



Who Do You Love?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

by Edwin Crozier

September 8, 2013

AM Assembly



Introduction:

Let's begin with a story. A Jewish 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. By chance, a priest was going down that road. When the priest saw the beaten man, he passed by on the other side of the road. Sometime later, a Levite was also walking down that road. When he saw the beaten man, he also passed by on the other side. Sometime later, a Samaritan, a man hated by Jews, came to the place where the man was. The Samaritan had compassion on this man who likely would have passed by had roles been reversed. He went to him, bound and treated his wounds using his own supplies. He set the man on his own animal and walked the rest of the way to the inn. He spent the rest of the day and night taking care of him. Then he gave two days' wages to the innkeeper to care for the man and promised to cover any other expenses when he returned(cf. **Luke 10:29-37**).

Many of us have heard this story or at least heard of it. However, very often we forget to see what this story is all about. This story was actually Jesus's answer to a question. So let's back up and see the whole story. A lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, asking, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And the lawyer 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 Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus told the story of the beaten Jew and the benevolent Samaritan. Do you see the question the Samaritan's story answers? Who is my neighbor? Jesus and the lawyer both agreed, if the lawyer wanted eternal life he must love God and his neighbor. But the lawyer wasn't finished. This wasn't a clear enough answer. He needed better lines drawn. So he asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Think about the question behind this question. The lawyer wants to know, "Who do I have to love to get eternal life?" As we focus a month on good deeds, on loving in deed and truth, we might ask this question too. Okay, I'm supposed to love my neighbor, but who is that? Who do you love?

Discussion:

I. What kind of answer was the lawyer looking for?

- A. Lawyers were teachers of the Law who worked hard to figure out the jots and tittles of legal application. They knew the Law well. They had figured out the patterns. They had figured out the applications. They knew the loopholes. They knew the limitations. They knew how far you could go and how far you had to go. They knew what you had to do to fill commands. They figured things out like how many times you were really allowed to strike someone when legally punishing them, how far you could actually walk on a Sabbath's day journey, and which spices you had to tithe. They liked lines and limitations.
- B. When this lawyer said, "Who is my neighbor?" this is the kind of question he was asking. What's the limitation on this? "Sure, Jesus, I know I'm supposed to love my neighbor. But who does that really mean? What is the limitation? Let's be reasonable. You can't mean I love everyone, so who do I actually have to love?" I hope we grasp this. The lawyer's question was one that we hear asked very often and one that we often ask ourselves. The question was "Do I have to...?" The lawyer might as well have been pointing his finger at different people and asking, "Do I have to love that guy?" In fact, he was actually asking, "Surely I don't have to love everyone to get eternal life. Who can I get away with not loving?"
- C. The lawyer was looking for Jesus to provide acceptable limits that drew a circle around those he actually had to love to make this command easier. He expected an answer listing qualifications, for instance: must be a Jew, must live in the Promised Land, must be part of your own tribe, must be within a Sabbath's day journey of your home, etc. The lawyer's question wasn't really about who he had to love. It was really about who he could get away with not loving. And isn't that the basis of all our "do I have to" questions?

II. Why this story is so shocking.

- A. One of the things we don't often consider is the cultural setting behind this story. Jesus actually does a masterful job setting up this story. Remember that the story began by saying the lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test. He was trying to entrap Jesus in His words. We don't know the exact nature of this trap, but in

some way he wanted Jesus to fail in His words and lose face before the crowds. But Jesus turns the tables and springs a huge trap on the lawyer.

- B. Many of us are well aware that the Jews and the Samaritans didn't like each other. The Samaritans were the descendants of the non-Jews who had come into Israel when Assyria took the northern kingdom captive. God sent lions among these inhabitants who were not worshipping Him in His land. So the Assyrians sent Levites to teach them how to worship God. However, they didn't devote themselves completely to God, they simply added Him to their group of gods (cf. **II Kings 17**). The Jews hated these imitators. They despised their half-religion and half-devotion. They abhorred the fact that they didn't worship in Jerusalem.
- C. However, there is another aspect to this story that many of us miss. Among the Jews, there were multiple sects or groups that adhered to different philosophies. Two of the most well-known were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Pharisees were semi-separatists who wanted to make a huge distinction between Jews and everyone else by keeping the Law as strictly as possible. They did believe in the resurrection. They believed they would gain eternal life because of their strict adherence to the Law of Moses. Most lawyers and scribes were Pharisees. This one who is concerned about inheriting eternal life was almost certainly a Pharisee. The Sadducees were materialists who didn't believe in the resurrection (cf. **Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8**). Thus, Sadducees wouldn't be very worried about inheriting eternal life. These two groups were rivals. They didn't really like each other. Pharisees thought the Sadducees were materialistic opportunists who weren't really concerned with keeping God's people separate from the Romans and other Gentiles. The Sadducees saw the Pharisees as extremists who were going to keep Israel in trouble with Rome. Here is the kicker. Many priests and Levites were Sadducees.
- D. Understanding that, do you see what Jesus does with this story? He is answering a Pharisee or at least someone who has leanings toward the Pharisees. He tells the story about a priest and a Levite, men who would likely be Sadducees and how they pass by a man in need. I can almost see the lawyer salivating. Jesus is slapping the lawyer's religious rivals. As Jesus starts to talk about the third man walking past the Jew, who do you think the lawyer expected to be the hero? Jesus had just shown how those materialistic, unspiritual Sadducees responded. Surely he is going to bring up a good, law-abiding Pharisee. Instead, He brings in someone even worse than the Sadducees. He brings in a Samaritan. Imagine Jesus here telling this story to our congregation. He might tell it like this:

