



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

The Kingdom Way: Love

July 10, 2022

Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: Luke 8:26-39 (ESV)

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."

On the news recently, there was a story about someone who was described as being a "Good Samaritan." He had stopped along the freeway to help a person who was in big trouble. A Good Samaritan. Now, where did that phrase come from? Well, we know from our story today, don't we? With the exception of the prodigal son, no story Jesus ever told has so left its mark on our language and society as the parable of the Good Samaritan. As popular and well-known as this story is, then, it becomes all the more important that we understand what it is about. Because it's more than simply a morality lesson. It's actually part of Jesus' instruction on kingdom living – on the Kingdom Way,

and his kingdom's relationship with the law of God. Remember, Jesus came announcing that He was inaugurating the Kingdom of God as he called people to repent and believe in Him. As we examine this story and the next two that follow it, we have him teaching us the ways of the kingdom, it's practical council on kingdom living.

The story of the Good Samaritan is part of a conversation – you could maybe even call it a debate – between Jesus and an expert in the law of Moses. The law expert had a question or two for Jesus. He stood up to test him to check out his knowledge of the Old Testament. Perhaps he was thinking that he could catch Jesus saying something heretical or controversial about the law of Moses, I suppose. But there really isn't a hint of hostility in this story. Maybe he was just curious about Jesus, or perhaps he had concerns about his own future and his own relationship with God. Well, we can't know for certain, but we do know that the experts stood up, which is a sign of respect, and quizzed Jesus. “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Eternal life – that's an important spiritual matter, isn't it? It's a synonym for entering the Kingdom of God and on how to have a forever life with God now and in Heaven.

Notice, though, that he asks, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” That's a strange way to put it, don't you think? To inherit something is to receive something for doing nothing. For instance, I inherited my father's house when he passed away. I did nothing to earn that. It was a gift from my father. This guy's question implies that he's looking for a specific act that he can perform that will give him the key, the guarantee, to eternal life. And he's convinced that he needs to earn it, you see. But as Jesus did so often, he quickly and effortlessly flips the script on the man by responding to his question with a question. “What's written in the law?” Jesus said, “How do you read it?” In other words, what's your interpretation of the law of God? Tell me what the Old Testament laws answer is to this question. And suddenly the quizzer has become the quizee. The lawyer knew the answer to his question: love God, love neighbor. It's a combination of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, and Jesus affirms the man's answer with a God-like authority: “You've answered correctly. Do this and you'll live.” That's what the law says. But the lawyer isn't satisfied with that. We're told he wanted to justify himself, perhaps have the last word in this conversation, or maybe, just maybe, hear something from Jesus to make him feel more reassured about his own relationship in future with God. So he asked, “Who's my neighbor? I'm doing fine. I'm loving God. I've got the vertical thing down, I think. But I'm not so sure about who is my neighbor. Are there limits?” He was doing what everyone who operates within a works-based religion must

do. He's trying to lower God's standards down to a place where they can be achieved by human effort. Just place the limits on who he is responsible to love. Keep it close to home, and then you'll have a chance at getting the job done – to be declared as a just person before God.

But Jesus is about to show him that he falls far short of following these commandments that he's just quoted. Just like we all do. The lawyer was looking for this straight, doable answer to his question, maybe some affirmation for his own efforts, but Jesus instead told a story to show him that his question was the wrong question in God's kingdom – love has no limits, no boundaries. The more appropriate question is, how can I be a loving neighbor to everyone I encounter? That parable about a mugging: a man's traveling down a dangerous stretch of road gets beaten up and left half dead by neighbors. He's bypassed by two religious Jews. For some reason, he's in a predicament. Who's going to help him? Along came a Samaritan – remember now, Samaritans were despised and considered longtime enemies and not trustworthy. This man saw the half dead man lying on the road. Jesus probably paused like any good storyteller, and the listeners might have been thinking to themselves, “Uh oh, this is going to be bad. Surely he's going to do something terrible to this poor man.” But Jesus went on with the story and said the Samaritan had compassion for the half-dead man and went to him and took action to rescue him and care for him. Israel's enemy's playing the hero in this story that had to have been shocking to those listening to Jesus.

But Jesus didn't leave it there. He asked the stunned lawyer, “Which is these three proved to be the neighbor to the man who got mugged?” And the lawyer said, through gritted teeth, I imagine, because he didn't like Samaritans, “The one who showed mercy, I suppose.” Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.” And the conversation and the debate is over. According to Jesus' question at the end of this parable, the right question is not “Who's my neighbor?” Instead, it is, “How can I be a loving neighbor?” It's just not a matter of noticing and feeling bad about the wounded and the suffering and needy of the world. It's doing something for someone in need. We're being taught that love is a verb. Love acts, like the Samaritan did, with costly, generous, self-sacrificing culture-crossing actions. He lavished kindness on this wounded enemy, who is probably Jewish by the way, and he did it at his own expense. We see that loving one's neighbor has some risk involved. This could have been a trap to rob him, but he stopped and pulled out his oil and wine and tended to the injuries anyway. He took a risk and it was inconvenient for him. He had his own schedule to keep, but he put the

man on his own donkey and walked him to an inn, that slowed him down and nursed him through the night, getting little rest for himself. He then paid ahead for the man's stay and promised to come back and repay any other incurred expenses. He was a loving neighbor, wasn't he? And it appears from this parable as well, that there are no boundaries and limits when it comes to being a neighbor.

