

Sermon June 26, 2022 3rd Sunday after Trinity The Good Samaritan

Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "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."

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."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 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.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." Luke 10:23-37

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I plan to be gone on vacation for the next two Sundays. I noticed that the Gospel for Sunday, July 10 is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Since I love that text and I will be gone on that day, I took the opportunity to preach on it today instead. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches the lawyer that he needs a Savior to come and do for him what he cannot do for himself so that he might inherit eternal life. The lawyer is spiritually dead. He can't save himself. Jesus uses this parable to teach how salvation works. In order to become the heirs of God, we must be rescued by an outsider who owes us nothing, whom we dared to despise, and whom we can never repay.

This is the only way for the lawyer or any of us to be saved. There are no loopholes. There is, however, a Savior who comes in mercy. We trust in his mercy and not in our own merits. The only place we put our trust is in God's promises.

Faith receives Christ and all His benefits including the Holy Spirit. This changes us. We stand before God holy and clean even though we were unholy and unclean. It also gives us holy, spiritual impulses that love God and His law and which seek to imitate Christ. Saved from damnation, we are then directed by Jesus to go and do likewise, that is, to go and be like him.

This is the essence of the Christian faith. It puts Christ at the center of everything. It gives him all the honor and glory for what he has done. He alone is good. He alone is the Savior. He alone does all things well. He freely bestows this justifying grace on the unworthy. This brings us at peace with God and leads us into the eternal joys of heaven.

Many do not understand this. Many pollute and corrupt it with a false view of what we need from Christ. Many change the formula into what we might do to earn His favor and manipulate Him into saving us. All this obscures the glory and benefits of Christ. Christian consciences will be wrongly burdened, always wondering if they have done enough, and denied the full joy of the Gospel.

This parable has often been misunderstood and abused to that end. People read it and think it is a call to good works. They are not completely wrong, but it would be better if they were. A half-truth is worse than a full lie. They fail to see that good works flow from faith. Without that understanding, this becomes a burden because Jesus does admonish us toward good works. He wants us to be like Him. The devil jumps on this, telling Christians that they have not done enough. They have not sacrificed everything they have to eradicate poverty and end injustice. They are hypocrites who have not been like Jesus. They are not as good as the Good Samaritan. Therefore, how can they consider themselves saved? That is false, and the devil is a liar.

Jesus doesn't tell this parable to reinforce the idea that we are to love everyone. The lawyer already knows that. He is feeling the burdens of conscience. He wants to be justified but is squirming because he doesn't know how he can be justified since he has not kept the law and have not loved his neighbor as himself. Jesus is not telling the parable as a means of telling the lawyer to just try harder. He is telling him that He is the Merciful Samaritan. He is the outsider who comes to rescue the lawyer on his way to Jericho. Jesus is the answer to both questions "How do I inherit eternal life" and also "Who is my neighbor." He gives eternal life as a gift

to those who have no other place to turn. He rescues them. He also proves Himself to be the good neighbor to mankind by His mercy.

It is only after the rescue that Jesus calls the lawyer and all of us to imitate Him. This is not a threat or condemnation. Jesus is speaking as an elder brother to his younger siblings. That call for good works is sincere. Good works are not optional or superfluous, but they flow from the joy of salvation and are not, in any way, a cause of salvation. Our status before God and the promised eternal life come by grace alone. This rests securely and solely on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by which God's wrath against us has been satisfied, the law fulfilled, and our debt paid. Thus, we are not under the law but we are still in it. We are still sons. We have a place and a role. He gives us a part of His Kingdom.

There are many statements in the Scriptures like the command, "Go and do likewise." In Jeremiah 31 God says that He will put His law in the minds of His people and write it on their hearts. Paul recognizes that the doctrine of justification by faith could lead to sinful living and a despising of the law. He asks "Do we then make void the law through faith?" and immediately answers: "Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." (Romans 3:31, NKJV). Jesus Himself tells us to keep the commandments. In Matthew 19 He says: "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."" (Matthew 19:17, NKJV)

These statements can be misused if they are pulled out of context. But if we read them as they are written, we discover that they all reflect the reality that the forgiveness of sins, justification, and faith change the believer. They do not leave him static. God gives the Holy Spirit and produces new life in those who believe in Him. He produces spiritual impulses in our hearts. The lawyer is expected to be changed from his encounter with Jesus, even as the woman caught in adultery and Zacchaeus and the man born blind were. That is what God means when He says "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts."

After we have been justified and reborn by faith, we begin to fear and love God. His commandments are written on our hearts. We pray for and expect help from him, help in believing and in resisting temptation, doing good works, and fulfilling our vocations. We also pray for help to bear our afflictions and to make a good confession. We love our neighbor. We go and do likewise. Our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses given by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

These things cannot and do not happen before or apart from the grace of God that is freely given through faith in Christ. It is impossible to keep the law without Christ and without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is received by faith. These things do not earn God's favor, but we are called to them, not as a burden, but as a gift. "Stay with Me," says the Lord, "work in the vineyard."

Even though the lawyer had evil intent, the question before Jesus was "How does one inherit eternal life?" That is the context of this parable. The preaching of the Law left the lawyer squirming. Again, he did not have pure motives, but he did want to be justified. He was looking for a loophole or escape route. Rather than giving him that, Jesus offered him Himself. He answered the question: eternal life is inherited by grace, as a gift of mercy, from God the Father in the Person of Jesus Christ, received through faith alone.

Jesus Christ is the one who has compassion. He provides the balms of healing and transportation to the inn at His own expense. He is the one that is despised and yet who pays for everything and promises to come back. He is the one who proves neighbor to the man by His mercy. He has rescued us in this way, and we should imitate Him. We should be like Him, compassionate and merciful and forgiving. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him. Amen.

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