

Sermon Transcript for August 29, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

All right. So we have this parable that Jesus speaks of the good Samaritan. And the idea is this guy is going from Jerusalem to Jericho, he gets hit by robbers and nobody helps him, including two people that really ought to, a priest and a Levite. But we're going to get into that in a little bit.

First off though, I want to look at the Old Testament because there seems to be a reason why Jesus spoke of the guy going to Jericho. I think he wanted people, the Israelites, to think on another instance where there were the poor and the beat-up who were returned to Jericho. And here we have this story in 2 Chronicles. This is probably not a part of the history of Israel that you've paid a whole lot of attention to, but this is King Ahaz, whom we know has done all sorts of reprehensible things. This is the king with which Elijah has his issues with on the mountaintop and everything with the prophets of Baal. But Ahaz, not only did he worship Baal, he also built a metal god or thing that he worshiped. And he sacrificed his sons on this metal thing. And he worshiped this "god", whatever god he chose, probably Baal more than anything else. And he worshiped them in the high places and underneath the trees and all the other places. Now this is the king of Judah. And this is what we need to understand about the history here. By this time, Israel has been split. There's Judah, which is in the south, and Israel, which is in the north. Judah is the kingdom through which the Messiah will come. Israel are the top 10 tribes, and they rebelled against God. And while they still were relatives (they were sons of Abraham), they didn't worship God properly. And they rebelled against His temple in Jerusalem and rebelled against His king in Jerusalem. So the Israelites here, took 200,000 captives from Judah. That's the Northern tribe attacking the Southern tribes. And so they were already rebelling against God. And now they went to attack their brothers and sisters and to bring them off into slavery and to take their spoils with them.

Now, just before this, again, because King Ahaz was so wicked, God had sent Syria up in Damascus a little bit further north to come down and attack Judah to try and get them [to see], "Look, you're not following after God. You are rebelling." So Syria did take a bunch of captives and slaves and spoils and everything like that. And God let them do that. But Israel, he sent a prophet to them to say, "What are you doing?" So it wasn't necessarily that God was against allowing the people to go into a foreign land and lose their wealth because they had disobeyed Him. That wasn't the issue. The issue was the Israelites were the brothers and sisters and relatives, and you are not called to do that. So here in the Old Testament, we have this story of people who are trying to take advantage of others. "Judah's weak. So let's go down and get some more spoils and get what we need out of them." And yet there are still some. And these men were from the tribe of Ephraim, but they were living in Samaria, eventually to become the Samaritans. So here you have a Samaritan or a person from Samaria, several leaders of the tribes. And I'm not going to say their names again. I had enough trouble the first time. So these men from Ephraim, Samaritans, they chastise the men of Israel. They say, "You can't do this. Have we not already rebelled against God enough?" In other words, even in Ephraim, even in Samaria, even in the nation that had rebelled against God and separated themselves from the love of God, even there, there were people who believed in the holiness of God and knew that what was being done was wrong and knew that the true worship was of the one true God and only Him. And so they rebuked their brothers and they restored the ones who had been captive. They clothed them. They bound up their wounds. They put the weak on a donkey and returned them to Jericho. So this is all the background. So here we have a story of

Samaritans, not just story, but history of Samaritans dropping off and healing Israelites, Jews, because they were their relatives.

Now, Jesus takes that idea of relative and expands it one larger to neighbor. And so He tells this parable. He says all of this whole stuff happened. And you would think that the holy man, the priest, the one who worships in the temple, who serves God in the temple, you would think that he would stop by and help this man. But the priest was more concerned with his outward piety and his outward cleanliness than he was with actually doing the will of God, because he was probably off to Jerusalem to serve the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to actually be in the temple and do his job. And if he touched a dead person, he would be considered unclean and he would no longer be able to go to the temple. So he would be shooting his one chance to really do the job that he was called to do. So he wasn't going to touch him. He was following the letter of the law, not the spirit. And then we have the scribe or the Levite. A Levite is also a student of the law. He also serves, but he knew the law and he knows if you touch something unclean, then you got to go through this whole purification rite, and you got to cleanse yourself, and you got to present yourself before the priest and show yourself to be clean. And it's a whole rigamarole. And he's like, "I am not going to do that. The guy's probably already dead. We'll just leave it by."

