

Learning From Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 May 2009

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 10. And I want us to just look at the, from verse 25 to the end, it's well known, in fact two very well known incidents, one of the Good Samaritan and then of Mary and Martha.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And so on. Now, as we're all aware, questions are used by us to work out and to try and understand many of the things of life.

We all ask questions. You ask from the earliest age. As soon as we're really able to speak, we're always asking the questions about the whys and the wheres and the whens and the hows of life. There are times we're confused and times things happen and we just do not understand. And we often ask the question. Sometimes we don't ask it of anybody, but we ask it within ourselves. Why? Why did this happen? I'm sure there's many a time all of us, one way or another, have said that very thing. But there's a question posed here, and it's not that kind of question.

[1 : 33] It wasn't a question that this man came forward to ask Jesus out of a genuine sense of wanting to know something. It was a question that was put to Jesus in order to test Jesus.

I think this lawyer's hope was that he would show Jesus up not to be so clever as people were thinking. I think this was his aim. He was wanting to stump Jesus. He was trying to kind of trick Jesus.

And he was going to pose this question. And he was a lawyer who obviously had a full, he was a great Old Testament scholar. The lawyers were great Old Testament scholars, and he would have understood all that the law was saying.

But he was hoping in some way to trip Jesus up and to expose Jesus as not being really as clever as people were thinking. And so Jesus, who knew that this man was a man of the law, he turned the question back on this lawyer.

And he said to him, right, you've asked me a question. I am going to ask you a question. And he asked him a question based upon the law. And he says to him, what is written in the law?

[2 : 43] Let this be our starting point. You've asked me a question. Right, I'm going to bounce it back off you. And I'm going to ask you, what is written in the law? And it shows the man had a very good understanding of the law.

He summarized what we find in the Old Testament. And he said, you shall love the Lord with 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.

Now, in theory, that is absolutely true, that that is eternal life. If we are able to love the Lord with all our heart, our soul, our mind, our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, we will have eternal life.

But you and I know we cannot. We are incapable of it because we're sinners. We cannot love the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We do not love our neighbor as ourselves. And so the man realized, and that's why Jesus said, you've answered right. Do this and you'll live. And the man realized that he was beginning to come out in a bad light.

[3 : 57] So he tried to throw in something else. And he thought, right, I have to justify myself. So he asked the question then, and who is my neighbor?

Now, the way the Jews thought, we probably can't understand it today. But they had a very sort of isolated view of life.

It was a sort of their own life was, in a sense, all that mattered. And they didn't feel any need or any obligation to love those outside their own race or their own religion.

That loving of the neighbor involved just those of themselves. No further. And so the lawyer, I'm sure, would be hoping that Jesus would answer, when he asked that question, who is my neighbor, that Jesus would answer something along these lines.

But Jesus does something very clever here, as Jesus always does. Because Jesus always gets exactly to the heart or the root of an issue or a problem.

[5 : 07] And Jesus says, well, the lawyer said, according to the law, I'm to love my neighbor. But who is my neighbor? And Jesus really changes the emphasis here.

And what Jesus is saying, the question is not, who is my neighbor? Let's turn it around, Jesus is saying. But ask this question. Am I a neighbor to all?

And that's a question you and I have to ask ourselves. When that man said, but who is my

neighbor? Jesus said, let's put it the other way around. And ask the question, am I a neighbor?

Am I the right neighbor? Am I a biblical neighbor to all? And so we find that the Lord then gives this story of what we know as the good Samaritan.

And I want us to look at two or three things that are taught here. And I think one of the things that may strike us is that love for other people might not be as great as sometimes we think it is.

[6 : 16] Here's this man and he's making the long trip down from Jerusalem to Jericho. And as you know, that's quite a, it's a long route.

And it is a road going down. And it's a route, it's quite an isolated route, barren route. And there's loads of rocks and caves. And it's an ideal place for bandits and robbers to hide and to lurk.

And, of course, that's exactly what happened. As this man was going down, these robbers pounced out on him and gave him a fearful doing. In fact, to such an extent that his life is in danger.

They stripped him of everything that he had and he was left there really to die. And he was in a terrible state, barely alive. And then along the road there came these two men, a priest and a Levite.

Both men who, of course, worked in the temple. The Levite, of course, he didn't have the same rank as a priest but was involved in the temple and studied the law.

