

Text: Luke 10:25-37

²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

²⁷He 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.’”

²⁸“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰In 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.

³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two silver 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.’

³⁶“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Theme: Our Salvation Is Grounded in Compassion and Mercy

Think about this question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” That is absurd. This man was a teacher of the law, and he asked what he must do to inherit something. How do you inherit things? You don’t earn them. Inheritances are gifts. That is what that teacher of the law didn’t understand. Our salvation is not grounded in what we have done, but in God’s compassion and mercy for us.

I. It is very tempting to think that we don’t need God’s compassion and mercy.

First it might be good to define what compassion and mercy are. These are two very common terms in the New Testament. The Greek word for “compassion” means “guts.” It is when your heart goes out to someone else. They might be in need and you feel for them or they might have had something good happen to them and you rejoice with them. It is related to sympathy. Mercy is God’s love for those who cannot help themselves. Think of the people who cried out to Jesus for mercy. They were afflicted with incurable diseases. They were sinners. They could not help themselves, but they knew that Jesus was able to help them.

The teacher of the law thought that he didn’t need either of these things. He knew that to save yourself you had to love 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.” To him this seemed easy. He had a great devotion for God. He probably observed the Sabbath and feasts, he fasted, and he paid his tithes. He was also sure that he loved his neighbor as himself. However he understood his neighbor to be other good Jews. He probably lived by the rule, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” In his mind he had done everything necessary to inherit eternal life. He was sure that God would tell him, “Well

done, thou good and faithful servant.” He didn’t need any compassion or mercy from God, so he thought.

It is tempting for us to think that we can save ourselves too. We might feel that we are very devoted to God. It is tempting to think that I have deserved God’s love. “Look at how pious I am in my faith. I never forget to pray in the morning, before meals and at bedtime. I am generous with my money. I know the Bible pretty well. I try to be a good person. Why compared to most people, I’m not so bad at all.” We might feel pretty confident that we have done enough to inherit eternal life. Like the man in our text we are often tempted to justify ourselves before Jesus. We hope that He will realize that we have done enough to inherit eternal life.

II. The truth is that none of us has done enough to inherit eternal life. We all need God’s compassion and mercy.

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to make that point. We can see ourselves in several of the characters of the parable.

Sometimes we are like the robbers. They beat the man, took his possessions and left him lying half dead on the road. There are people whom we have hurt. Sometimes it’s our words. We have said things that hurt them right down to their soul. Other times it’s our deeds. We physically hurt people. We have taken advantage of them. None of us are completely innocent. When we think about it, there are people whom we have hurt badly by what we have said or done to them. We have given them scars that will never heal in this life.

Other times we are like the priest and levite. When the priest saw the poor man right in front of him, he passed by on the other side of the road. The levite did the same thing. There are times when God directs us to someone who needs our help, but our hearts are stone-cold. We don’t feel any sympathy for them. We have the means to help them, but we try to get away as soon as possible. We want to get out of there before we can get involved. But the Bible is clear that to neglect the good that we should do is as bad as actually doing the dirty deed. James 4:17 says, “*Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.*” We can all think of people whom we have passed by. They needed our help. They might have even cried out for our help, but we got out of there as quickly as we could.

Most of all we are like the man who was beaten up. We were on our way to the heavenly Jerusalem. Everyone would love to have eternal life. We want to live under the blessing of God in this life and live forever with Him in His glory forever. But on the way we get beaten up. In fact, we get so beaten up, that we’ll never make it. We will die before we ever get there, we are in such bad shape. What beats us up? What leaves us dead on the way? It is our own sins, the bad things that we have done and said, and the good things that we have failed to do. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 2:1, “*As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins.*” We were not just half-dead. We were dead in sin. People who are dead in sin can do nothing to inherit eternal life.

But we have our Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan saw the man who was half-dead on the road. Immediately His heart went out to the man. That compassion caused him to dress his wounds and bring him to an inn where he paid for everything that the poor man needed. The Good Samaritan

helped this poor man who was not able to help himself. He had mercy on him.

That is exactly how Jesus has treated us. He saw our condition, and His heart went out to us. Paul goes on to write in Ephesians 2, “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved.*” Christ paid the price of our sins. It was much more than a couple of days’ wages. It was His own innocent suffering and death on the cross. He took our sins on Himself. But by His wounds we have been healed. In baptism He washed our sins away. He has raised us to a new life with Him and put us on the path that leads to eternal life. Our salvation is not something that we have earned. It is a gift that God has given to us through our Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ through His compassion and mercy for us.

III. As Christians we want to share that love and compassion with our world.

Jesus told the teacher of the law, “*Go and do likewise.*” Think of what God has done for you. He has been compassionate and merciful. When we have been the beneficiaries of those gifts, we can’t help but share them with others. God helps us to rejoice with those who are happy. He enables our hearts to go out to those who are suffering or struggling with temptation. His Spirit helps us to love our enemies and to even pray for those who persecute us. We want to do good to all people, especially those of the household of faith. We do struggle with temptation and sometimes we fall into sin, but Christ our Good Samaritan is always there to pick us up again as we repent. It is our desire however to be as compassionate and merciful to our neighbors as Christ has been to us.

May God enable each one of us to realize that we cannot save ourselves, that we may receive His compassion and mercy for us and that we may then go and do likewise and share His compassion and mercy with a world that is in need of it.

Amen.

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