So the people that were supposed to be caring, were supposed to be servants of God, failed in their task. And the reason Jesus is telling the story is this lawyer asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus, as always, turns the question on its head and asked the man, "Well, what do you think?" And so he quotes from two different passages in the Old Testament which summarize the law, "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, all your mind and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself." So love the Lord, your God, that covers commandments one, two, and three. And love your neighbor as yourself, that covers four through 10. So basically, these two are summation of the whole law. And Jesus is, "Well, okay. Go do that." And the lawyer's going, "You've just given me an impossible task. There's no way that I'm ever able to conceivably come close to doing anything remotely like perfection of the law. So love your neighbor as yourself. Who is my neighbor? Let's see if I can shrink down God's law a little bit so it's more manageable for me." I mean, in essence, that's what He's saying. "You don't really mean everybody out there, right? You just mean the people that I live with. Yeah. Closing the circle. I can deal with the people that I like, my neighbors, my friends." In essence, that's what the lawyer is saying. He's trying to get God or Jesus here to help him figure out a way to be able to follow the law in a manageable chunk that is not too difficult for him to do. Jesus, of course, does not accommodate the man, and He makes sure that he understands that it's not just the people that you like. It's not just the people in your town who are generally related to each other and connected with one another and friendly with one another. It's not just that. It's even those people that you consider despicable, your enemies.

But rather than showing the Israelite as having kindness on his enemies, He takes the enemy of the Israelites and chose them to be the kind one and the neighborly one and the one who serves. You see, Jesus is hammering home this point that Paul is making in Galatians, is that if you think that the law was put in place to help you figure out how to be saved, how to be a good person, you've missed the point. The law, primarily, its first purpose was to imprison everything under sin. In other words, it was to show us very clearly that we are incapable of living up to the standard of God no matter how good of a person we think we are. And no matter how much we seek to serve God, the law always shows us there is more that could be done. It also shows us those things that we could have done that we did not do. In other words, if we're looking to the law for comfort, we're not going to find it. The law imprisoned everything under sin. And why was the law added

as well? It was added because of transgression until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made. It was made about Christ and for Christ. See, God saved Abraham not because Abraham was a good person or did right, but God saved Abraham because God chose to save Abraham. God loved the people of Judah not because they were faithful. We show very clearly that they were not. But God chose to love Judah because He chose to love Judah. Not because there was anything righteous within them, but because He, God is a God of love and chose them. And I hate to say it, but God loves us and has chosen us not because we deserve it but because He has chosen to love us. And because He has chosen to love us, we are free from the guilt of sin. If we don't deserve the love of God. Then we should be pretty certain that they don't deserve the love of God either, everybody out there.

So what are we to do with that? How are we to address that? Well, we're to love our neighbor. And who is that? Everyone. Those that we come in contact with. The word neighbor, from the Greek, basically means whoever's next to you, whoever you are around. Not just the people that are close to you, where you live, everybody that you come in contact with is your neighbor. And we are called to seek to live up to the commands of God. Just because we know that God loves us doesn't give us an excuse to say, "Oh. God loves us. I'm good. I don't need to worry about it." He still has called us to serve Him and to serve our neighbor. That's still a part of our existence. Not because we have to, or if we don't, God's going to punish us, but because He has already loved us and He has already forgiven us. And because He has done that, therefore we want to do what He has commanded, which is to love Him and to love our neighbor.

So we really have a message here of two things. One, do not be afraid that you have failed to live up to God's standards. I'll just tell you right now, you haven't, nor have I. We just get that out of the way right away. But God has forgiven you and He loves you. And He wants you to share that love with one another, to give a cup of cold water, to help those in need, to consider... What did they do? This man, this Samaritan gave two denarii, two days' worth of wages to a stranger that he did not know to take care of him, to help him in his time of need. We're called to consider the wealth that God has given to us as His to be used for the service of letting our neighbor know that God loves them.

I don't know what that looks like for you or for me. It's different in every situation with every person. But let us pray. Let us pray that God would allow us to see our neighbor in need and to be the good Samaritan who cares for them even if they are our enemies because God loves them as much as He loves us.

May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.