

Whole-Person Lovers of People

Luke 10: 25 – 37

Dr. Bert Downs, July 31, 2011

The essence of Jesus' teaching here revolves around the critical understanding of what is really important. This passage is one of a few passages in the Gospels in which Jesus is asked what the most important commandments are. In summary, He answers in all instances to **love God and love people**.

Here we focus on the "love people" aspect of this as illustrated in the familiar story of the Good Samaritan. A teacher of the law has asked the question of "what's most important" and Jesus gives his usual answer. The teacher seems to accept the answer, but then presses a point in order to "justify himself." That point related to the love of people: who am I required to love? Who is my neighbor? Jesus uses this story to answer the question and to shape our understanding of neighborly love.

Context and its lesson . . .

- The questioner – the expert in the law – wants to justify himself by LIMITING the full application of the law.

Whenever we find ourselves "justifying" something, it's usually because we've fallen short and we need an excuse. This seems to be the case here . . . perhaps the "expert" wants to get a definition that fits his comfort zone when it comes to who his neighbor might be. In any case, what he seems to be trying to do is to limit the scope of application of this particular commandment by focusing on the object (neighbor) of his love. You sense an underlying thought regarding who might be worthy of his neighborly love.

- We're back to loving God. To love our neighbor as ourselves, we are called (commanded) to love God with our ALL . . . heart, soul, mind and strength.

The answer ultimately drives us back to the first part of what's often referred to as the Great Commandment. We can't love our neighbor as we're called to do if we don't love God in a manner to which the commandment calls us: heart (core of who we are), soul (the emotion, action-based side of who we are), mind (how we think and reason) and strength (not just physical strength, but strength items like time, resources, talents, gifts, etc.). These all come to play in fully loving God and form the foundation for fully loving others. While this isn't the focus of this lesson, it can not be overlooked if we're to fulfill the "neighbor" commandment.

Who is my neighbor? Jesus' answer . . . (v. 30 – 37)

This is the scribe's key question, and he's looking for an answer that will limit the application of the commandment. In a sense, he's asking, "who do I really need to love, and who can I 'righteously' ignore?" Jesus' answer used three people to make his point: two religious men and a much despised Samaritan.

- The religious persons (priest and Levite) ignored the command to LOVE _____, but probably did what would have been expected.

The priest and the Levite, both servants in the temple, bypass the man who has been assaulted and left for dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. It's likely that they were headed down from Jerusalem after completing their religious duties. And is it not true that sometimes duty overrides the really important things. Have we not all bypassed something important based on the fact that we've already "done our duty?" This is like the situation with these religious men. They didn't want to be bothered with the intrusion the needs of this man in the ditch might require. And it's likely most listening to this story would have agreed with the actions of these two religious servants . . . they really weren't required to stop so why should they.

- The Samaritan's response on the other hand was one of COMPASSION _____ and not what would be expected.

Enter the Samaritan, a representative of a group largely despised by the Jewish people of that day. Since this was likely a Jew lying in the ditch, one would not have been surprised to see this guy bypass, perhaps even happily, this person in need. After all, why should he help someone he doesn't know and who is likely from a group who mostly mistreats his kind? But surprise of surprises, the Samaritan actually stops his journey to look at the man, and having looked, the passage says he had pity . . . literally he felt this person's pain . . . had compassion. It all starts with LOOKING. Neighbors observe, not to gossip or do other malicious things, but to see the God opportunities a life might present. The Samaritan looks, sees and acts . . . becoming this man's neighbor.

- The Samaritan's love found expression in costly ACTION /sacrifice.

Here's why we're often afraid to look: when we really see as God has equipped us to see, the seeing will require action. And action is always costly: time, resources, changed schedules, giving up one thing for another. The Samaritan goes above and beyond investing deeply in the well being of this man he doesn't know, but for whom his heart and his

practical love have become attached. The audience listening to this story would not have expected this. Need we be reminded that God is very much the God of the unexpected?

- Jesus' point was to move the focus of loving your neighbor from the object (the one being loved) to the SUBJECT (the one doing the loving).

Back to the scribe who asked the original question. What he wanted Jesus to do was limit the potential neighborly response by defining who his neighbor might be. Jesus shifts the emphasis to the attitudes and actions of one who would be a neighbor and love in a neighborly way. With the Samaritan, his actions had nothing to do with the person in the ditch, and everything to do with the Samaritan's character, attitudes, priorities, heart, willingness and capacity to love others . . . even those he didn't know . . . to treat the stranger as a neighbor.

Summary application: I define who my neighbor is by how I INTENTIONALLY offer neighborly love.

Who is my neighbor? Your neighbor? Those that we really see . . . see through God's eyes . . . and having seen, choose to offer our love to with no expectation of return or appreciation. We're just doing the right thing because we really love God and that's what He would do. In fact, that's what He did do:

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." I John 4:10

"For while we were still helpless [like the man in the ditch] at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love [neighborliness] toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:6-8 [comments added]