

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Those words of Jesus today set your minds on what it means to hear God’s word. The Lord shows you the great compassion he has toward you in Christ. That’s the thing about the Good Samaritan; it’s God’s compassion and mercy. To understand and know Christ in faith is to see God and what he’s done for you to save you. Without this mercy and compassion toward you in Christ you are worse than the man left for dead, you are dead.

You know this well-known parable. The Good Samaritan is one of those Bible stories that even many unbelievers have at least heard at some point. Hospitals are named after the character in this story, and many places even have “good Samaritan” laws in place for helping others in need. The Good Samaritan resonates with people because it hits at something innate in our creative fabric of giving help to others. This is something people understand regardless of culture or historical setting. You see someone in need, and you help them.

Where things go off the rails is when the church falls into one of two ditches, which is something considering this parable, when it listens to this preaching of Jesus. One ditch is to turn this into a moralistic lesson where it burdens you into thinking the law is achievable. The other ditch is to go the route of this doesn’t teach you anything about what God desires for your life as you live in this world with your neighbors all around you. Both ditches err and lose sight of the whole picture Jesus teaches you today and proclaims to you. Jesus though keeps you on the narrow path and shows you his mercy and what this mercy means toward your neighbor.

“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’ And he answered, ‘You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’”

The interaction between Jesus and the lawyer at the beginning of the parable sets not only the tone but the overall theme of what Jesus says next. The lawyer wants to test Jesus. Think about that for a second. It sounds innocent enough but the question he asks Jesus is really the wrong question. Yet, there’s something interesting here, did you catch it? Jesus doesn’t respond to the lawyer with “you’ve asked a wrong question” or “O foolish lawyer” even though you don’t “do” something to inherit eternal life. An inheritance is given not a performance someone does. No, Jesus gives answer to his question of the law by affirming that the law is indeed good. Jesus told him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” That’s an odd response, isn’t it? What’s the deal? Jesus isn’t wrong in what he says and he’s not lying for Jesus can neither err nor can he lie. Jesus knows that doing the law of God is a good and righteous thing. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus commands us to “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Jesus knows that what God commands is indeed a good thing, and the law is not sin. The law reveals God’s will and is “good and wise” as the hymn aptly states.

This also gets to the purpose for which the Word became flesh. In Galatians 4 it says, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Jesus lived out the law of God perfectly. Not only that but his obedience is our salvation as Romans 5 says, “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” Obeying God’s law is a good, right, and salutary thing. God’s law is not the problem nor is it the enemy. Jesus answered the lawyer’s question and his response correctly, “do this; and you will live.”

So, then, what's the problem? The law is not the problem. The law is not sin. Sin is the problem; we are the problem. There's something wrong with this lawyer. He can't save himself. We can't save ourselves. This can be seen in the question the lawyer asks next, "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" Did you catch that? Luke even records for us the condition of this man's heart, he was desiring to justify himself. This lawyer was definitely thinking. He was thinking in his mind, "tell me what to do and not to do and all is good." This issue at hand with the lawyer and how we see the things of God in our old Adam is the same. We see God's law, his righteousness, his kingdom, and all things as something we can achieve. Look at the question he asks, "who is my neighbor?" It's as if he's saying, "tell me who I need to love so that I can love those people and not others. I want the law to be achievable. I want to set the bar so that I can jump over it on my own." That's why Jesus responds with the parable. It's not necessarily to make things easier to understand, parables don't serve that purpose. No, it's to humble him and then see the fulfillment in Christ. Jesus is addressing the man's heart.

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'""

The parable of the Good Samaritan, then, convicts the lawyer. The shift is made to show him that he can't save himself and needs something or rather someone. It shows him that what God desires is mercy. Love is shown to one's neighbor and one's neighbor extends beyond our own definition of who he may be or want. In Luke 16, the rich man had Lazarus placed at his gate and the rich man showed him no mercy. The convicting part is not fully known how it hits the lawyer but, obviously being a good Jew by his recitation of the law at the beginning of the reading, he would have not considered a Samaritan to be his neighbor. Likewise, as a good Jew, he would have thought he was justified in passing by the injured man as he thought the law would have exempted him from it. For a Samaritan to stop, bend down, and do what is right is mind boggling. Yet, he is the one who serves as an example of what the lawyer is called to do. The lawyer's mouth is stopped, and he is left with no way out other than for that same mercy to be shown to him.

The fact of the matter is that we don't follow God's word and can't put the bar lower on it so that we can then jump over. It's all or nothing. In James we hear, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. God's law requires total, perfect, and complete obedience. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The reason is because it's a revelation of God's will. God's will isn't just some nice thought or something that is good for some and maybe helpful for others. No God is holy, righteous, and good and his law confesses and reveals this. That doesn't mean we aren't called to follow God's law for that also would be in error. Our new man desires to live a new life according to what God teaches us. The problem is when we see our lives in terms of a legalistic way of approaching God and who we are before him. There's no justifying ourselves.

