

JUST DO IT; JUST KIDDING

LUKE 10:25-37

EVEN THOUGH WE ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS, THE LEAST BIT OF SELF-EXAMINATION WILL REVEAL HOW BADLY WE DO AT BOTH.

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Just Do It; Just Kidding

Luke 10:25-37

Let me just remind us of where we are in the Gospel. Jesus is making His way towards Jerusalem. They have been traveling through the region of Samaria. They have experienced both rejection and incredible success. Jesus had sent 70 disciples out on a mission where they experienced great power in healing, casting out demons, and preaching the Word of God. We left Jesus giddy last time over the dedication and the success of the 70 and all the people they ministered to.

He was then reminding the disciples that they should count themselves blessed because their names were written in the book of life in heaven. In other words, they were permanent citizens of heaven for all eternity. And secondly, they had witnessed and participated in the Messianic ministry of Jesus. These were truly reasons to rejoice.

This morning, Jesus is going to be tested by a professional lawyer. This was not just some secular random lawyer of the day. This was a lawyer whose specialty was religious law. In particular, this lawyer interpreted and explained how the Mosaic Law should be applied to everyday situations. This guy was a professional and we learn in today's text that his intent was to put Jesus to the test but what happens is that Jesus turns the tables and puts the lawyer to the test. The dialogue concerns how one is to obtain eternal life. I want us to keep this in mind as we study through this morning's text. We should keep basic theology in mind as we study through the Bible. We clearly believe that we are saved by grace through faith and not by works. However, we would also quickly add to that that authentic faith is accompanied by works of righteousness. It's amazing to me how thick this lawyer is. He states clearly that one inherits eternal life by loving God with one's whole heart, soul, strength, and mind along with loving one's neighbor as he or she loves oneself. Jesus told the guy to "Just do it." That sounds simple enough. But if we take some time for self-reflection, we can see that we can never attain it.

Just think how hard it is to love our neighbors, especially those who are not so kind. It's okay for me as long as I have pleasant neighbors. However, if I have cranky neighbors, I can only be nice for so long.

I had this one neighbor lady who was insufferable. I really did try to be nice to her. One morning, I went outside to get my newspaper, and she happened to be getting hers at the same time. I said to her, "Good morning Ms. Paloma. You are looking mighty nice this morning."

She stuck her nose up and said, "I regret that I could not say as much about you."

I tried ... Lord knows I tried ... but I said to her, "That's because you're not as big a liar as me."

Jesus' discussion about loving our neighbor takes some interesting twists.

The question that drives this discussion between Jesus and the lawyer is, "What must I do to earn eternal life?" Doing and righteousness become the key words in this exchange. Even Jesus ends each section by saying, "Do it." However, we can quickly see the difficulty of doing what Jesus commands. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **EVEN THOUGH WE ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS, THE LEAST BIT OF SELF-EXAMINATION WILL REVEAL HOW BADLY WE DO AT BOTH.** In other words, Jesus lays out the simple requirements of being righteous. But living out these simple requirements is not so simple.

It's interesting that I am writing this sermon in the same week I taught a worship lesson on Hebrew poetry which uses parallelism. I don't think I did so good of a job. But what do you know, we run into it here in this passage. The passage is broken down into two major sections and your outlines will attempt to lay out the parallels between the sections. In section 1, verses 25-28, the lawyer will ask a question and then Jesus will ask a question. The lawyer will give an answer and then Jesus will give an answer. In the second section, verses 29-37, we will see some of the parallel thought. The lawyer will ask his question number 2. Jesus will answer the question with a parable. Then Jesus will ask His question number 2. The lawyer will give his second answer and then Jesus will close the encounter with another answer. Now what is important about parallelism is that we have to trace the thought. The expert will ask Jesus what he has to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answers his question by telling him to love God and love his neighbor. The expert will ask how Jesus defines neighbor. Jesus will go on to define that and then tell the lawyer how to be a neighbor. And then Jesus tells him to imitate the example Jesus gave him in the parable. Therefore, the passage is about salvation, holiness, and the nature of authentic faith.

KNOWING THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE (VS 25-28)

In verses 25-28 we encounter someone who knows the commandment of love. However, **TALKING ABOUT LOVE IS A LOT EASIER THAN LIVING IT.** I think that most of us who claim to be Christians know the right answers. In other words, we know what's right and wrong. Our problem is often not that we don't know but that we don't do. Many people try to play with the commandments of God.