Pastor and writer Timothy Keller writes in his book *Generous Justice*,

We instinctively tend to limit for whom we exert ourselves. We do it for people like us and for people whom we like. Jesus will have none of that. By depicting a Samaritan helping a Jew, Jesus could not have found a more forceful way to say that anyone at all in need, regardless of race, politics, class, and religion is your neighbor. Not everyone is your brother or sister in faith, but everyone is your neighbor, and you are called to love your neighbor.

Years ago, there was a popular children's program on public television called *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, and at the end of its theme song, it would say, "Won't you be, won't you be? Please, won't you be my neighbor?" And this passage before us has Jesus saying to us, "Won't you be a neighbor?"

I have to admit, friend, I find this conversation and parable to be quite convicting and disconcerting, don't you? And I wonder if the law expert did. Maybe Jesus wanted that to happen. Someone once made this observation about him: that Jesus came to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. And this passage afflicts me a little – troubles me because I know in my heart of hearts that I fail at loving God and neighbor. So often I fall way short of the mark of fulfilling the law's demands. And I'll bet you do, too, which can cause us to despair as we consider that law expert's opening question: What must I do to inherit each eternal life with God?

Let me ask you then, after all this we've heard, do you really want to depend on your obedience to the law for eternal life? Are you comfortable with that? Are you still committed to working hard to justify yourself before God and others? This conversation between the law expert and Jesus is informing us that if I'm counting my doing for eternal life, then I'm in mighty big trouble. I just might want to reconsider my way of thinking here. Depending on my own obedience for eternal life with God – that's a dead end and a frightening way to live my life. There's got to be a better way. And Jesus offers it to us. You see, there are two kinds of religion in the world. One is spelled "do," "D-O." Do these things and you'll go to Heaven. But that's a dead end. Because how do

you know you're doing enough? That's where all the religions of the world teach. Except one. And that once is spelled "D-O-N-E," done. And that's a Christian faith. Jesus, who is the ultimate Good Samaritan, when you think about how he came to rescue us in our helplessness, has done it all for us. As far as eternal life is concerned, while we were still his enemies, Christ came to us and lavished us with his costly sacrificial love by dying on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins so that we might be forgiven and have eternal life. By his wounds we are healed trusting in him and what he's done, we have a rich inheritance that awaits us in Heaven, scripture says. You can't earn it. That's the way of his kingdom. Trusting in Christ first. That's the way in eternal life with God is: a gift that only can be received through faith in Christ alone.

So, this passage for today is, first of all, an encouragement for us to stop trying to justify ourselves before God by our doing, and to instead place our trust in Jesus, God's son, savior, the world for eternal life. And so I'm pleading with you today as a preacher of the gospel: repent. If that's if you're like that lawyer, repent, change your mind and only trust in Jesus for eternal life. You can't do it yourself. Don't wait on this and miss out on what God wants to give you. Hold out your empty hands to Jesus and ask Him to give you his eternal life. And He will give it to you.

Now, you may be wondering at this point, what about the commandments to love God and neighbor itself? Do they then still apply to those of us in Christ's kingdom who are trusting Jesus for eternal life? I'm glad you asked. The answer is yes, but the motivation is different. Once we have understood the truth about eternal life and our inability to earn it and placed our faith in Christ and entered His Kingdom, we receive a new heart that has been touched by the unmerited love of Christ, and we are moved and empowered by the Spirit to extend love and service to others. And we obey this commandment to love God and neighbor, not in order to earn eternal life for ourselves, but because we have eternal life. We love because he first loved us. It's a response. We want to please and delight God because we love him and are grateful to him for rescuing us. Our desire has become that we want to serve him by bringing his love to others so that they might believe and enter into his kingdom. We want to do that for him. Our love will never be perfect in this life, though, we'll still sin and fall short. But don't despair. There is good news. Scripture promises that if we confess our sins, which means failing to love God and neighbor, God who was faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He gives us a do over.

Isn't it interesting that we find the lawyer's words in our confession of sin? At the beginning of our worship services, we admit our failures in love:

We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your son, Jesus, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we might delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.

And in His compassion and grace, God points us to the cross and has mercy on us.

Then, as forgiven children of God, He sends us out again in Christ's name, into a world full of Jericho roads with wounded and needy people in need of a neighbor with compassion who will love and help them and point them to Jesus Christ. That's our calling. That's God's way for us as kingdom citizens. And you don't have to look very far for hurting, needy people, do you? Your mission field is all around you. It could be in your own neighborhood. Someone who's recently lost a loved one or the local food shelf, or the nursing home. Or the local jail or the homeless shelter. Recommit yourself today to look and listen and love in Christ's name. Find a need and fill it. Find a hurt and heal it in the name of Christ Jesus who first loved us.

There's a wonderful story from *Men of Integrity* magazine, which reads:

A man who had no interest in spiritual matters had a Christian neighbor. They talked over the back fence and borrowed lawnmowers and stuff like that. And then the non-Christian's wife was stricken with cancer, and she died three months later. And here's the letter he wrote afterward:

I was in total despair. I went through the funeral preparations in the service like I was in a trance. After the service, I went to the path along the river and walked all night. But I didn't walk alone. My neighbor, afraid for me, I guess, stayed with me all night. He didn't speak. He didn't even walk beside me. He just followed me. When the sun finally came up over the river, he came over and said, "Let's go get some breakfast." I go to church now, my neighbor's church, a religion that can produce the kind of caring and love my neighbor showed me, is something that I want to find out more about. I want to love and be loved like that for the rest of my life.

And that's our message for today. You've been loved by the savior – trust in that love and then love because he first loved us and saved us to be his own for eternity. That, my friend, is the kingdom way. Amen.