In our lives though we still think like the lawyer. We think, "how often is enough to go to church? When will this service be over? What amount of money do I need to give to be giving enough? How long before I am no longer responsible for my kids? Why can't the church change with the times so that it would be more appealing to people? Who really thinks like that anymore? Why can't I just live my life the way I want and others do the same?" All these and the like are wrong questions. God tells you that you have fallen short of his glory and to repent. The correct response when confronted by your sin and attempts to justify yourself with what you think may be something clever. No, the response is what we heard a few weeks ago, "Lord have mercy on me a sinner. Lord, make atonement for my sin."

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You see the great and wonderful thing about the Good Samaritan shines forth when you don't come to hear it with a spirit of arrogance. In repentance you see it's all about Jesus for you. In the great depths of your sin the Lord came down from heaven to redeem you. His compassion is never ending as even his own didn't receive him and he was rejected and despised by men. Jesus was called a Samaritan, and they said he must be possessed by demons. Yet it was the will of God to crush Jesus as the one who bore your sin. Forsaken on the cross you have in him the one who draws you near to the Father. His life is a righteous life which has perfectly obeyed God's law and not fallen short. That righteousness life of his was so that he would be the perfect sacrifice offered to the Father even as he himself is God in the flesh. By his dying he has destroyed death. Christ crucified is your Good Samaritan, then, as this is God's perfect compassion toward you.

Now you understand all things through Christ. You hear his word and see your Lord as your Savior who has rescued you from the pit and brought you into the safe lodging of the church where he feeds and nourishes you and promises to return. Dwelling in this inn of the church you take great delight in what your Lord has promised and what he teaches. As one who has been justified by grace alone through faith in Christ alone then your new life flows from this and you live as you have called to be in the waters of your baptism. You turn from your sin and seek what he desires clinging to Christ and the forgiveness you have on account of him. Your responses to God's word as a Christian now confesses this, "Lord, let your name be kept holy in my life. Let thy Kingdom come and thy will be done. Give me this day my daily bread as it comes from you. Lead me not into temptation Lord but deliver me from the evil one and all evils."

God's mercy is the chief thing throughout the parable that God shows you and your eyes see, and your ears hear. God has had mercy on you in Christ who lived perfectly in obedience to God's law and is without sin. Jesus did what you can't do. Jesus did go and live the law of God, and he lives and by that life you live. That's the Lord's active obedience. And there's great mercy in all of this as your Lord looks on you. It's this same Jesus, your Savior, who has come down to pull you out of the depths and give you in return that perfect righteous obedience he has accomplished and takes on your sin, suffering the wrath of God, which is due your sin, your unrighteousness. He suffered as the perfect sacrifice, this passive obedience, as your substitute who made payment for your sin by shedding his blood and giving up his life as a ransom for you. Now God counts that righteousness of Jesus, his life and death, to you for the sake of Jesus. You have what he has done and it's yours solely out of his grace and mercy to you and it's all received through faith. Your righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus; it's the righteousness of faith received through the word and sacraments.

As the baptized people of God, the mercy God shows to you in Christ is never ending and it overflows in abundance in love toward your neighbor. This is, then, where the command to "you go; and do likewise" doesn't fall on deaf ears when you hear it. You see with opened eyes and hear with ears that have been opened to hear God's word. Now you, as a Christian, go back and hear this parable again and see the example of the Good Samaritan and delight in what it teaches you about your new life in Christ and what your love toward your neighbor is to look like. You desire to show mercy. You delight in what God teaches. 1 John 4 wonderfully and clearly explains this all well as you consider this Parable told by Jesus this morning and who you are now as a baptized child of God who is a new creation with a new heart and spirit: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

So, what does this look like in your life? Ask yourself that question "who is my neighbor?" Ask that question but do so not to justify yourself but as one who has been shown mercy and desires to show mercy to others. Look at who you are and where God has placed you in this life. Start with your closest neighbor and spiral out from there. Your closest neighbor is your spouse, if you are married, and then your children, if God has granted them to you. Next keep circling out to others in your life. See these people with real faces and who you know in your life. Show them mercy. Forgive them when they sin against you. Pray for them. Have compassion on them and care for them. Learn from the Scriptures

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what this godly love and mercy is to look like as you live in this world. Teach your neighbor. Rebuke in love if necessary for the sake of calling them to repentance. See and know what they need and help them. Above all point them to Jesus who has shown them the same mercy he has shown to you.

“But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’” Hear this word of God today and know that you have been shown compassion. God’s mercy and provision for you is guaranteed in this life. Fix your eyes on Christ crucified and see God’s love toward you as he is the Lamb of God who has taken away your sin. Your sin is forgiven and your burden is lifted. Feast on his word and know you will never grow hungry. Cling to your baptism and know your wounds have been healed, and you are no longer naked but covered in Christ before the throne of God. Take into your mouths the very body and blood of Jesus and have all that he has won and look forward to the day when you will be at the eternal feast that knows no end. Rejoice in God’s mercy and delight in showing mercy to others. Your mind and heart have been created anew and changed by the Holy Spirit as a Christian so that now you desire to live your life like Christ. What a joy it is to behold your God who has done all of this for you and gives you graciously all that he has done. Mercy is yours. God has shown you compassion. You are an heir of eternal life. Sit here in this place. Hear, rest, take, and eat and wait eagerly for the day when your Lord returns and says, “All is ready, I have come back for you.”

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