

Everyone Should Be A Samaritan!

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I'm just going to read one more thing. It's not going to be up on the screen, but I think quite useful for what we want to do.

So I'll just read, it's a short passage. If you've got your Bibles, it's Genesis chapter 29 and verse 21. We'll just read a few verses. Then Jacob said to Laban, Give me my wife that I may go into her, for my time is completed.

So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went into her. Laban gave his female servant Zilpah and his daughter Leah to be her servant.

And in the morning, behold, it was Leah. And Jacob said to Laban, What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me? Laban said, It is not done in our country to give the younger before the firstborn.

Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other one in return for serving me for another seven years. Jacob did so and completed her week.

[1 : 1 6] Then Laban gave his daughter Rachel to be his wife. Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant. So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. But, well, good evening.

You know, whether you're here in person, whether you're on Zoom or on the telephone, whatever it is, if you could keep your Bible open tonight in Luke chapter 10, and particularly verse 27, where the lawyer answered a question from Jesus and said, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.

And that was the thing, the Shema that Ian read out. But before we get to that, I'd read that short passage about Leah.

And for those of you that have heard any preaching that I've done recently, you know that I've been reading the children, some of Catherine McKenzie's books.

[2 : 5 0] She's written a whole lot. And they're not just for children. I can thoroughly say that they're for adults too, and it would do you good to read them if you can get a hold of them.

And there's something in one of her books about Leah that, obviously I've known this story since I was a little boy, but there's something that she said in her book that just had not registered with me in the way that it should have done.

I've always known, as I'm sure you all did, that Jacob had two wives, one that he really loved, which was Rachel, and the other one which he didn't love so much, which was Leah.

But what didn't register with me until I was reading that book was the story from Leah's perspective. Because if you read it, what is really clear is that Leah loved her husband, and she loved him very much.

I don't know if this is actually the case, but I get the feeling when I read this passage, and I've read it a lot recently, is that she was possibly a willing participant in her father's deceitful schemes.

[4 : 03] And I think that she maybe went along with it because she had had feelings for Jacob all along. But the problem here is the one that you all know. Not only did her husband not love her, but the last verse that we read said that her husband hated her.

And that's really strong language. It's shocking language. It's something that when you read it and understand it for the first time, you take a step back that Jacob hated his wife.

You may argue that he had grounds. She had, after all, been part of a scheme to trick him into marrying a woman that he didn't want or didn't love. But that's not the point for tonight.

The point is that she loved him. And she loved him very much, and she did all that she could to get him to love her back. And the thing that she could do, the one thing that she thought she could, was to have children with him.

And the hope was that as a result of this children, that he would start to love her. And if you read on in what we read in Genesis, we said child number one born, but he still didn't love her.

[5 : 19] He still hated her. Child number two, same thing happened. Child number three, same thing happened. And then by child number four, she had given up and took her troubles to the Lord.

But the point is that she loved him, and he didn't love her back. And that's something, and it captures in a very direct way, just a simple truth that's been there from the beginning of the creation, is that everybody needs to be loved, and there's someone to love.

Go back to Genesis, and you'll see that God realized that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone, so he gave him Eve to be his special companion. Other examples, Ruth in the Old Testament, she loved her mother-in-law so much that she didn't want to be separated from that love, and she left all behind to follow her.

We didn't sting it, but Psalm 22, maybe if you get some time later on tonight, you will see the psalmist. And he felt that everybody was out to get him, that his life was in danger, he was unhappy and sad, he was physically ill, and he felt that he had nobody to turn to, nobody to care, nobody to love, and nobody to show him any compassion.

Taking it from a different angle, we had Abraham, and he was told as a test that he had to sacrifice his own son, and the pain that he went through, in the knowledge that this is something that he thought he would have to do.

[6 : 59] And there are many examples, but when it comes to it, as I said, we all need to be loved. We all need to have somebody we can trust, somebody that we can rely on, somebody that we can depend on, maybe gee us up at times, maybe give us a telling off at times, or share or carry our burdens with us.

We all need that. But just as in the case of Leah, the person that she really wanted it from was not prepared to give her that love and compassion that she so desperately wanted.

And it's so true for many of us in all walks of life, it can be as a result of a bad relationship or a broken relationship, as was the case for Leah.

It can be as a result of the loss of love. Maybe we've lost somebody, maybe somebody very dear to us that has died. It can be isolation, which is all the topic at the minute.

That could be the missionary who's away from home. It could be somebody who's stuck in their house because they're having to isolate. It could be maybe just somebody who's just not able to socialise anymore or have no one to care for them.

[8 : 13] Maybe even someone who's just so broken or burned by life that they withdraw because they feel safer spending time with themselves and their own company.

