

Loving Our Neighbours

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Date: 16 December 2007

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[0 : 00] Well, thanks Warwick, what a great song. Well, for those who don't know me, my name is Matt Stevens. I'm the Children's Minister here at Holy Trinity. And I'd like to start by telling you a story.

Well, it's New Year's Eve in 2004. I've just spent about 30 hours in a plane, travelling from Australia over to Brazil. And I've arrived in Rio de Janeiro Airport, and it's New Year's Eve.

So I was sitting there. I've got an eight-hour stopover. Has anyone had a really long stopover in an airport? Thank you, Paul. There's been a lot of...

There's not a lot of things you can do when you're in another country, you can't speak the language, and there's nobody else there, except for security guards who think you're weird walking backwards and forwards trying to pass the time.

So I'm sitting there, and after a while, you know, this lady comes up to me. And as I said, I can't speak Portuguese, and I presume she can't speak English.

[1 : 03] And so she's going... And I thought, well, okay, why not? So I pick up all my bags, and I travel up two or three flights of escalators, and there's all the staff from the airport standing at the windows just as the fireworks are going up for New Year's Eve so that I got to see the fireworks going off over Rio for New Year's Eve.

And I just thought, wow, isn't that amazing? She must have seen me around just sitting there on my own and just thought, he could probably do with something to look at. He's probably pretty bored. And that story's helped me to remember, especially with people who can't speak English from my situation, how to get me to think about how I can love people who perhaps don't really know what's going on or aren't very secure.

And it got me also to think about how I love people, not only in the future, but how I've been loving them in the past. So today, Jesus tells a story that gets an expert in the law, a lawyer, to think about how God wants us to love other people, just like that story helped me to think about how I love other people.

So let's pray before we go to that. Dear God, thank you that you've given us your word so that we can learn about the truth of the way that the world is and the way that you want us to be.

[2 : 44] Thank you that we have this time to listen to it. And I pray that you would help me that the words that I speak would be true and would help explain this passage to your great glory.

Amen. Now, because we've been a bit easy on you and there's been a video for our Bible reading, you now have to look it up. It's on page 844 of the Black Pew Bibles.

It should be just in front of you. So we're looking at Luke chapter 10, verses 25 to 37. I'll give you a second.

844. Well, as we start off this passage in verse 25, we see Jesus' teaching.

Like a lot of classrooms these days, the teacher stands, pupils sit and they hopefully listen. And at this stage, a lawyer or an expert in the law stands up to ask Jesus a question.

[3 : 59] Immediately, though, Luke gives us a heads up that things aren't quite going to be peaceful. We see the lawyer has stepped up to test Jesus. This isn't some sort of, you know, wanting to give positive feedback.

He's really looking to get straight to the heart of Jesus, see what he's made of. However, from the start of his question, we see that this expert in the law doesn't really get what the law is really for. He's confused. He asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. He thinks that eternal life is something that someone can get by doing things rather than it being a gift from God.

His pride is keeping him from seeing his need for God's help. Interestingly, we see this very same question with the rich young ruler in Luke 18.

I haven't got time to kind of look at that in detail, but then the problem for the rich young ruler when he asks, what must I do to inherit eternal life, isn't so much pride as greed.

[5 : 09] He needs to admit that before he knows, he needs to admit that before he knows that he needs God's help. Well, in response, Jesus goes on to ask, well, this man's an expert in God's law.

He's a lawyer in the law of Moses. So what does the law say? How do you read it? He asks. The lawyer answers from Deuteronomy 6, verse 5, and Leviticus 19, verse 8.

He answers that God commands us to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus agrees with the answer. He says, that's right. Do this and you will live. Now, Jesus isn't saying here that the way to eternal life is to do those things.

Immediately before this section, in verse 21, we see Jesus thanking God, his Father, that he has revealed his salvation, not to wise or educated folk, as though it was something that they earned, something that they deserved, but to ordinary folk, to everyday people, to highlight God's gracious revealing of his power to save, his great salvation.

[6 : 40] Jesus will go on to confront the expert with his inadequacy to fulfill what he's just said are the most important commandments. He can't do enough, and no one can.