A man was driving down the road to Mooreseville from Brownsburg when he was carjacked by hoodlums that beat him, robbed him, stripped him, and left him for dead. By chance a Christian who says we shouldn't have Bible classes and uses only one cup for the Lord's Supper drove down that same road. When he saw the man, he gunned his engines and sped by. Likewise, a Christian who says it is okay to worship God using mechanical musical instruments passed that way. When he saw the man, he didn't even slow down, but sped by. But a Muslim came by, picked up the man, set his bloody and grime covered body on his leather seats, carried him to a nearby hospital. He gave the clinic his financial information so they could charge him instead of the man.

- E. This was so shocking to the man that when Jesus asked him who proved to be the neighbor to the beaten man, the lawyer couldn't even say, "The Samaritan." He chokes on that and instead says, "The one who showed him mercy." What would we have said if Jesus had just told a story showing us up by using a Muslim as the hero of the story?

III. The better question.

- A. When Jesus finishes His story, He turns to the lawyer and springs His trap with a question. But have you ever noticed how odd that question is? He doesn't say who was the Levite's neighbor, who was the priest's neighbor, or who was the Samaritan's neighbor. He doesn't actually ask simply who was the beaten Jew's neighbor. The English Standard provides a better translation when it shows Jesus asking, "Who proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" This does accurately express the point. Who proved to be a neighbor? Who showed himself to be a neighbor? As Young's Literal Translation puts it, who became this man's neighbor? Why would Jesus ask that in such an odd way?
- B. Jesus's point is that the lawyer asked the wrong question. The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" He essentially asked, "Who do I have to love?" "Who meets the qualifications of being my neighbor so that I am obligated to love him?" Jesus deftly explains that these are bad questions. The right question to ask is not who qualifies as my neighbor. The right question is how do I qualify as a neighbor? Rather than asking who do I have to love, I need to ask, "How do I prove myself to be someone who loves?"
- C. The lawyer was asking for lines and limitations, but Jesus doesn't give Him any. In fact, if you're like me, when you get done with this story you are left saying, "Well, that doesn't help me at all. Okay, I'm supposed

to go and do likewise, but for whom? I mean when I see a broken down car, do I have to stop? When a beggar is at the side of the road do I have to give him something? How much do I have to give him? Do I have to help non-Christians? Who do I have to love?" Jesus actually doesn't answer those questions for us. At least not directly. He doesn't draw the lines for us that let us off the hook. He challenges us with His shocking story. He challenges us with His pointed question. He refuses to make it easy for us.

IV. So, who is my neighbor?

- A. Now that you've considered Jesus's odd question for a moment. Let's take another look at it and how He really is answering the lawyer's question. The lawyer's question is "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus's question is "Who proved to be the beaten man's neighbor?"
- B. Put yourself in this lawyer's shoes. Who in this story did he most identify with? He was no Levite or priest. He didn't want to be. They were likely Sadducees that didn't believe in eternal life. He was no robber. He wouldn't beat anyone and leave them half dead. He certainly didn't identify with the Samaritan. Who did he identify most with? The beaten man.
- C. Do you see now the masterful stroke Jesus played here? The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" He essentially asked, "Who qualifies to be someone I have to love?" Jesus tells a story that essentially responds, "I don't know, lawyer. Who would you want to be your neighbor if you were laying half-dead on the side of the road? Would you refuse a Samaritan's help if you were the one beaten and dying? Then why would you refuse to help him if he were the one beaten?"
- D. And this is the problem for us. None of us ever asks, "Who should show me mercy?" We think anyone and everyone should show us mercy and compassion. If we were beaten, dying, hungry, thirsty, naked, in need, we wouldn't hand someone an application that they had to fill out in triplicate to prove that they really were our neighbor and therefore were obligated to help us. But do we ask, "Who do I have to love? Who is my neighbor?" Do we put people through a background check and neighbor assessment test before we will show them mercy? Jesus responds, "Your neighbor is anyone you would want to help you if they passed by when roles were reversed."

Conclusion:

Don't ask the wrong questions during our series on good deeds. Don't ask who you have to show mercy and compassion to. Don't ask who your neighbors really are. Ask how you can be a better neighbor to those who you cross on your path, whether it is a family member, a co-worker, a person in your neighborhood, a school-mate, a brother or sister in Christ, a stranded driver, a homeless man on the street, or whoever else you meet. Our story ends with Jesus saying, "You go, and do likewise." That leaves us with this question. Who do you love?