In verse 25 we will see that testing Jesus can easily backfire. Jesus is traveling towards His date with destiny in Jerusalem. There He will suffer and die as Israel's Messiah. He will die to make atonement for the sins of Israel and our sins. He will die so that we can inherit eternal life. The NIV identifies this unknown man as an expert in the law. The NLT says the lawyer's specialty is religious law. The text simply says the man was a lawyer. From the discussion that follows, we can safely assume the lawyer indeed is a Hebrew religious law expert. Notice his intent in

questioning Jesus was not to learn but to test Jesus. And so it is really interesting the lawyer asked Jesus what he had to do in order to inherit eternal life when Jesus was about to make a way for people to actually inherit eternal life through His death and resurrection. But the lawyer is there to spar with Jesus, not to learn even though he addresses Jesus as teacher.

As this clever lawyer is about to learn in verse 26, testing Jesus leads to being tested by Jesus. Jesus tossed the lawyer a softball. Jesus gave him a question that he should be able to knock out of the park. Jesus simply asked him what was written in the law. Jesus asked him for his interpretation.

Verse 27 goes on to explain that he knows the right answer. The expert lawyer shoots out the correct answer without hesitating. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. In other words, he told Jesus that the way one inherits eternal life comes as a result of Loving God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Further, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We could say the same thing. The problem is that none of us do this. Could any of us here say that we love God with all our heart soul, strength and mind? In fact can we even say that loving God and spending time with God takes priority in our lives? I'm just going to take a wild stab at the answer to this question. I'll just speak for myself. There is no way that I could claim to love God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind. I'd like to be able to say that, but my actions surely don't demonstrate that. Even though I would say that God has first place in my life, and I'd like to believe that about myself, I'd have to say that I love me more than I love God. I'm constantly trying to overcome that but I'm not even close. Look we all know the religious answers. The religious lawyer knew the right answer.

Look what Jesus tells us to do with the right answer. In verse 28 Jesus says, "Just do it." In other words, knowing what the truth is and living the truth are two different things. Jesus acknowledged that the lawyer gave the right answer. In fact Jesus ended up by saying, "Do this and you will live." I'm wondering if the lawyer gave Jesus' command to just do it any thought. Have we given it much thought? Let's take some time to do that now. Think about your day planner. How much time do you spend with God intentionally throughout the day? Oh, I am busy doing a lot of things. I do a lot of good things. I do a lot of religious things. But if I were to analyze my use of time, it would definitely reveal that I love me more than I love God. Let's now look at our checkbooks and credit card statements. My assumption is that all Christians know we should be giving at least a tenth of our money to church. But when we examine how much we spend on ourselves as compared to how much money we give to God, if you're anything like me, again you'd have to say that I love me more than I love God. If Christians gave just what God commanded as the minimum, churches would never be short of money.

Let's review this first section. Jesus just told us to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind. In other words, we are to invest ourselves totally in God, with our emotions, with our intellect, with our bodies, and with all our resources. And further, we are to love our neighbors as we

love ourselves. Think about the dilemma we find ourselves in. We don't even love God like we love ourselves. How could we expect to love our neighbors as we love ourselves? The point is this. TALKING ABOUT LOVE IS A LOT EASIER THAN LIVING IT.

At this point, if we have been listening to Jesus and if the Holy Spirit has been speaking truth to us, we should simply stop here, fall on our knees and beg God for forgiveness. Jesus loved us by continuing on to His march to Jerusalem where He gave His life in the most horrific way so that we could inherit eternal life through Him. And yet we return His love with giving Him what we have left over in time, money, and strength.

We have talked enough about the commandment of love. It is time for doing the commandment of love as explained in verses 29-37. JESUS CALLS US TO LOVE NOT JUST TO TALK ABOUT IT. In other word, at this time the lawyer should have fallen on his knees and confessed that he was unworthy even to be talking with Jesus.

But he is not repentant in the least. In fact he will have to learn this lesson again. In verse 29 he will find out that testing Jesus can easily backfire again. Please follow the wording carefully here. Remember this is about salvation, about eternal life. The Apostle Paul uses the word justification to describe our inheriting eternal life in this sense:

"1Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1 / NIV).

It is clearly God that justifies us. When God justifies us He declares us to be righteous. Notice that we cannot do this by keeping the commandments. We are declared righteous by God when we place our faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. In this section righteousness is from the same root word as justified.

"1Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4 / NIV).

DOING THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE (VS 29-37)

Please keep this in mind. When we repent and confess our sins to God, He forgives us. He justifies us and applies His righteousness to us. But the text here in verse 29 says that the lawyer wanted to justify himself. In other words, he wanted to prove himself and declare himself righteous. It seems to me, he should have just let it go. He should have said to Jesus, "I try to love God and my neighbor, but I have to constantly fight off my self-centeredness. Help me." But like most self-righteous people, he has to press the issue. He doesn't just want to press the

issue, he wants to press Jesus. He then asks Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” While giving the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quoted a common Jewish belief although it is nowhere found in the Old Testament:

“43You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Matthew 5:43 / NIV).