[7 : 18] But first of all, the priest came. And as we see, the priest passed by on the other side. And then the Levite came and he did the same. He looked and he passed by on the other side.

They both saw the man there. They both saw him bleeding to death. They saw the wounds. They saw him there stripped of everything. And yet both men probably looked out the corner of their eye. Maybe they looked more than out the corner of their eye. Maybe they actually looked at him. But they carried on walking. I wonder why. Well, I'm sure there would be all kinds of reasons would circulate it within their head.

Maybe one of them was, I don't know. Maybe they were thinking to themselves, well, if that happened to that man and if I stop, it's likely to happen to me. And that's a, you would say to yourself, that's a perfectly good excuse and a good reason.

Because I suppose, you know, it's part of the society we live in today. It's one of the things that we're seeing happening more and more.

[8 : 18] And when we read the story of the Good Samaritan, we have to say to ourselves, you know, it's actually becoming difficult in the day that we're living in. Because are we not finding it reported in our papers and so on that Good Samaritans, people who actually go and try and help, are often, they themselves are getting hurt and sometimes even killed.

We are living in a terrible society. But taking that away altogether from the moment, because Jesus is teaching a principle for life, not looking at one, just one experience as such.

Maybe this man is sort of saying, I'm not going to stop. I'll be late for my tea. And I remember what happened last time that happened to me. There's all kinds of things. I might become ceremonially unclean.

Or he may be saying, it's got nothing to do with me. And that, unfortunately, is often the way people think. It's got nothing to do with me.

And so many people pass by on the other side because it's got nothing to do with me. Now, we are thankful to the Lord for the community that we live in.

[9 : 35] Because by and large, it is still, by and large, still a relatively caring community. But I suppose it's one of the things that is being highlighted from our nation today.

It's that so many people will not become involved in anything unless there is something in it for them. That is often the sort of the, what makes something worthwhile doing.

What can I, before I become involved in anything, what's in it for me? So often that is the philosophy and that is the principle. Well, that is not a Christian philosophy.

It is not a Christian principle. You do not find the Lord ever saying, before you go out to help somebody, before you come involved with somebody's needs, you work out what is in it for you.

Do I get, do I get something out of it? If it is somebody who has got vast wealth, oh, I'll be right in there, I'll help them and I hope I'll get something in return.

[10:40] That's not the way to work. That was never the way that Jesus worked. If Jesus had thought in that way, he would never ever have come into this world.

He came into this world and he didn't say, what is in it for me? He came to have people that were unlovely and rebels. People who were ugly. People who hated him.

He came and he died for them. And we've always got to remember, this is the self-sacrificial love that we see in the life of Jesus. He didn't count the cost.

He became involved and he did. And that's the love that he is looking for from us as well. This love, this self-sacrificial love.

And let us remember there are many people around and all they're looking for is a shoulder to cry on. Sometimes they're just looking for somebody to unburden themselves.

[11:41] Are we ready? Are we prepared? Or do we say, what's in it for me? Or it's going to take up too much of my time.

Then the next question we have to ask is, who and how are we to love? Now, when Jesus told this story to the Jews, I don't think that we could in any way understand the impact that it would have.

Remember what we said, the Jew was not under, this is according to their own thinking, not according to God. God never said this to them. But this was their thinking. They weren't under obligation to love anybody outside their own religion and race.

And here is Jesus telling this story about the Samaritan, who the Jew despised really above all. Remember how it says the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Remember when Jesus was speaking to the woman from Samaria, his disciples, when they came back, they were astounded.

[12:41] They were amazed that he was actually engaged in speaking to this particular woman. So when Jesus tells his story about the Samaritan as the one who was coming in, the impact upon his hearers would have been incredible.

So here is this Samaritan. The priests, the Levites have gone by, they don't want to become involved. This Samaritan comes along and straight away he goes in.

With this unconditional love. Straight in. He doesn't ask, did this man deserve to be done in? He didn't ask, am I myself at risk?

He goes straight in. And we find that this man, when he saw him, he had compassion. That's the key. He had compassion.

And I believe it's one of the things that is missing from our society so much today, is compassion. It has been, we mentioned that before, it has been described in this way, defined in this way.

[13:44] Your pain in my heart. In other words, you have so identified with the other person that you are feeling their pain in your heart.

And if you do not have a spirit of compassion, if you do not have a heart of compassion, if you find that your life is hard-hearted, in other words, you feel unmoved and untouched by other people's problems and predicaments, there's something wrong with you spiritually.

