

April 7, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 10:25-37.

1. What do you think was the lawyer's motivation for asking Jesus about eternal life?
2. Why did the lawyer ask Jesus?
3. What is the essential nature, or what does the twofold law the lawyer stated represent?
4. Why did Jesus tell the lawyer to go out and keep the law and he would be assured of eternal life?
5. Why did the lawyer ask about what constitutes a neighbor?
6. What important lesson did Jesus teach in the story about the good Samaritan?
7. Why did Jesus say a second time that the lawyer needed to go and do?

LOVE EACH OTHER – DO GOD'S LAW
Luke 10:25-37

It is true that each year fewer and fewer Americans make their way to local church services on a regular basis. There are still the many who have traditionally showed up at church on Easter and Christmas. But why? Why do people bother? Have you ever asked

why you attend church services fairly regularly? According to the Pew Research Center, a survey they took in 2015 indicated that about 75% of all the Americans who responded to the survey believe something about eternal life. More precisely, it would appear that three-fourths of our population have some thoughts about a heaven to gain and a hell to avoid. Maybe thoughts about eternal life compel us to go to church.

That general knowledge about eternity might be why the question, "Where will you spend eternity when you die?" was a pretty effective way to open a witnessing opportunity for the gospel in a generation past. I remember hearing about a barber whose pastor had challenged the congregation on the previous Sunday to create opportunities for telling the good news of the gospel. So while the customer was sitting in the barber's chair, lathered with shaving cream awaiting a shave, the barber was sharpening his straight edge razor as barbers used to do in the past generation. Thinking it a good time to follow through with the pastor's challenge, the barber (while sharpening his razor) said to the customer, "Do you know for sure that you will go to heaven when you die?" That was probably not the most appropriate time to pose that question.

It is true that the American culture is still heavily influenced by the religious fervor of past generations. A lot of people were taught in Sunday School about eternal life. But beyond that is the reality that everyone has a pesky, nagging reminder that life is short and when it is all over, we are going to live somewhere forever. There are plenty of false teachings like reincarnation, annihilation, oblivion where everything just stops, or we all become ghosts, or the soul returns to the "Mothership," or time just sort of re-boots in a different sphere with which we are unfamiliar in this life.

Actually, the reason most people think at least a little about eternity is because God placed the idea in our souls when He created us. The wise man Solomon concluded, "*He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end*" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The question of eternity still hangs around. It still demands an answer. A man who was considered quite intelligent by his peers

asked Jesus about eternity. God the Son, author of eternal life, gave a critical answer which all people do well to consider or ponder.

A Man Put God to the Test (vv.25-28).

The test was about eternal life. *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v.25).* The lawyer dealt with something that is ageless. Questions about eternal life are important. Most people have an intuitive sense of eternity in their souls. People who have not seared their consciences have a certain amount of intuitive knowledge about eternal life because God put it there. Again as Solomon concluded, *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end (Ecclesiastes 3:11).*

That gnawing question brought the rich, young ruler to Jesus to ask the same thing the lawyer in our text asked. In that story we read, *Behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:16-17).*

An expert in law would know some matters about eternal life. All devout Jewish people agreed that God promised some kind of eternal kingdom. The precise form of that kingdom was not universally agreed upon even as it still is not. However, there was a sense that righteous people would live in God's kingdom forever. That was the Old Testament concept of eternal life.

Especially an expert in the law would know truths about eternal life having studied and taught truth like Job's conclusion, *And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me! (Job 19:26-27).* Or David's confession, *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).* Or the essence of Daniel's vision: *But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever (Daniel 7:18).*

This lawyer was an expert in teaching and interpreting the Law of Moses. He was also an expert in teaching and applying the hundreds of manmade laws and traditions that had come down from other lawyers, elders, and the Sanhedrin. And of all people he could have asked about eternal life, Jesus was the most obvious one to give the right answer. He had taught repeatedly that He came to bring that life. Early in ministry, the Christ conversed with Nicodemus about eternal life, saying, *that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:15).* He told the teacher of Israel, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).* He taught, *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life (John 3:36a).*

Jesus offered the woman at the well eternal life (John 4:14). He offered eternal life to the whole crowd gathered at one of the major feasts in Jerusalem (John 5:24). He made it very clear that He offers eternal life through the Holy Spirit's work (John 6:63). He is eternal life (John 6:33). He came to offer eternal life (John 10:10). He gives eternal life to all who believe in His character and finished work (John 6:40). The expert in the Law was having a conversation about eternal life with the Author and provider of eternal life – yeah, Him who is eternal life.

