

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25-37

Key Verse: 10:28

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

In the last passage Jesus sent out seventy-two other disciples to proclaim, “The kingdom of God is near you.” They were weak and vulnerable, like lambs among wolves. But when they simply depended on Jesus, they experienced the power of God. They became Christian soldiers who rendered glory to God. At our last Friday leaders’ meeting, several new Christians shared their Bible testimonies. When they simply depended on Jesus, they experienced the power of God. God doesn’t necessarily use special people to do his work. God uses those who pray, obey and proclaim, “The kingdom of God is near you.”

This passage is the parable of the good Samaritan. It is exquisite among the parables of Jesus and very well known. The influence of this parable has been widespread. Today we see many hospitals named, “Good Samaritan Hospital.” We would like to award a Nobel Prize to the good Samaritan. Yet it is very important for us to consider this parable in the context of the Bible passage. We must know why Jesus told this parable and what the point of the parable is. May God help us.

First, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (25-27)

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 was an expert in the law. He studied diligently until he earned the title, “an expert in the law.” He might have had his own television and radio shows as a “Bible answer man.” These days we study the book of Job in Daily Bread. It is not easy to understand. But this expert in the law could explain the book of Job with scholarly understanding. He was a man of eminence. Whenever he got up to speak, those around him stopped what they were doing and listened, expecting to learn something great. This time, he stood up slowly and confidently, his silk garments glistening, and turned to address Jesus. He wanted to test Jesus. In testing Jesus, he is not trying to trap Jesus with malicious intent, but to measure Jesus’ Bible knowledge. It was common in those days for rabbis and experts in the law to engage in public discussion. In this way, they raised consciousness about many issues, sharpened one another’s wits and competed for a listening audience.

The contents of his question were, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The man’s question was not petty. It was about eternal life. Actually, all men long for eternal life. Ecclesiastes 3:11b says, “He [God] has also set eternity in the hearts of men...” God gave man the awareness of and longing for eternal life. This man wanted eternal life desperately. But his question reveals that he did not have the assurance of eternal life in his soul.

Here we see the man’s problem. The study of the Scriptures should have led him to eternal life. For example, Jesus’ disciples were “unschooled, ordinary men” (Ac 4:13). Yet they knew that Jesus had the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68). They followed Jesus with a clear commitment, for he alone gave eternal life through his words. Jesus said, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (Jn 6:63). Eternal life comes when we accept Jesus’ words. This expert in the law studied the Bible extensively. But he did not meet God personally through Bible study. Outwardly, he was an expert in the law, self-confident and the object of envy. But in his soul there was no assurance of eternal life. So inwardly he was always anxious to maintain his uncertain existence. He could not but engage in public debates in an endless cycle of challenge and response with no spiritual satisfaction. His soul was so tired and weary. This happens to those who study the Bible without repentance. Once Jesus rebuked the chief priests and elders of Israel because they did not repent before God’s message through John the Baptist. As a result, they were not entering the kingdom of God, while tax collectors and prostitutes were going in ahead of them (Mt 21:31-32).

How did Jesus deal with this expert in the law? Look at verse 26. “‘What is written in the Law?’ he replied. ‘How do you read it?’” Although Jesus knew the man’s problem, he did not respond with immediate correction. Jesus did not collide with the man. Rather, Jesus embraced him and invited him to share his Bible testimony.

Look at verse 27. “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.’”” Wow! This man summarized the

entire Law precisely (Dt 6:5; Lev 19:18). His answer was excellent. In fact, Jesus himself answered in the same way when he was asked what the greatest commandment was (Mt 22:37-39). This expert in the law was as impressive as any honor student. However, he had no assurance of eternal life.

Second, “Do this and you will live” (28-29).

Look at verse 28. “‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’” Jesus credited his good answer and gave him an A+ in Bible understanding. Then Jesus added, “Do this and you will live.” Having the right knowledge from Bible study was important, but it was not enough. He needed to put into practice what he knew. Then he could experience God’s life in his soul and have the assurance of eternal life and the kingdom of God.

Here we must listen carefully to Jesus’ words: “Do this and you will live.” It means that to obey one word of God is life-giving. To put one word of God into practice is more important than knowing ten thousand theological arguments. For example, the ancestor of our faith is Father Abraham. Father Abraham was not a theologian. But he obeyed God in practice better than anyone else. Through his obedience he expressed his love to God. When God told him to leave his country and people and father’s household and go to a new land, he obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Abraham had ups and downs in his life of faith. But he always obeyed God at the crucial moment. For his final exam, God commanded him to offer his only son, Isaac, as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. Who can offer their one and only son to God as a burnt offering? Abraham did so. He demonstrated clearly that he loved God more than anyone or anything else in the world. Abraham did not love God with words alone, but through his practical obedience. Then he had assurance of God’s love and of eternal life in the kingdom of God.

King David also loved God through his action. When he was just seventeen years old, David happened to come upon the battle scene where the giant Goliath was ranting and raving. Goliath was nine feet tall and the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. All the other Israelites were frozen by fear of Goliath and could not move even a finger. David was just a shepherd boy. But when he heard Goliath blaspheme God, David burned with anger. Compelled by love for God, he fought Goliath and defeated him. Throughout his lifetime, David risked his life to express his love for God. David knew God loved him and he was also sure of eternal life in the kingdom of God (Ps 16:10).