So it was fairly common for Jewish people to love other Jews but they felt free to mistreat others. However, at the Sermon on the Mount Jesus went on to correct that wrong thinking. Jesus went on to say that if we want to be His followers, we must adopt His way of life. Jesus went on to say:

“ 44But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:44-48 / NIV).

In other words, if we want to fulfill Jesus’ love command perfectly, we must set ourselves apart from the rest of the world by loving our enemies.

This lawyer asked for it, and now Jesus will give it to him right between the eyes. The lawyer finds out once again that testing Jesus leads to being tested by Jesus in verses 30-36. Let me just give us some warnings as we study this Parable of the Good Samaritan. First of all, if you do most of your study in the New Living Translation, I want to just give you a heads up that they take a lot of liberties in translating this passage. It’s not that they are inaccurate, but they read some things into the translation. I’m sure that most of you know that I really like the NLT but here you should read another translation alongside it.

Next, throughout history, there have been many different approaches to translating parables. People have allegorized them and many bible scholars have attributed all sorts of symbolism to the parable. For example, they want to make the man who was robbed and left for dead on the road humankind. In other words, all of us have been robbed, beaten, and left for dead by Satan. Jesus becomes the Good Samaritan who rescues us and nurses us back to health. He pays for our rescue and healing through His death on the cross. I don’t think the parable is about this at all.

I think another way to lose the intent of the parable is to over literalize it. For example, when I was in seminary, there was a dangerous gang in Chicago. One person would pretend to be stranded or in trouble at the side of the road. When someone would stop to help, the gang would jump the person, rob them, and leave them for dead. The parable is not telling us to stop for everyone that appears to be in trouble. We must use wisdom as well. Some people want to find meaning in the designation of a priest and a Levite.

Here are some facts that describe the journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jerusalem is about 20 miles from Jericho. Many of the priests who served at the temple and many Levites lived in Jericho. They would make regular trips to and from Jerusalem in order to fulfill their duties. Jerusalem is 2,300 feet above sea level and Jericho is about 800 feet below sea level. The road is rough to travel and presents many opportunities for robbers to hide and ambush people. The road was nicknamed the Bloody Way.

That's all common knowledge people would know. But what should drive our interpretation is the fact that Jesus was responding to the lawyer's question, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus starts out verse 30 by reminding us that God presents us with opportunities. Jesus simply said a man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho. We don't know the ethnicity or anything about the man except he was headed from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was unlucky enough to fall into the hands of robbers. They robbed him, stole his clothes, beat him, and left him for dead. Jesus could have told this story in Chicago or any other city. The point is that someone lay on the side of the road in need.

As we read the parable, let me remind us that the particular situation is not what Jesus is after. God puts all sorts of people in our path who are in great need. Some are in financial need, some in emotional need, and some may be in physical need. Some may be afflicted by old age, illness, or some other problem. But God will always bring someone into our lives that needs to be ministered to.

In verses 31-32 we see two missed opportunities. Again, many commentators want to allegorize or spiritualize the role of the priest and the Levite. Priests offered up the sacrifice of the people to God for forgiveness. The Levite was an assistant to the priest. They were singers, gatekeepers, and did all sorts of other temple chores. They no doubt taught the duties of people to demonstrate compassion to those who were in need and to show acts of mercy as a religious duty.

Whatever their reason, they saw the man, and then passed by him on the other side. We have all sorts of reasons that we don't minister to those in need. We don't have time, we don't want to spend our money, or a myriad of other excuses. Sometimes we miss opportunities because we are not paying attention to what God is doing in our lives. We are all caught up in our own world.

But in verses 33-35, we encounter someone who is engaging opportunities. Here is the first opportunity in the story that I think we legitimately make something about the person in the story. We would have expected Jesus to move from the Priest, to the Levite, to a common Israelite. But Jesus bypasses the common Israelite and jumps to a Samaritan. There are some interesting observations we have to make about Jesus choosing a Samaritan to be the hero of the story. The Samaritans were looked down on by the Jews, especially the religious Jews. The Samaritans

were basically Jews from the northern part of the kingdom who were conquered in the 8th century B.C. Their captors forced them to intermarry with other conquered people from all over the world. So they were no longer considered pure Jews because they had adopted customs from all over the world. So other than being an out and out pagan Gentile, Jesus took the lowest possible Jewish connection. If the Priest and the Levite represented the religious elite, the Samaritan represented the lowest expression of Judaism.

If you remember from a couple of weeks back, on His journey through Samaria, Jesus was out and out rejected by a town in Samaria. James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven on the village. Nevertheless, Jesus chooses a Samaritan to be the hero of His parable.

