

From our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So we begin with the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is the law. The whole book is the law, and it's the ceremonial law. It's the dietary law, it's sacrificial law. It's the moral law, it's the civil law, it's everything. Leviticus is just, it's one thing after another that we must do or the Israelites must do in order to follow God. And here we specifically have God telling them not to be like the Egyptians or like the Canaanites. And so He says, "I am your God. I'm Yahweh. I am who I am. That is my name. I have given you my name. And I am different than the Gods of Egypt, of Ra and Isis and all those other Egyptian gods. I am not those gods. And I'm also not the gods of the Canaanites, Baal and Asherah and Moloch and Dagon and all of those other gods. I am Yahweh. I am the one who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

And so he is telling the Israelites how they should live and what they should do in relationship to one another in this instance. But he reminds them that the reason they do that is because of who he is, and he wants to make sure that they know he is the God who has saved them. He is the God who has brought them to the promised land. And therefore, because he has saved them, this is then how they should treat one another. And how they should live, and how they should worship him. And so while this isn't exactly the 10 Commandments as we know them from the tablets, per se, it really does express much of the same and expands upon it and it helps us understand what we mean. So He says, "Don't profane His name." So don't use any other name but His. As they built false gods, they often said, "This is the God we worship." He said, "No, that's not me. That's not my name. That's not who I am. You worship me because I have saved you."

And don't be like the rest of the nations. You're going to look different. You're going to stand out in the crowds, because of your way of life. Now that's how he described the Israelites. But it's not really that much different for us today. I mean, we worship the God who saved us, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And He has brought us out of the land of slavery, not physical slavery per se, but spiritual slavery, slavery to sin. And He has called us to do good works in this world. He has called us to be salt and light in this world. So it was the same for them as for us. And He specifically describes some interesting ways of acting. He describes how when you're farming, you don't glean to the very corners and you don't pick up anything that drops on the ground. If you pick on a vineyard and you accidentally drop some grapes, you leave it there. In other words, He's kind of saying, be a bad farmer.

I mean, He really is. He's saying, "Don't be so concerned with your material possessions that you get every last little bit for yourself." He says, "Leave the corners. Just kind of circle around them. Leave the corners for the foreigner and the poor." And as you're picking grapes, if you drop on on the ground, just leave it

for the poor. In other words, He's telling us that we don't need to be concerned about every little thing that we need to provide for ourselves, because we have a God who provides for us. We can trust Him, so that we can be generous with our time, with our money, with our gifts, because He has been so generous to us.

See, while this is a list of things that we are called to do and not do, don't show favoritism to the poor or the rich. Just because they're poor, you don't give leniency, and just because they're rich you don't excuse them, you treat them all the same. And it ends with, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And so you provide all good things for yourself, also for your neighbor. That is what you're called to do. So you're going to look different. You're going to act different. You're going to stand out, because you're not like the rest of the world. Because I am your God. And you're going to hear that again, love the neighbor as yourself when we get into the gospel lesson.

So we have Jesus, and this is a continuation of what we read last week and the week before. He's got his eyes to Jerusalem. He's heading to Jerusalem to suffer and to die for us. And he gets tested by this lawyer, somebody who knows the law of God, wants to justify himself, says, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Already in the question we know he doesn't quite have it figured out, because do and inherit don't go together. If you do something, it's not an inheritance, it's a wage. If you inherit something, it's a gift. So he's trying to figure out what he's got to do to inherit eternal life, but in the very word and the method by which we get eternal life, there's nothing we can do. So he's almost got it right. He knows it's something he needs to inherit, something that is desirable, but he's looking for a way that he could do it.

So Jesus, as he often does, turns the tables and says, "Well, what do you think is the law? What do you think you got to do?" So he takes from Deuteronomy, which is also, again, the book of Deuteronomy is very much a retelling of that which was read in Leviticus. So it's very much the same thing. It's all about the law, all about what we are called to do. Only from Deuteronomy, Chapter 6, he says, "You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind." That's from Deuteronomy. And then he plugs it again with what we read in Leviticus. "And, love your neighbor as yourself." Love God, love your neighbor. We've heard Jesus say that before at various times as well. This is a very good summary, short and sweet, about what we are called to do. And as he says it, Jesus says, "Well, you've said it correctly. Do this and you will live." Well now then the lawyers start thinking, wait a second, how do I do this? And how do I define what my neighbor is?

He says, "So yes, who's my neighbor?" And he's trying to define how far he has to go. He's already trying to figure out what the minimum requirement is. He's not

looking to serve God. He's looking at what is the minimum thing that I have to do in order to serve God? Who's my neighbor? And that word neighbor is really the word for the guys that are closest to you, and the people you can reach out and touch, across the street, sitting in the pew next to you. Those are your neighbors, right? That's what he's trying to imply here. So Jesus, again, blows him out of the water, expands the understanding of what a neighbor is, and he tells a story that we're all familiar with, the Good Samaritan, right?

