

“Priorities”
July 12, 2020
Luke 10:25-41

I. Introduction

Before we were interrupted by the pandemic, you may remember that we were studying the Gospel of Luke. We started over a year ago—to be specific: April 18, 2019. Since we finished the Book of Esther last week, it seems right to try to pick up where we left off in our study of Luke. As we come to chapter 10, Jesus was in the final months of His earthy ministry. He was slowly traveling to Jerusalem from Galilee with some side trips along the way—**Luke 9:51** says, **“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”**

As He was about to enter Judea, after leaving Galilee and traveling through Samaria, Jesus sent 35 or 36 pairs of disciples ahead. They blanketed Judea’s towns and villages with the message of eternal life and a call to become Jesus’ disciples. Their messages would have included words similar to those Jesus preached to them in **Luke 9:23-24**: **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”** In spite of all the groundwork and Jesus’ preaching and miraculous healings, only a very small number of people would truly believe and accept the gospel. Most rejected the call to humble themselves, repent of their sin and self-righteousness, receive forgiveness, and in faith, enter the kingdom of God. They wouldn’t accept Jesus’ message because they would not admit that they were sinners on their way to eternal destruction. Having rejected the message, they rejected the only way to salvation.

As Jesus neared Jerusalem, the religious capital of Israel, He would encounter more and more people who felt that they were already righteous—this was especially true of the Pharisees and the Sadducees who were based in Jerusalem. In the weeks leading up to Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, they would bombard Him with questions—sometimes with the intent of discrediting Him, sometimes with true concern. The **“expert in the law”** who questioned Jesus in today’s Scripture asked the most important question a person can ask, and he seems to have asked with a good motive. Jesus was able to use the man’s questions and answers along

with Martha and Mary's problem to demonstrate the priorities one must have in his or her life as one of His disciples.

II. Jesus and the Expert in the Law

A. The Question It all began with a question that was often debated by the Jews: **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** In this man's mind, Jesus was a logical person to ask about eternal life, because it was a constant theme of Jesus' preaching, e.g., in **John 5:24** Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned but has crossed over from death to life.”** What does **John 3:16** say? So, the expert in the law had come to the source. That he **“stood up”** and apparently interrupted Jesus was not a sign of disrespect, since he addressed Jesus courteously as **“Teacher.”** While the phrase **“to test Jesus”** could imply an evil motive on the man's part, it seems, in this case, that the man was truly searching for the answer to this all-important question.

As a master teacher, Jesus responded to the man's question by asking one of His own, **“What is written in the Law?”** The Law to which Jesus referred was the Law of God given to Moses. Jesus' second question, **“How do you read it?”** could also mean, *“How do you recite it?”* From the man's answer, it would seem that Jesus was referring to the verses that, even today, pious Jews recite every morning and evening called the Shema which is found in **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**.

B. The answer The first part of the expert's answer, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,”** comes from those verses. The additional phrase **“and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”** is from **Leviticus 19:18**. When Jesus was asked to name the most important commandment, He gave the same answer—**turn to Mark 12:28-31**—so the man's answer was correct. (By the way, the word the man used, and the word Jesus used for love is the Greek word **ἀγαπάω**, agape love—sacrificial love.)

Because the man's answer was the right one, Jesus said, **“You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.”** But this brought up a problem. If this man was truthful to himself, he knew that it was impossible to keep the law; it was impossible to perfectly love God and other people. **Romans 3:20** says,

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.” This is why Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Jesus was trying to get the man to see that he was a sinner, that as Romans 3:10 says “there is no one righteous, not even one.”

C. The Story of the Good Samaritan In his attempt to justify himself, the scribe ignored the issue of loving God with agape love, implying that he believed he did that already. He also believed that he was loving his neighbor perfectly unless Jesus had a different definition of neighbor. So instead of being justified by throwing himself on the mercy of God (Luke 18:9-14), the man tried “to justify himself” and wiggle out of the hole he found himself in. He used an old debating tactic, *Define your terms!* So, he asked “Who is my neighbor?”

The story of the Good Samaritan is often used to teach the importance of helping those in need. But while it is important to help the needy, that is not the point of this story. It is in reality a story about how one inherits eternal life—*that is the question that started the whole conversation*. Jesus gave the man one more chance to really see that he didn't love all those whom he considered to be neighbors with a sacrificial love, with agape love. One more chance for him to acknowledge his sinfulness and cry for mercy.

As the story began, “a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.” It was about 17 miles from Jerusalem to Jericho and a drop in elevation of 3,500 feet. The road was steep and dangerous and there were caves along the way in which robbers would hide. Unfortunately, “he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.”

Jesus immediately introduced a ray of hope, “a priest happened to be going down the same road.” A priest was a servant of God. His job was to offer sacrifices for the people's sins. He was expected to be a model of spiritual virtue and to be the best, the godliest, and the most righteous of men. However, “when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.” We can come up with a plethora of excuses for the priest's actions, but Jesus' point is that because he knew the law's requirements, he would have been expected to stop and aid the injured man—but he didn't.