And I think as well that aspects of the modern world just seem to make this so much worse because it's broken sort of traditional communities.

It's broken traditional family life. It's... It's... It's... The other thing that it's done is it seems to have changed the moral compass where we can blame whoever we want.

But we put ourselves at the centre rather than the community or our family or whatever it happens to be. All these things have changed.

And this... This lack of love in anybody's life it's a destructive thing. Destructive for them. It's destructive for people around them.

[9 : 13] It creates a downward spiral that causes nothing but misery and hopelessness. And this takes me to where I want to get to this evening because I don't want to talk so much about what you do if you're in this situation because we'll all be in that to a greater or lesser degree at times.

What I want to do is to talk about the responsibility to love because it's good. It's good for our health. It's good for our happiness. It's good for our society. It's good for our church and our state.

And it's a win-win situation for everybody involved. And as I said what I want to talk about tonight is the responsibility to love others to be the lover to be the person who loves both our best friend our dearest family member in just the same way as we love our worst enemy in that way.

You know it's about what I want to capture is to be that person who loves everyone regardless of their age their background the colour of their skin or any other factor that differentiates us or creates a division that we are to love them all just the same.

And that is such a difficult thing at times. I know it is. Sometimes it's just hard to love people. We maybe not have anything in common. We maybe just don't understand what makes them tick.

[10 : 48] We've maybe been badly wronged by people. Maybe the person that we're supposed to love which is just not very nice whatever it happens to be.

Maybe our heart really wants to love but we just don't know how to do that in practical and emotional ways. But what this passage shows is that we are to love regardless of any of these factors.

And the passage in Luke it has a flow leading up to the parable of the Good Samaritan. It starts at the start of chapter 10 where Jesus sends out the 72 and they come back.

Their work has been successful. They're full of the joys. And then at the end of that Jesus promises the 72 eternal life in heaven.

And then Jesus goes on in verse 21 he highlights that it's the ordinary people who have a better understanding of the gospel message than what he calls the wise.

[11 : 57] And it's at that point that this lawyer and it's a religious lawyer maybe a scribe one of the wise that Jesus was referring to decides to ask his questions because I feel he's just a bit put out and he says what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

It is a question but it's more of a challenge because he would have felt that the 72 what have they done to deserve eternal life? They've been sent out for a few weeks and done a few things ticked a few boxes where it was he a scribe he kept the law he knew the law he was educated and wise and what is it they have done to deserve eternal life?

and then to make matters even worse where Jesus went on to say that the children knew better than the likes of him what the gospel message was that was just too much for this to describe so he asked this question which was a challenge and that takes me to really the first thing I want you to notice that it's our responsibility to love and if we go back to the interaction of Jesus with this scribe he was the scribe he was a legal man he was well versed in legal matters so Jesus deals with him by taking him back to the law and while not directly here but he takes him back to the ten commandments where the first four commandments as I'm sure you know deal with our responsibility to love God and that was summarised in Deuteronomy chapter 6 which was the first bit I read about loving the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your strength and it covers and the second the the the remaining six commandments are about our love for other people and they're comprehensive we've got to love

God only there's nothing to get in the way of that it's a love that can't be shared can't be half-hearted it can't be occasional and it's central it affects every area of our life and how we speak and how we think about God and how we worship and so on and as I said the Shema cuts that down to summarise this as an easy way for people to remember with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind and then our love for people you will know this but we have to be we have to protect them physically and emotionally we have to protect their family life or have appropriate relationships we have to protect their possessions we have to protect and enhance their name and their integrity but not to covet things that they have and they're summarised we haven't read it but I'll just read it very quickly in Leviticus or we did read it but slowly and it says you shall not swear by my name and so profane where is it sorry

I can't find it but it it's about loving your neighbour and says I am the Lord so that's the first point that it is the law that we love our neighbour and it is the law that we love God too there aren't any carve outs there aren't any exceptions there aren't any caveats there's no get out clauses so this requirement to love is a command it's not an option but actually a command about how we should be love kind of think of love love and do love if you don't love

[16 : 29] God well then you can't love your neighbour possibly. And there are a few things that come from that. The requirement, as I keep saying, is to love totally and fully.

It's the law after all. But also, it's a basic theological fact for all of us to remember. It's not new. It's not radical.

It's not a philosophy. It's not a lifestyle. It's not a political belief or system. It's very different from that. And the difference is, when we have other things, be it philosophies or systems or processes, be it unionism or nationalism or conservatism or socialism or communism, whatever it is, they all, I'm sure, start out with good intentions.