That is a clear understanding from the Bible. If you are unmoved and untouched by other people's problems and predicaments, then there is a spiritual problem.

Because at the very heart of Jesus' life and ministry, there was a spirit of compassion. A believer cannot be Christ-like and have no heart of compassion.

It's inconsistent. Now I know that naturally speaking, people can be different. There can be people who are more naturally tender-hearted than others. But a hard-hearted Christian is inconsistent with the Christian faith.

[15:01] And so compassion, it's not necessarily just a feeling, it is the desire to do something, if at all possible, to alleviate or to help.

And that's what the Samaritan did. He did what he could. And he poured in oil, the olive oil into the wounds, and he poured in oil and wine as a sort of an antiseptic to prevent infection.

He put him on his own animal. He took him to the Zinn, and he took out two days, enough to pay for two days. A denarii would be a day's wage. And he gave him this.

And he said, Look, if it costs more than that, when I come back, I will pay. So in other words, this man, he made him as comfortable as he possibly could.

Now, this is the love. This is the love, as we say, that Jesus demonstrated. And it's the love that Jesus requires from us as well.

[16:03] And, as we said, the whole point that Jesus is making in this story is that we are to operate in this way, not looking for what we can get out of it. We don't know if that man ever said thank you to the good Samaritan.

He may have, maybe when the Samaritan came back again, he may have, the good Samaritan might have been two weeks before he came back. That man might have been in that inn for 12 days.

The Samaritan would have put his hand in his pocket and taken out and paid what was ever, he might never have seen the man again. That's not the point that Jesus is making. The important thing is that we show in our day-to-day living this unconditional love.

Showing Christ. If we are Christians, we are to bring Christ. You know, don't get me wrong on what I'm saying here. Sometimes, in our action to love our neighbor, we are doing it in the hope that maybe we can get them along to church.

Maybe in some way that we can bring them to Christ. And sometimes, within our own heart, we say, well, I must befriend people.

[17:29] I must be good to people in order that I will get them to church. That's actually, that is not what is being taught here. Now, don't get me wrong. I believe it's one of our duties and obligations to ask people, invite people to church.

And I believe that all of us are under that obligation to ask people to church. And that is a great way to be able to ask your friends, those who maybe don't go to church, to invite them.

But that is not why we are to love them. We need to stop. I read somebody saying something like this. We need to stop thinking of getting people to Christ and thinking more of bringing Christ to people.

In other words, if we live Christ, then we will be doing good to people, no strings attached.

That's the kind of ministry that Jesus is expecting from us. Not that we're doing it in order that if we do this, then hopefully get them along to church later on.

[18:38] We just do it. And as we're doing it, in the name of Christ, hopefully the love of Christ will shine through.

And that, I believe, is the emphasis that is being highlighted and taught here in this particular story. You know, people often ask the question, what's the church doing?

You often hear that question. What's the church doing for so-and-so? What's the church doing for these people? Well, let's put the... I believe that if Jesus were here and we were to say that question, ask that question to Jesus, Jesus would straight away turn it back and say, what are you doing?

What are you doing? It is so easy to sit back and say, well, what's the church doing? Remember, the church ultimately is made up of people, of you and me.

And Jesus, in this very story, is showing our obligation, our duty. We do not have the right to point to any institution or to any group.

[19:46] We are to look at our shelves and say, what am I doing? Am I living Christ? Am I seeking to bring Jesus Christ by my life, by who I am, into daily contact with all who I meet?

And that really is where Jesus is coming from here. And sometimes, in our attempt to get away from teaching, which we don't, justification by works, we're often afraid of, in case people think it's a social gospel, not at all.

We teach absolutely that salvation is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must be careful that we do not exclude from our teaching the importance of living Christ in our life.

Let your light, as a command, so shine before men that they may see your good works. And then, just very, very briefly, just in three or four minutes, we see Jesus, he entered into this village.

This little place, Bethany, into the home of Mary and Martha. And this incident where we have Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening and worshipping, and Martha running around in every direction is a story also that we know very well, so we're not going to spend any time really on it at all.

[21:13] Mary and Martha are thrilled to have Jesus in their home, but they react to the presence of Jesus in two totally different ways. Martha is running around, so busy that she comes, the word

tells us she becomes distracted.