Fortunately, for the injured man, a Levite came along. Levites assisted priests and this man would also be very familiar with the Old Testament laws about helping strangers or enemies and showing mercy, e.g., **turn to Exodus 23:4-5**. But “when he came to the place and saw him, he passed by on the other side.” Despite being circumcised, having knowledge of God’s law and involvement in the religious system, both he and the priest proved themselves unqualified for eternal life. They did not love God since they did not keep His commandments. Nor did they love their neighbor since they both passed up an opportunity to demonstrate that love. **James 2:10** says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

When all seemed lost, help arrived from the most unlikely of sources. “A Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.” Given the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, this man would seem to have been the least likely one to help the injured man. In fact, it wouldn’t have been surprising if he had finished what the robbers had started. But instead, “he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.” But he didn’t stop there, “The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’” He basically gave the innkeeper a blank check. His generosity knew no limits. He cared for the injured stranger the way most people care for themselves.

It was not a Jew helping a Samaritan, but a Samaritan helping a Jew who had been ignored by his fellow Jews. The Samaritan sacrificially loved those who hated him, risked his own life, spent his own money (two days’ wages for a laborer). That is the kind of limitless love, agape love, that it takes to earn one’s way into God’s kingdom. The expert of the law did not love like that—for that matter, none of us do.

D. The Conclusion Jesus brought his story to a conclusion by asking the man, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” He replied with the obvious answer, “The one who had mercy on him.” Making His point, “Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”

The idea is that only by continually and sacrificially loving God and every neighbor on every occasion, including his worst enemy, could the scribe satisfy the 1st and 2nd commandments and obtain eternal life. Obviously, Jesus' point was and is that neither the expert in the law nor anyone else is capable of such love—only God loves this way. **Turn to Romans 5:6-8.**

III. Jesus and Mary & Martha

Luke closed this section on the Christian's priorities, by recording something that happened at the home of Mary and Martha. Although Luke doesn't name the village, John wrote that Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus lived in Bethany ([John 11:1; 12:1-3](#)). Luke recorded two different reactions to Jesus' visit—actually two different reactions to the teaching of Jesus.

A. Mary was devoted. She **“sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.”** We might say that Mary was hanging on to Jesus' every word. Mary demonstrated the attitude of a true believer—Jesus said in [Luke 6:47](#) that a genuine disciple is one **“who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice.”**

B. Martha was distracted. Unlike her sister, **“Martha was distracted by all the preparations.”** She had allowed the many preparations to keep her from the better priority of listening to the Lord teach. There is nothing wrong with showing hospitality—Scripture commands it, [Romans 12:13](#) says, **“Share with the God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”** [Hebrews 13:2](#) says, **“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”** The problem was that Martha got her priorities mixed up. She was so busy trying to get everything just so that she failed to take advantage of the opportunity to hear in person the Lord of the universe teach.

Her confused priorities led to Martha losing the joy of serving. She became more and more frustrated until she became angry with Mary. Finally, in exasperation, Martha came up to Jesus and said, **“Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”** After accusing Him of not caring, Martha then went on to tell the Lord exactly what to do—her will and her plans were more important than His.

Demonstrating compassion and care, Jesus answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed-- or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Martha was so worried about temporal things that she had forgotten that one thing is necessary; listening to the Word of God. Martha’s problem was not that she had too much work to do, but that she allowed her work to distract her. She was trying to serve two masters. Faithfulness on the job, in the home and even in church has a place, but it must not be allowed to replace faithfulness to God and His Word—Deuteronomy 8:3 says, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

IV. Conclusion

Many people, including some who call themselves Christians, think they can earn their way into heaven. But Isaiah 64: 6 says that “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Jesus paid the price for our eternal life, our salvation—turn to Isaiah 53:5-6. This is the Gospel, this is the message we are to share with the world—“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). We are saved not by doing good things, but by accepted the gift of eternal life—as Paul told the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” If you have never admitted that you are a sinner, if you have never asked Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, why not do it today. Don’t put it off, you never know when you will be called to leave this life.

Few things are as damaging to the Christian life as trying to work for Christ without taking time to commune with Christ. In John 15:5 Jesus said, “For without Me you can do nothing.” Whenever we criticize others and pity ourselves because we feel overworked, we had better take time to examine our lives. Perhaps in all the busyness, we have been ignoring the Lord. Martha’s problem wasn’t that she had too much work to do, but that she allowed her work to distract her and pull her apart.

The key to all of this is to have the right priorities: Jesus Christ first, then others, then ourselves. It is extremely important that we spend time “at the feet of Jesus” every single day, letting Him share His Word with us. Someone has written that “*the most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God*

sees.” Unless we meet Christ personally and privately every day, we will soon end up like Martha; busy not blessed. But don’t forget James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” What are your priorities? Why do you do what you do?