesus has done. In this peace of forgiveness, we can and do go and thank our God for his love by loving others.

As we follow this command of love, we can find many different ways to reflect our love for others in how we speak and how we act towards others, even those that we don't share cultural, social, or religious ties.

May God move us to reflect the love that he has shown to us and to follow his command of love.