But Jesus does this lovingly, to bring even this proud lawyer to repentance and faith in God's salvation.

However, the lawyer's just asked a question that he knew the answer for, so he looks a bit stupid in front of the crowd that's there. So, the lawyer, sort of damage control, he asks another question to prove that, maybe in his mind, the label of neighbor's just a bit more complex than others might think.

And who is my neighbor? He says, in verse 29. Now, it's an interesting question because you don't ask that unless you think there's some people you may not have to care about.

Just have a think about that for a sec. Like he's saying that he'd just like to know which people he doesn't have to admit are valuable. Which ones are kind of outside the fold?

[7 : 50] I think sadly it's a question that we are far too ready to ask, even if we don't actually say the words like this expert has. Maybe we think people who can't speak our language or don't have a job, people who smoke or drink or who have been through a broken marriage are just not quite alike enough to kind of justify the kind of compassion God demands in his definition of love.

Well, Jesus tells a story. In verse 30, a man is traveling down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and he's attacked by robbers as we've seen in the video.

Big kind of bulky, spiky guys. He's injured, he's broke and he's naked on the road. He's unable to care for himself or to reach any sort of safe haven.

Now, the race of the injured man, it could be assumed to be that he's a Jewish man because Jesus is talking in a Jewish context, but the race, the background of the travelers to come is made more explicit, which kind of tends to indicate that who they are in the story is more important than who the injured traveler is.

The man who was attacked simply needs help. That's his role in the story. So the stage is set and like a game show, on comes the lights, out comes the first contestant.

[9 : 19] A priest comes by, verse 31, and we know that he's seen the bloke in need. However, instead of helping the man, the priest avoids contact with him as much as physically possible.

He goes to the other side of the road. I mean, maybe he didn't want to be inconvenienced by becoming ritually impure. It says that the guy was half dead.

If the priest was to touch a dead body, he'd become ritually impure and he'd need to be cleansed in order to be able to help with sacrifices. But for whatever reason, the priest who would have known God's command to love your neighbor ignores the injured man and passes by.

He keeps on trucking. Verse 32, next, a Levite arrives on the scene. He too sees the injured man. He also would have known God's law and avoids any contact with him continuing on his way.

Lastly, we come to contestant number three and here's where it gets a little bit spiky for the lawyer.

[10 : 31] But a Samaritan, as he traveled, what? A Samaritan? But the Samaritans had instituted, there was like a false temple they'd made up north at Shechem.

And they were the ones who scattered bones or they tried to scatter bones in the temple to kind of a, in the temple at Jerusalem, kind of a religious terrorism in a way, trying to desecrate this place.

And even we see in chapter 9 of Luke that Jesus is spurned by the Samaritans in a village he passes through just because he's going to Jerusalem.

Yet, Jesus goes right on to tell how this man, this Samaritan, cared for the injured traveler. Instead of avoiding the man, the Samaritan had pity on him, went to him, and pretty much gives him the equivalent of first century first aid.

He gives him wine and oil to clean and soothe his wounds. The Samaritan then evacuates the casualty to the local inn on his trusty donkey ambulance, probably meaning, though, that he now had to walk instead of ride, so there was a personal cost to him.

[11:51] He cares for the injured man, leaves extra cash at the desk so that he'll be taken care of as the Samaritan continues on his way. But not only that, he actually says, well, hang on, if the money I give isn't enough, when I come back, I'll give you more.

I'll reimburse you. The Samaritan has fully committed himself to caring to a wounded, complete stranger. As A.A. Milne says, we started with who should I love?

And Jesus answers the individual in need. The love of God calls us, the love God calls us to, is having pity on those who are suffering and acting on it despite personal cost.

So the curtain drops. A play is over and we're back with Jesus and the expert in the law. Jesus asks, which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?

But the expert in the law, just look at what he says in verse 36. Verse 37, rather. The expert in the law, the lawyer, can't even speak the word Samaritan in his answer.

[13:12] The idea that a Samaritan could possibly do something praiseworthy, even in the theoretical, even in the story realm, is just repulsive to him. Jesus has swung that spotlight on the expert, showing his heart to be like that of the priest and the Levite.