When Jesus said, “Do this and you will live,” he strongly encouraged the expert in the law to practice the love of God instead of just talking about it. How did the man respond? Look at verse 29. “But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” The expert in the law must have been cut to the heart at the simplicity of Jesus’ words. What he needed to do was not complicated. He needed to love God. He needed to love his neighbor. He needed to repent before the word of God. He must have felt like a kindergarten kid before Jesus. Still, he was an expert in the law with prestige and a sense of honor to uphold. So he tried to justify himself in order to save his face. He asked, “And who is my neighbor?” He wanted to define the word “neighbor.” This is a common strategy for a lawyer in a tight spot.

In essence, the expert in the law was asking, “Who must I love?” The flip side of his question was, “Who can I ignore without breaking the law?” His Bible study was merely a mental exercise, and he was an escape artist. Perhaps he hoped Jesus would exclude Gentiles in his definition of “neighbor,” especially the Roman oppressors. Perhaps he hoped Jesus would exclude Samaritans who were regarded as a mixed breed and idol worshipers. Perhaps he hoped Jesus would exclude public sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes who gave him a stomach disorder when he looked at them. Perhaps he defined “neighbor” as his wife, his children, and his friends from law school. To Jesus, he needed not only a proper definition of the word “neighbor” but a change in his approach to Bible study. Jesus could have been disgusted with this selfish and able man who cleverly avoided simple obedience to the word of God. But he was not. Jesus loved him and wanted to help him. So he told him the best parable, the parable of the good Samaritan. Surely, Jesus is the God of humbleness.

Third, a good Samaritan (30-37).

Look at verse 30. “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.’” Maybe this

man was a University of Chicago student who happened to stray outside the boundary of campus security while jogging. Suddenly he was beset by gang members who stripped off his designer sweat suit and Nike shoes. Then they beat him and left, not caring if he lived or died. The man was too wounded to move. He could only lay there and groan. A neighborhood priest happened to be going down the same road. This priest should have taken care of him, for he was called to be a shepherd for God's people. But the priest passed by on the other side of the road. His Bible knowledge was comprehensive. But the word of God he remembered at this time was Numbers 19:11. "He who touches a dead man is unclean for seven days." His Bible knowledge did not motivate him to help a dying man. Instead, it gave him an excuse to cross over to the other side of the road and avoid the man completely. This priest was not a shepherd, but a hired hand. Here we learn that without a shepherd's heart, Bible knowledge can be misdirected by the selfishness of our sinful nature.

Look at verse 32. A Levite happened to be going down the same road. Levites were known as music ministers. Perhaps this man led the praise band at another place of worship. When he came to the place and saw the wounded student, he gasped. Then he lamented. Taking out his guitar, he began to sing (to the tune of #123), "What a terrible world we live in! Oh, what dangers lie in store. Man, I have advice to give you. Do not go outside your door!" His artistic lament didn't motivate him to action. When he finished singing, he shrugged his shoulders, sighed deeply and went on his way.

Look at verse 33. "But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him." In contrast to the Jewish religious leaders, this man was a Samaritan. And yet, this Samaritan took pity on the wounded one. The words "took pity" are very important. It means his heart was moved by the suffering of his fellow man. More than that, he took action to help the wounded man. Without a thought for his own safety, the Samaritan went to the man and began to bandage his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. He was not a doctor. But when he had heart, he could treat the wounds. Then he put the man on his own donkey. The Samaritan walked beside the man as he rode, steadying him with one arm to keep him from falling and taking great care to minimize the jarring effect of the donkey's steps upon the wounded man.

The Samaritan probably had a business appointment to keep. But when the alarm on his palm top went off, he ignored it and headed for an inn. Maybe it cost him a great deal of money. But he could not abandon the helpless man. Once at the inn, he stretched the man out on a bed and washed his whole body, seeing to every cut and bruise and wound. So tenderly, he applied medicine. Cradling the man's head in his left arm, he used his right hand to spoon feed him some Chinese herb medicine and later some pieces of fruits and vegetables. Gradually the half dead man began to revive and his breathing changed from ragged to steady. After spending the night with him, the Samaritan knew the danger was over. The man would recover. So the Samaritan took out two silver coins and deposited them with the innkeeper, charging him to care for the man until he returned. He also assumed responsibility for all other expenses which would accrue. In this nameless Samaritan, we see a compassionate heart that drives the action of love.

Jesus asked in verse 36, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" In verse 37 the expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus' beautiful parable had melted the man's heart. Probably, he was in tears as he said, "The one who had mercy on him." Then Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." How amazing it is that Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Jesus believed that this expert in the law could be as compassionate as the good Samaritan.

Jesus wants us to know the character of the good Samaritan and to practice the love of God. This starts with a compassionate heart. It involves a willingness to sacrifice. In fact, our Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate good Samaritan. When he saw the misery of mankind under the power of sin and death, he did not remain on his heavenly throne saying, "I'm sorry." Instead, he gave up his glory and power in the heavenly kingdom and came down to this world to live among us. No matter how tired he was or how busy he was, he made time for all who came to him and healed their sicknesses and planted the living hope in the kingdom of God in their hearts. In order to heal our wounds, however, he could not just pour on oil and wine. He had to suffer and die on the cross. Isaiah 53:4-5 says, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Through this passage we hear Jesus' words, "Do this and you will live." Jesus urges us to put God's love into practice by taking care of the needy. Taking care of one person with the word of God and prayer is costly. It requires heart devotion and sacrifice. It is not convenient. It requires the humbleness of Jesus. Let's not be escape artists in this fall semester who avoid the needy. Let's be like the good Samaritan and like our Lord Jesus Christ. When we practice the love of God, we can experience the life-giving power of God and have the assurance of eternal life in our souls. May God richly bless you and make you like the good Samaritan.