They all want the right thing. They all want happiness. They all devise systems and processes and laws to create that. But the difference is that they try to create them.

Whereas the Christian view is love, is something that you just actually are. It's the way you are. It's your being. It's yourself. It should be everything about you.

[17 : 42] And the third thing about this legal requirement, and I've mentioned it already or in passing, is that it is absolute.

And it takes me back to the sad case of the lawyer. He asked a question that he already knew the answer to. But in the interaction with Jesus to try and catch him out, what this lawyer revealed about himself was that he just could not live with this requirement to the fullest extent required by the law.

The lawyer knew this, and everybody who was listening in the vicinity knew that he couldn't do it and knew that they couldn't do it either. And his response was desperately sad because what he tried to do was to limit the requirement.

What he is effectively saying is, I know I have to love my neighbour, but I don't love somebody who's not my neighbour. And that's what he was trying to do.

He was trying to narrow the playing field to a position that he felt that he could comply with. And this parable just points out the lengths that people will go to to do something similar.

[19 : 02] The priest and the Levite in the parable, they didn't want to go near this body of this badly injured man because if they touched him, it would make him unclean. But it was no excuse.

For the priest, for example, because he was on his way home from worship. He wasn't going to worship. He was on his way home.

And even if he had been going to the temple, if he was on his way there, yes, he would have been unclean, but there was mechanisms, ceremonial mechanisms to reverse that, to make him clean once more.

So what was happening here was not his fear of being ceremonial unclean, but he was showing he had no love for this wounded and beaten man.

And his love was so small that he couldn't be bothered going through the processes just to help this man out. And one of the reasons why I asked Ian to say the Shema is because the priest would have started the day saying the Shema, you know, about loving the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might.

[20 : 20] And I don't know if you saw Ian, but what he did was he put his hand over his head. That wasn't because he was embarrassed or shy or because the light was in his eyes. What they did was they put their hand over their eyes so that nothing would distract them from the words that they were saying so that they could focus totally on this act of worship.

There's another thing that Ian did that he whispered. Now that wasn't because he was trying to remember the words. The reason for that is that there's some of the things that Ian said that aren't in the Bible but they're in the Talmud and the compromise that they make is to whisper what's in the Talmud but to say out loud what's in the Bible.

And the reason for saying this is quite simply is they went so hard at this. They thought they were so good. They would have covered their eyes. They would have done their whispering.

They would have said the Shema in the morning and at night and he was on his way home to do it but yet he passed by a man who was in need. And what a hypocrite.

What a bunch of hypocrites this priest and Levi were. They were promising to love God with their whole heart, soul and strength but they wouldn't help someone in need for no other reason than it was a bit of a nuisance to do it.

[21 : 42] And I think if we're truthful we're all similar. We all think we love. We all pride ourselves in helping others. We all think well of ourselves when we help somebody in need but we fail each and every day.

We all have blind spots corporately as a church but as individuals. And if I was going to give some examples maybe close to home you know maybe it's other denominations or other denominations who claim to be us or use buildings that we think are ours.

Do we love them in the way that we love ourselves? We find it hard to love others who harm us but we are to love them as ourselves.

We find it hard to love others who are different or have a different outlook to us but we are to love them as ourselves. Sometimes I think in the tradition that we're in and the tradition that I grew up on that as men we find it really hard to show our love for other men in the way that we can for our children or our women.

I think as well in this modern age and what we're facing that we struggle to love others in the way that we love ourselves who have different views on Christian marriage.

[23 : 07] I grew up in Belfast. I grew up I was born the year the trouble started. I've been through it all and I look back and see what did we do to bring the gospel to those who lived in the west of our city and we didn't do anything.

So we all have this requirement to love but we all fail. I've just given a few examples but I'm sure there's many more.

And if we want to know how we should love well then this Samaritan man shows us how it should be done. He loved a man who would not have loved him. The man who was beaten was a Jewish man.

They were enemies of each other because the Jews saw the Samaritans as both religiously and spiritually unpure.

The Samaritans disliked the Jews every bit as much. They'd even gone as far as setting up their own temple. They fought with each other. People were dying because of their occasional skirmishes.

[24 : 15] There was no love between these two nations. But the wounded man was passed by by his own people who would have said the Shem of that morning because it was a bit of a nuisance to help him.

But the man the man was helped and saved by somebody and a nation who would have hated him. And he helped the man despite the danger to himself that would have been on that road.

He provided medical care and attention to someone that needed it. He used his own money to put somebody up. And to have him cared for.

And he did all this without any recognition or even without a vote of thanks. And because his love was so pure and so strong none of that was expected.