But why did the fellow even want to know about eternal life? Maybe his motivation was not all that pure. The text reveals, *behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test.* That phrase indicates a rather abrupt move, maybe even an interruption. In other words, it looks like the guy was on a mission. Be that as it may, he addressed Jesus as "Teacher" showing respect. But still his motivation (*to put Him to the test*) is suspect. The Greek word for test means to tempt toward failure, to try to trap. The word shows up only four times in the New Testament and always in reference to putting God to the test.

It is always foolish to test God on His theology. The really important question is not what I think about God, but what God thinks about me. So this lawyer's test was really not aimed at making Christ fail but it was about the lawyer himself. In fact, a literal reading of his question sounds like this: *"By what having already done do I inherit eternal life?"* The question was about what he had accomplished toward gaining eternal life. But notice the illogical nature of the question. If eternal life is an inheritance, you don't do

anything to get it. An inheritance is a gift. This is the precise problem with most religious people. They talk about the **gift** of eternal life and then worry about all they need to do to **earn** it. We don't **earn** gifts!

That line of reasoning leads us to this inevitable question, "Is eternal life gained by keeping the Law?" Keeping Law is to love God and neighbor. *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."*

Jesus answered the man's question by appealing to the Law. Christ never ignored the Law, or denigrated the Law, or contradicted the Law as the religious rulers often accused Him of doing. Here He appealed to the Law as the authoritative teaching on eternal life. But we also see that Jesus answered the question with a question: "*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?*" Which was to ask, "How do you recite what is written in the Law?"

This was a reference to the practice of the devout Jews who were supposed to recite daily the Shema, which the lawyer repeated. "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The Jewish teachers/lawyers also added to that recitation of the law the statement from Leviticus 19:18, "*... you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

These two statements summed up the teaching of the first half of the Ten Commandments (love God supremely), and the second half of the Ten Commandments (love you neighbor like you love yourself). Both commands require the death of self stated in the words, *all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind* (v.27).

God the Son affirmed the lawyer's answer. *And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live"* (v.28). Jesus agreed with this simple, twofold expression of the whole Law. On another occasion when asked to state the most important law, *Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor*

as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

No doubt the lawyer was feeling pretty satisfied at this point. Sadly, he didn't realize that the problem is that no one is able to do this. In fact, to gain eternal life by keeping the Law, a person is required not to break any part of the entire Law. Paul explained the problem by teaching, *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them"* (Galatians 3:10).

This truth means that everyone is guilty of breaking God's entire law which renders us unrighteous sinners who offend God by our very lives. Any attempts to please God by keeping law is the essence of human pride. Expressions of pride and independence from God will gain hell, not heaven; eternal suffering, not eternal life. We cannot begin to have faith in the atonement won by Christ until we are completely empty of self, and self-efforts, and self-righteousness. We must conclude that we are included in the repeated statement in the Bible, "There is none righteous. Not one!"

God Put the Man to the Test (vv.29-37).

In response to Jesus's challenge for the man to love God supremely and to love his neighbor equally, the man attempted to justify himself. *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* (v.29).

People love to justify themselves. Human nature desires justification. If there was no guilt, there would be no attempts to justify ourselves. Consider how we respond when someone points out even the smallest inconsistency in our lives. For example, we make a mistake at work or overlook something that we should have done, or we step out of bounds at home. Our boss, our friend, our spouse points out where we fell short of the expected goal and we immediately start to make excuses. I have a friend who is late for everything. I used to call it to his attention. Sometimes he would show up knowing he was late and say, "Sorry I'm late. The sun got in my eyes." Okay that might be a valid excuse for a baseball player

dropping a fly ball, but it doesn't work for everything. Excuses are attempts to justify ourselves.

The Law of God being revealed in nature, in our conscience, as well as in the Bible, does a good job of convicting us of failure and saddling us with guilt. This is the age-old conflict which is wishing to justify ourselves by not telling the truth versus humbling ourselves by telling the truth. Based on his own response that we are required to love God supremely and love our neighbor equally, the man should have hung his head in shame and said, "I am a failure. What can I do?"