So he's got a priest that walks by and a Levite that walks by. And what do they do? I mean a priest, he is highly educated, and highly esteemed in Israel. Everybody looks up to the priest and the Levites. They are the people that serve in the temple. The priest is the one that offers the sacrifice. The Levite is the one that takes care of the temple and sings the praises and is part of the choirs and makes the temple a worshipful place. These are men to be revered and honored and respected. So Jesus takes them and says, "Okay, what do they do when they come to a guy that got beaten and was dead?" What does the priest do? See nothing, know nothing. There's nothing there. Levite does the same thing. Now, rather than getting too judgmental with these men, we have to understand what's going on. If you touch somebody or something that is dead, that makes you unclean. And if you're unclean, you can't serve in the temple.

So the priests and the Levites, they don't get to be in the temple all the time. They're on a schedule of rotation. It's sort of not quite a month by month, but close. And they rotate through and each group gets to serve in the temple for a brief amount of time, and then they go back to their regular lives. So this might've been the one chance that year, or maybe even in his life, that he gets to go and serve in the temple. That is a great honor and a privilege. And if that guy's dead and he touches him, he doesn't get to do it. He doesn't get to serve in his calling.

So I mean, we can kind of understand that. It's going to be very problematic if he touches this person and he's dead. The guy that does help, the guy that isn't concerned about being clean or unclean, the guy that is concerned about caring for the individual is a Samaritan. And again, you got to understand Samaritans in this culture. Samaritans were hated and despised, literally spit upon by the Jewish people. Literally, they were. They were seen as less than the Jews, almost equivalent to animals. I mean, really, they had that low of an image of the Samaritans. They hated them. And the Samaritans didn't exactly have any love for the Jewish people either. It was a mutual hatred, and yet the Samaritan isn't concerned whether he is Jewish or Samaritan or anything else. He goes and helps the man, puts him on his donkey, takes him to an inn, pays two days worth of money to care for this person, and then promises to do more when he comes back, if it's needed.

Then he goes to the lawyer. "Okay, so who's your neighbor?" Who's the one that acted like a neighbor? Well, the one who showed mercy, of course. "Go and do likewise." Now that go and do likewise, should all cause us to look down at our feet and go, "I can't do that." Yet we are called as Christians to act in love. We have been saved by God. He has purchased us with the blood of Christ. And because he has purchased us, we are called to serve and to do good, but we need to remember how and why we do that.

And Paul is talking to the Colossians and he's rejoicing that the Colossians do serve each other because they have a hope that is laid up in heaven. They know where their certainty is. They know where their hope resides. And it's not in this world, but it's in Christ in what he has done. But because they know that, they can then love one another, and serve one another, and seek each other's goodwill. And so we are called, especially on this Sunday, to examine our own lives, to think about what is it that we do? Would people look at us and see the love of God in our everyday activity? In the way we speak, and the way we treat others, and the way we uphold the reputation of other people, and the way we don't mock or yell or get frustrated with people. Now, you get frustrated, but do we pray for them? Do we seek their goodwill? Do we carve out our world and get every little bit that we need? Or do we leave the corners for the poor and the foreigners? This is an indictment of our own lives to examine.

We are called to do good. We are called to look and be different from the rest of the world. But we are able to do that because of what God has done for us, first and foremost. We need to get that right first. We need to understand that God has saved us, that he has loved us, and because of that, we can then love Him and serve our neighbor.

In the parable, who is the Good Samaritan? Is that who we are? I'd love to think that I'm the Good Samaritan, but I know that I'm not very often. See, the Good Samaritan really isn't a description of you and me, but it's a description of Christ. Whenever God tells a parable, the parable helps us understand how much God loves us and what he has done for us. That's what the parables help us understand. And so Jesus takes this parable and makes it ridiculous. The Samaritan's the guy that helps. But what does the Samaritan do? He gives of himself. He heals and binds up the wounds of the man who is laying dead. He puts the man on his own donkey so that he has to travel, and walk rather than ride. He gives up his comfort for the sake of the injured, and then he goes and takes this man to an inn and pays their lodging and their medical bills.

He pays for their life. The Good Samaritan is Jesus, and we are called to be the innkeepers. See, when Jesus took the injured man to the innkeeper, he gave them over to the innkeeper so that the innkeeper might take care of them, might care for

their fellow man. So Jesus is encouraging us, because I have already saved you, serve one another. Be the innkeeper. Be the one who cares for those who need the care, out of celebration, out of love for what the Savior has already done for us, out of what you have already inherited. Inheritance is something that is given to you as a gift, and your inheritance, my inheritance is eternal life, salvation, the forgiveness of sins, peace with God. Because we have that inheritance, now we are called to do, out of the joy of our salvation. Now we can love God. Now we can serve our neighbor because he has first loved us and served us.

So let us give things that we do not have to do anything to inherit eternal life, because God has done it for us. But let us also then in our inheritance, in the joy of our salvation, seek ways to serve and obey, to love, and to cherish God and our neighbor. That is what He is calling us to do because He is our God, because He has saved us, and we are His. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting.