

## Intro Words

“Who is my neighbor?” It seems like such a simple question but in the time of Jesus, this was an oft debated question and how one answered revealed the deepest parts of the heart.

## OSL 112 – The Man Left for Dead

Jesus and a rabbi were discussing a question that was the most important question anyone could ask. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” But rather than answer the question, Jesus asked this rabbi what the Law of Moses said. Let’s read the text again in Luke 10. I am reading verses 25-29.

<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?”

The man had answered correctly! He had given the answer every Jew should give, and one wonders why he bothered to ask Jesus in the first place. Every morning and evening, a Jewish man would say “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” This is from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself is found in Leviticus 19:18.

It sounds like Jesus and the legal expert agree! That would be a welcome relief to the crowd that was present. It seems like confrontation followed Jesus wherever he went, and here was an emissary from the establishment in Jerusalem questioning Jesus publicly. But, if the people thought that was the end of the matter, they were in for a surprise because the expert in Mosaic law had another question. His question was, “Who is my neighbor?” and the text tells us that he asked this because he was wishing to justify himself. Both questions come from impure motives. The first question about eternal life was a question to test Jesus, to trip him up, to put him in an awkward position, the second question was an attempt to justify himself.

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So, the religious expert was really asking, “Jesus, if I am to love my neighbor as myself to gain life, how can I determine who my neighbor is? Who should I love? Who should I ignore?”

How did Jesus respond to this man’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” At this time, Jesus did not answer his question with a question. Instead, he told a story. It is one of the most famous in the world. We commonly know it as The Good Samaritan. I like to call it, The Man Left for Dead. Let’s read in Luke 10:30-35.

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by 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, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two 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.’

The road from Jerusalem and Jericho was about 17 miles. It went from the heights of Mt. Zion to the Rift Valley, an elevation difference of over 3600 feet. On many stretches of this road there would be no other travelers, and its remoteness made it dangerous because of robbers. About 100 years before Christ, the Roman general Pompey sought out and killed many of these robbers. But the area was so difficult with so many hiding places, others would return and take advantage of travelers who were not careful. Such was the case with this man in the story who was attacked by robbers, beaten, stripped, and left to die. In the Middle East, physical assault did not normally accompany robbery, but if the victim resisted, he would be beaten, and the fact this man was beaten shows that he tried to resist. But his resistance only brought brutality upon him.

As Jesus told the story, the people would realize that the man was foolish for traveling alone. But soon, help arrived. A priest, just like the expert in the Law of Moses who was questioning Jesus, came along. The priest obviously was not making the same foolish mistake this traveler made. He would have been with others for protection for his life and his substantial wealth. He would ride upon a donkey. He had most likely finished his duties in Jerusalem and was on his way home to be with his family.

But did he help the man? No. He probably thought that the man should not have been so foolish to travel alone. And because the man was stripped, the priest could not tell his nationality. He might not be a Jewish man and if he was not Jewish, then he had no obligation to help him. He was not his neighbor. Plus, if the man was dead, the priest would defile himself by touching and examining him. He would have to go back up the road to Jerusalem for ritual purification that could take a week. His laws of ceremonial impurity were too important to risk. Did not the writings of Ben Sirach say, ‘If you act with kindness, know to whom you do your kindness. Give to the godly man, but do not help the sinner.’ This man had to be a sinner! And the priest walked on without helping.

Then, another man came down the road. He was a Levite. Levites assisted priests in the temple and his service was now complete. He was on his way home as well. Now he may have been alone, but wise travelers stayed close to other groups and never let them out of sight. This brought safety. And so, from a distance he could have watched the priest’s entourage approach and then move away from something lying on the side of the road. When the Levite drew near, he saw the reason why, a body lying naked and helpless on the side of the road.

Levites also had purification rules also, but these rules only applied during their temple service. Afterwards, the rules of touching corpses did not apply. Perhaps the Levite would be the hero in the story and help the man! But the Levite approached and following the priest's example, did nothing.

After the Levite left, a third man came down the road. All the people expected him to be a Jew. The story would go from the holiest type of Jew, a priest, to the next holiest, a Levite, to the next holiest, a Jew from another tribe. That's how stories often went. But Jesus gave them a surprise for the third traveler on the road was a ... Samaritan."

The people must have gasped! A Samaritan? Not a hated Samaritan! A Samaritan cannot be the hero of the story! The Samaritans and the Jews were hostile to each other for hundreds of years. Did they not build a false temple in Samaria? Had not the Jews at one time destroyed that temple? And had not the Samaritans defiled the holy temple in Jerusalem just twenty years before when they scattered the bones of dead people in the courts of the temple in Jerusalem?

"There are two nations my soul detests," a popular Jewish saying went, "and the third is not a nation at all. I detest the Edomites, the Philistines and the stupid people living in Samaria." Another person said, "he who eats the bread of Samaritans is like one who eats the flesh of swine."

But in the story Jesus told, the hero was a Samaritan! The Samaritan was on a journey. He was wealthy and would have several with him and several mounts carrying his belongings. He saw the man lying on the side of the road, felt compassion, and knelt beside him. He touched him. He listened for a heartbeat. He felt for a pulse, and discovered that the man lived! He pulled out bandages, oil, and wine. He poured the wine and oil upon the wounds. He cleaned and washed them as best he could. He stopped the bleeding. He bandaged the wounds.

Then, he put the man upon his personal mount and carefully led his mount, like a servant, down the steep road. When he came to Jericho, he brought him to an inn, reserved a room, and took care of him that night. On the next day, he took out two coins, enough to care for the man for many days. He gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.' This was important because if people could not pay their debts, they could be sold into slavery. The Samaritan ensures that that will not happen to this man.

Jesus' story was complete, and now it was time to answer the legal expert's question with a question. The legal expert had asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' asked him, "Which of these three was a neighbor to the man who was left for dead?" Everyone knew the answer. The religious expert knew the answer and he quietly and humbly said, "The one who showed mercy toward him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Yes. You want to live? Go, and do the same."

And that is the message for us today. The most important question in life is, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And we know the answer – "Love God and live for him. Put him at the center of life. Take yourself off the throne of your life and make him Lord. Find his forgiveness in Jesus who died for your sins and who rose from the grave and is Lord of heaven and earth." But we like to play games. We like to complicate things. We like to keep questioning God with our silly questions rather than submit to him and follow his clear, simple, and humble path.

Today, I hope you will not be like that religious expert who thought he was so intelligent with his theological arguments. I hope you will be like that good Samaritan who kept life simple and who did the right thing at the right moment. Place God at the center of your life. Love him with all your heart, and love your neighbor, love all others, as you love yourself.