Now watch this. The Priest and the Levite came, saw, and passed by on the other side. There is nothing inside of them that is moved. The Samaritan came, saw, and was moved with compassion. The word for took pity on him or compassion is a super emotional and passionate word. The Samaritan was moved at a very deep level for this victim. Instead of passing by, he stopped, bandaged the guy's wounds, poured out wine to sterilize the wounds and oil to sooth the skin. This cost the Samaritan money. He put the victim on his donkey, and took him to a local inn. This cost the Samaritan time. He then gave the innkeeper money that would have paid room and board for about 3 weeks with the promise that on his return if there were any additional costs, he would pay for them.

Here is the point. If we were to put this lawyer questioning Jesus on a religious continuum, he would no doubt be very close to the Priest and the Levite and far away from the Samaritan. Those he would have identified with did nothing. They were not moved with compassion and they did not stop to help. On the other hand, a lowly Samaritan stopped, had compassion, and invested his time, money, and energy in helping this man. He helped at great personal cost.

It seems to me that God gives us time, money, energy, and the Holy Spirit so that we can invest ourselves into the lives of people we find in need. God saved us for the purpose of carrying on Jesus' ministry. God blesses us in order that we become a blessing to others. That is what the Christian life is all about. Too many Christians think being a Christian is simply not doing anything wrong and minding their own business. Please hear what Jesus is saying here.

In verse 36 He pops the test question. He asked the law expert, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The wording here is key. I can still remember this as if it were yesterday. Beverly's brother Kerry and I were classmates. When the professor got to this point, you could see the light go off in Kerry's mind. He got excited and blurted out, "Don't you get it? The question we are supposed to ask is not, 'Who is my neighbor?' That's not up for definition. The only question Jesus forces us to ask is, 'Who am I to be a neighbor to?'"

Kerry nailed it. I am neighbor to all God puts into my path. This rules out all racism, prejudice, favoritism, arrogance, selfishness, or anything else.

The lawyer, wanting to justify his own righteousness wanted Jesus to define who His neighbor was but Jesus turned it upside down. Jesus didn't answer that question. He made it clear that the Lawyer was neighbor to all who needed him when God put them in his path.

In the first half of verse 37 we again find out that we often stand before God knowing the right answer. This answer betrays all the motives and bad intentions of the lawyer. It indeed shows he is in no way justified before God. He responded to Jesus, "The one who had mercy on him." The guy can't even bring himself to say the word Samaritan.

There is something else here. Do you remember I said the word doing was important in this passage? The phrase literally reads, "He that did mercy on him." The Samaritan acted out his faith. He did the righteous thing. Here is an important lesson for us. Knowing the truth, being able to quote the truth, being able to teach the truth does not translate into saving faith.

In the second half of verse 37 Jesus says again, "Just do it."

Saving faith is faith in action. People who are truly saved will be out there looking to do acts of mercy. God will bring opportunities into our lives. The question started out, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer is, "Be a neighbor as defined by Jesus." I know people get all crazy when we talk about works and salvation in the same breath. But please hear how the Apostle Paul connects them:

"8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10 / NIV).

Jesus told the lawyer to go and do likewise. Paul is telling us that we were saved to be a neighbor to those God brings into our lives. We have the words of eternal life. We know the Savior Who can heal them and make them whole. God prepared us to do good works and He will insure that He brings opportunities into our lives. Let's not miss these opportunities. Let's engage them wholeheartedly. **JESUS CALLS US TO LOVE NOT JUST TO TALK ABOUT IT.**

How could we possibly read the Gospels and come away thinking we are fine? For all the talk about faith and holiness, I don't see much evidence of brokenness and repentance. I see a lot of Christians who think they are fine. How can anyone spend five minutes in the presence of God and come away thinking we are fine in any way? **EVEN THOUGH WE ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS, THE LEAST BIT OF SELF-EXAMINATION WILL REVEAL HOW BADLY WE DO AT BOTH.**

Here is the trend I've seen from the 1960's up until this very day. Christians are generally good Americans but pathetic Christians. We have defined Christianity in terms of praying a magical prayer, being baptized, minding our own business, not getting involved with people, and staying away from the big sins. Jesus defined Christianity in terms of love. It's pretty hard to love when you're hiding out and not engaged. We have become like the dolls in the following story:

"A four-year-old girl, hugging a doll in each of her pudgy little arms, looked wistfully up at her mother and said, 'Mama, I love them and love them and love them, but they never love me back.'"

That's pretty reflective of modern day Christianity. God has loved us, and loved us, and loved us some more. However, we are really not good at loving Him or one another. If Jesus is serious about defining Christianity in terms of love, we have gone way off the track. Let's make a commitment to get back on track by loving God and loving those God brings into our lives.