And when you look at all that what it teaches you there's no logic to love. It's just something you are. There was nothing in this for the Samaritan man. He had much more to lose than what he ever had to gain.

[25 : 21] But the thing about love doesn't have that type of logic. Love is just what you are and what you do regardless of the situation. And this goes against again the current logic in the world that we have today about being deserving about a trade off.

There's no requirement here for payback. So to show this love you have to understand that at times it may do you harm. At times you may get nothing in return.

But that doesn't matter. That is the way you have to love under the law. But note also you have to love that way because of what Jesus did for us.

This is the way that Jesus loved. We aren't deserving. We aren't worthy of his love. We haven't done anything that makes him remotely desirable or attractive to him.

But yet he came to this world because he loved us. He had that horrible death on the cross because he loved us. He was cut off from the love of his father for a time because he loved us.

[26 : 30] It was unconditional the cost he bore. And that's so much more than anything that we will ever face. And if God loved us that way if Jesus sacrificed his life because he loved us as sinful beings well then that is that is the standard by which we should love and treat other people.

I think my final point really is is I think we're all in the same boat as what the scribe was in. The lawyer he was a well educated and clever person and he realised all the way through that he could not live up to this standard.

And his response as I said earlier was sad it was deeply sad because rather than try and see how to resolve this problem he decided to narrow the issue by narrowing the standard of love to something he could comply with.

what he thought was if he narrowed the standard to the people he already loved or at least thought he did then he would be okay. Maybe even given the interaction that there was he was saying well the priest and the Levite were right because the Samaritan was not their neighbour.

And that's desperately sad because deep down he was trying to be clever but he realised that eternal life was passing him by because he couldn't love in the way that the law demanded and that is the problem.

[28 : 03] The standard of love that Jesus required is a standard of love that none of us as sinful human beings can ever meet. We will always feel even to the people that we love and care for the most we'll feel by maybe an angry retort a crossword in the home maybe withholding your love to teach a lesson the fallouts you know the desire to maintain the moral high ground the blind spots examples I've given with already because it hurts too much or we don't care enough or we don't love God enough we'll even fail when we're trying because we don't know how to love properly so what do we do?

We don't do what the Samaritan did by trying to fit the standard to something they thought we can apply what we do is we throw ourselves on God we confess to God we are sinful people and we confess to him that it's impossible for us to ever meet this perfect standard that he sets down and all we can do is give our lives to God and trust him to help us do these things and I did point it out earlier but because of the love God has already extended to us well then we should at least try to extend it to others it won't be perfect but nevertheless we must try and live in accordance with this requirement in whatever way we can and with whatever gifts that God has given us I think as well we must never think of the cost of love because the cost of not loving is so much greater look at the Levite and the priest in this passage there's some suggestion by some of the commentators that maybe this is a real story or maybe it's a story that could have been true at the very least look at the opportunity they had they were so proud when they recited the Shema morning and night about how well they complied with that and what good people they are they had a chance there to make a difference they had a chance to save a badly wounded man to do something good they had a chance to make a difference to someone's life they had a chance to show the love of God and what they chose was their own sinful desires and that's that's a much greater cost than showing love in the way that it should be will ever be and I think the world is in much need of love right now we all know people in our church in our denomination in our circle of friends our workplaces whatever it has to be what we heard this morning of people in Afghanistan who need love people who are seriously ill people who are cut off people who are just really anxious because of the situation in the world at the minute we have people in the world who think pandemic is a load of nonsense and they are exasperated and frustrated by the whole situation and the impact it has we are they need our love in this world we have people who have lost their jobs people who are struggling to make ends meet we see businesses struggling to keep open just even in the last week our drug deaths in Scotland are higher than what I think they have ever been my records have been there our child poverty rates are going up year after year after year we read about wars we read about persecution and dare I say millions of people have died in the last year that wouldn't have expected the world needs our love and I could go on and on but I want to go right back to the start there are millions of Leah's out there billions of Leah's out there who want and need to be loved are desperate for love and are in various stages of despair and heartache because that's missing from their lives so in this environment we have a role we have a role to love we have a role to be compassionate we have a role to share the hope that we have because as believers that's been shown to us and not only are we required to do it but we have a moral obligation to do it as well and as I said by doing it we can make a difference

we can make a difference in our own home we can make a difference in our workplace we can make a difference in our church we can make a difference to people who have no hope or who are lost we can make a difference to the people who are scared to come out we can make a difference to the people who have drifted away in the last year if only we show them our love in the way that we're supposed to do that so I'll close with that we need sorry we need to show our love to people it's a legal obligation it's a moral obligation and it has wonderful consequences for both this world and ourselves and our faith and our faith and our faith and our faith■