But that didn't happen. Human justification avoids the hard questions. We hate to be honest about, "How is your relationship with God? Really!" Or "How is your relationship with your neighbor?" Not, "How is your relationship on the good days," but as a rule, do you love God with all your heart? Do you love your neighbor the same way you love yourself?

The lawyer was running into the stark reality that the Law convicts but does not save. Conviction for him (and us also) came through a story. *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'"* (vv.30-35).

Jesus told a story that brought the requirements of the law to the surface. If there was love for God and love for neighbor, someone should have done something for the victim of sin. A Jewish priest was among the top religious leaders. This would be like a reference to a pastor in America. He should have been the first to offer help. He ignored the problem.

A Levite was one of God's specially chosen servants who, of all people, we would expect to be in fellowship with God by loving Him supremely. This guy might have been equivalent to a deacon in an American church. Surely he would love others, especially one of his own race, like he loves himself. Nope. He wasn't interested in keeping the law.

Then there was this hated Samaritan. They were people of mixed heritage dating way back to when the Assyrians overran Israel in 722 B.C. The Jews hated them for not remaining pure in Jewish heritage. The Samaritans were not crazy about the Jews. The poor victim was from the nation that *had no dealings with the Samaritans* as the woman at the well reminded Jesus (John 4:9). The Samaritan could have argued, "The road from Jericho to Jerusalem is in Jewish territory, not Samaritan territory. Therefore, it was the Jew's responsibility to care of this needy man." Indeed, it was. But the Samaritan did what the self-righteous Jews would not do. He loved his neighbor. The Samaritan was not moved by legal obligation or by what others thought he should do. He was moved by compassion for the needy man.

Then Jesus gave a command to the lawyer. Could the self-righteous man "do likewise"? Having told the convicting story Jesus posed the important question. "*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"* (v.36) The self-righteous lawyer could only answer one way which was to tell the truth. *He said, "The one who showed him mercy"* (v.37a). That was the only and obvious answer. He was exactly right. The Jewish religious leaders had failed. Conversely, the Samaritan kept God's law even though it probably wasn't all that important to him.

Based on the man's confession, Jesus laid down the challenge. *And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise"* (v.37b). This is where the application of the story often gets off track. By telling this story, Jesus did not challenge Christians to be kind to the needy. Whoa! That's how we have always heard it. I'm not saying that Christians are under no obligation to help the needy. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of other texts and clear commands that require love, compassion, kindness and such toward our neighbors who we love as ourselves.

Maybe at the very least, our expected character is revealed by the fruit of the Spirit. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23)*. If we are born again, this is our standard for interpersonal relationships – even with people we do care that much for. If we are connected to the vine Jesus, we will produce fruit in keeping with His character.

But that was not the lesson Jesus taught in this story. Jesus’s challenge here was for the lawyer to go out and practice the second half of the Law (i.e. relationships with other people) perfectly! We know from our own experience that that was not going to happen! Jesus offered the same kind of challenge to the rich, young ruler. Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:21-22). The man went away sorrowful because he could not die to himself and the pleasures his riches brought.

In closing, let’s make the application of the principle. Sinners (all of us by nature) cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. As natural born sinners, we really are not consistent in loving relationships with others. At some point we all fail. That means that none of us can love God supremely through our own strength, wisdom, and self-discipline. Which also means that we fail to carry out either half of the Law.

Then what? That is the POINT! We will never be justified through our own works. Then what hope is there for eternal life? There is hope in God alone. God offers justification, but not through our efforts. God the Son died, shed His blood to pay the penalty for our law breaking. The letter to the Christians in Rome teaches that *[Righteousness] will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Romans 4:24-25)*.

God the Father is justified to blot out the sins of all who humble themselves, say the same thing about themselves that God says, and ask forgiveness from sins. At that response, God wipes the guilt of sin away and declares the believing penitent sinners to be righteous. The only possible justification available for sinners is to accept the

justification Christ already won for him or her. So the Scripture teaches, *He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7)*.

The “Good Samaritan” story was the challenge from God the Son to avoid trying to justify yourself through your good works. None of us can keep God’s law well enough to be justified. The law of grace is constant and unchanging. It still requires that we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. That we confess our sins. That we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and we will be saved.