He himself is compromised in his love towards others. So Jesus tells the expert in verse 37, go and do likewise. He's effectively rubbing the expert's face in it.

in his cold contempt for Samaritans as proof of his sinful heart. There's no way this expert can expect to do enough to inherit or earn eternal life.

The only hope for the lawyer is to realize his hopeless situation, his utter failure to live free from sin and in desperation to depend solely on his creator for forgiveness and salvation.

And the question comes up, is this proud religious man too far from God's grace? Would God have mercy even on him?

[14:28] Well, we read soon after in Luke chapter 11, verse 13, you can actually see it on the next page, page 845, that in verse 13 it says, if you then, though you're evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

God is only too willing to give his cleansing, empowering, encouraging Holy Spirit to all who ask, no matter what the failing, when that person humbly admits their need for forgiveness and change by his power.

It seems in this passage there's two lessons that we can take. First, to those who think they can earn eternal life with God by doing good gifts, doing good deeds, Jesus says, you are wrong, you have been deceived.

Actually, the flip side of that way of thinking is affirmed in Luke 13. There, Jesus charges that eternal torment is the only fate of those who don't have faith in God's power to save.

Not life, but death awaits those who trust in their own righteousness. Both times, that question of what must be done to inherit eternal life is asked here and again, like I said earlier, with the rich young ruler in Luke 18, Jesus slams the assumption that anything can be done by the questioner by pointing out they're failing to live up to the requirements God has set for his created image bearers.

[16:17] Maybe you haven't considered what your status before God is. I would challenge you to ask whether you have lived by his commands to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no one who has always done what is right. We need to honestly face that and come to God to forgive the sin we have done and break the power of that way of living for the future through faith in Jesus' death for us once for all.

If you're not a follower of Jesus, can I suggest reading through Luke with a Christian who you trust to understand Jesus' message, to understand what it is that Jesus is saying?

That would be a great way to start to follow him. Secondly, those of us who have been humbled by our sin and ask God for forgiveness and new life in Christ, we must take seriously the commands that God has given us.

It can be easy on the one hand to, and I find this easy, to forget we're saved by God's grace alone and fall back into trying to do things or be someone who will impress God or others.

[17 : 32] But, at the other extreme, we don't want to think that since in his mercy God has saved us and will continue to forgive us, that we can take God's commands for granted and act like we are God.

God has called us to repentance and faith in his Son, to do good works, to live the way he wanted us to, to be part of his redemption of this world from its broken state, by his power.

Let's live how God created us to rely on him for every good thing we need, by his strength, coming to him for forgiveness when we fail him, and looking with fiery abandon.

to the final frontier of Jesus returning to judge the world and call his people home. With that in mind, I'm going to just list three things, three practical ways that you can be involved in loving your neighbour.

I just want to challenge you with these. How about literally going next door to your neighbour and seeing how they are? It's so easy in our society just to think, you know, especially in the blocks we now live in, that the people next door are hundreds of miles away.

[18 : 52] Let's get to know them. Let's find out how they're doing. Maybe offering to share the gospel with them, if that's where your relationship is at, or even just inviting them to have a meal at your place, extending that sort of hospitality.

Maybe being involved with groups like Kids Hope. Gwyneth Mashalke is, she's not here this morning, but she will be around, and she's the coordinator of that in schools, or Paul Coleman, he's a friend of mine who's here today to talk about breakaway camps, which we'll hear about a little later.

They're both, well, Paul is here today, and where you could catch up with them after the service to find out about how you could be involved with helping with kids who are having trouble.

And also, there's the tier brochure, this is my last one, a tier brochure that we have out there in the Pickering Room, that Warwick and some other people will be there afterwards, that Paul explained before, we can use our money to really help some people.

And why not get your kids involved with it at the same time? Model loving your neighbour to them, so they can learn. To sum up, this Christmas, let's consider how we respond to God's merciful gift of His Son, and take steps to live in response to His grace, in thankfulness and trust, and great joy by His power, so that He will be glorified as our one true, necessary deliverer.

[20 : 27] Amen.