She's doing everything while Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet. And in the end, Martha can take no more. She explodes. And she says, Lord, do you not care?

And the actual language that she uses, the language expresses or indicates that there is actual indignation in her voice. She is finding fault with Jesus.

It's quite extraordinary. She's complaining about her sister to Jesus, but she's also complaining about Jesus as well. And what's the problem?

Martha, one of the problems is this. Martha places undue or too much importance upon her work.

[22 : 22] In other words, she thinks her work is the only work. Mary's wasting her time. Look at me, Lord. I'm doing everything. And Mary is doing nothing.

Martha. And you know, the spirit of Martha can be very prevalent even to this day. Are we guilty of looking at other people and judging other people and saying, oh, see, they're not doing what I'm doing.

They're not serving the Lord in the way I am. How do you know? You know, actually, when you come in, if we hadn't heard Jesus speak and Jesus' answer, we would have said, oh, Martha, Martha was the one who was really doing the, Martha is the one.

Mary, Mary wasn't doing anything. But actually, Jesus shows us it's really the other way around. Jesus is not condemning Martha for serving.

The Lord never condemns anybody for serving. His criticism of Martha was for over-serving.

Becoming so involved that the presence of Jesus was no longer of any value or any benefit to her in the house.

[23 : 32] In fact, Jesus had become a burden and a distraction. It's extraordinary. And do you sometimes find that? That you've lost your way in your Christian faith?

Do you know, we can become so involved in working that we lose sight of the one that we're working for. and when we lose sight of the one we're working for, our work becomes difficult, it becomes a burden, and like Martha, we become distracted, and in the end, we start complaining about everything and everyone and even complaining about the Lord.

Have you ever found yourself in that situation? Well, if you have, and I'm sure you have, then it's a Martha syndrome. I often believe that we have, and particularly in the society we're living in today, we're living in a society today that is expecting, that is pushing, that is demanding.

You've got to be everywhere at once. It's impossible. I believe that society is expecting far more of you than the Lord is. Because one thing the Lord is expecting of you and wants of you is your time. He loves you. He wants you to spend time with Him. And it doesn't matter whether everybody's shouting at you that you're not doing this and you're not doing that.

[25 : 05] The Lord is saying, hold on, what about me? And if we're running around all over the place and not taking time with the Lord, then our work will not be effective.

It won't achieve what we're hoping it will achieve. There are many things that we could say from this. But I think it's vital that we realize the importance of what Mary is doing.

Jesus highlighted the importance of it. Look at Mary. She's taken time out. She's taken this opportunity while I'm here of sitting at my feet listening.

And you know, this woman Mary, we've said it before, was probably the most spiritually minded, mature believer in the time of Jesus Christ. This Mary understood more than the Apostle Peter.

This Mary understood more than the Apostle John, the disciple who leaned into the bosom of Jesus because this Mary understood the mission of Jesus in a way that Peter, James, and John didn't.

[26 : 19] It's not extraordinary. How? How did she understand that? Because of her willingness to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn.

She anointed Jesus before his death in light of his death and burial when the disciples didn't even understand what Jesus was about.

She understood. They didn't. And that shows us the importance of putting first our time with Jesus.

It is never lost time. And while we're here today, you may be saying to yourself, you know that what you're saying is right. What we need to guard against and what we need to pray is, Lord, give me this vision throughout the week because it's so easy.

Once we're back into the week, once the pressure is on, once the demands are there, we lose sight again. We're caught up. We're derailed. And so often we're stressed out.

[27 : 25] We're struggling. We're saying it's hard going. I'm beat. And we're beat because we've lost sight. We've become too busy. Too busy to take time to be with Jesus.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we pray that we may indeed hear these words, that we may learn what the Lord is saying to us.

Forgive us, Lord, our sin because we are, often we don't even recognize our sin. Forgive us our lovelessness. Forgive us, Lord, how often we maybe neglect our neighbor.

Often we are not the neighbor that we should be. Help us, Lord, to focus day by day upon the Lord so that we will discover just how through it is those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They'll mount up with wings as eagles. They'll run and not be weary. They'll walk and not faint. And so, Lord, we pray for everybody here, particularly any who feel burdened and stressed, those who feel that life has become so much of a burden, who feel flat and discouraged.

[28 : 37] Lord, we pray to encourage and strengthen. Do us good, we pray, and take us all home safely. Forgive us all our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll conclude singing in the...

... ..