Luke 10: 28-29 28He said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.”

29But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

I have to tell you that I have heard this parable many, many times. I am afraid that the explanation and the message of this parable is often horribly off base. Most of the time when this parable is preached on, the lesson ends up being something about how we are to love our neighbor and be like the Good Samaritan. To be honest with you, I have preached on this text at least two other times and honestly I was afraid to go back and look at those sermons lest I too find that I was guilty of preaching bad applications like everyone else.

If you would, let’s just talk about what surrounds this text first. Just before this text in Luke 10:1-23 we heard of Jesus sending out the seventy-two to preach and teach his message. There was great rejoicing over the fact that the seventy-two on their return had done so well. But the seventy-two were more excited about the fact that they could do miracles. What did Jesus say to them: **“Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names have been written in heaven.”** In other words, salvation is the most important thing. Believing in Jesus and the one who sent him is the most important thing. In the closing verses of that section Jesus tells them this, **“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! Indeed, I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see the things you are seeing, yet did not see them, and to hear the things that you are hearing, yet did not hear them.”** Literally Jesus is telling them how much rejoicing they should be doing because the Son of God and Savior of the world was walking and doing marvels among them. The focus is on Jesus in that lesson.

Following our text are the verses speaking of Mary and Martha. You know the one. Martha is so busy with everything and complains and it is pointed out that Mary had chosen the better part. Mary had chosen to sit and focus on Jesus. The lesson is to be that we are to sit and focus on Jesus!

In between these lessons is the text before us. We call it the Parable of the Good Samaritan. But really, we should call it, “A lesson on getting things right.” That’s what our theme will be: **A LESSON ON GETTING THINGS RIGHT.**

So follow just what it is that happened. A teacher, someone billed as **“an expert in the law”** stood up to question Jesus. Jesus had just pointed out that he was the source and point of salvation, that he was the fulfillment of God’s Word and promises, something this man should have grasped and understood since he was “an expert in the law.”

Just contemplate that for a moment. Here is this man who was a student, a teacher, now hailed as “an expert” of the law. But does he really know the law? What we find is that he is good at the law part of God’s Word but clearly this man has totally missed the gospel points of God’s Word. That was the Jewish problem. There is law and gospel in the Old Testament and these so-called faithful people focused on the law side, the do’s and don’ts side of God’s Word completely missing the gospel side. So many do that today. They look at God’s Word and study God’s Word for what they are to do and be, totally missing the true point of God’s Word. And you know they miss the point because they too will ask the same question this expert in the law asked. **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

What a question. Do you understand the question? Perhaps somewhere along the line you too have asked or thought this question. But in truth, the question from God’s point of view is total foolishness. God’s Word makes it clear that to inherit eternal life and salvation we must be holy and perfect, just like God. Lev. 11:47 God makes it clear, **“You therefore shall be holy, for I am holy.”** Holiness is the demand of God, the price of admission into heaven. We can ask, “How can I be saved,” but to ask “What must I do to be saved,” that is already answered in God’s Word.

But you have to admire Jesus. He throws the question back at this man. Jesus says, **“What is written in the law? What do you read there/”**

Here is the man’s answer, and remember, Jesus tells him his answer is correct. Jesus tells him that if he does what he says, then he will indeed get eternal life. The man answered, **“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 says, **“Do this, and you will live.”** Now if you just pay attention to the man’s answer and his response you can already tell that something is wrong. His answer focuses on the last part about neighbors and this man totally ignore the greater and most important part. The law says we are to love God. How? Totally, fully, absolutely, and in every way love the Lord our God. Just let the words of God this man quotes sink in and feel their total weight. **“Love the Lord…with all your heart….all your soul…all your strength…and all your mind.”** That’s got like four different parts to contemplate. Four different parts that make it clear that our entire being in every way, at all times and places, in every aspect and way of our life is to be about God and loving him fully.

Now be careful, the questions I am going to ask if not answered correctly will lead to a false practice of religion concerning God. If you are married, do you love God with everything in everyway? If you own a home are all your resources and energies always directed to the Lord? If you have children, is your total and complete focus the Lord and his marvel and ways, and again all your being directed to the Lord? If you are in business, are all your energies, monies, and goods directed totally to the Lord your God? If you are a priest and your concern is becoming a higher priest, a recognized priest, a priest whom the people laud and applaud as “godly above all others” (like being an “expert”) is all your focus and energy the Lord your God? Pay attention. The only answer to all of these questions is a resounding and absolute, NO! But, tell me, what life is the life where God is totally, absolutely, and only the focus and point? The answer is simple. There isn’t one. There isn’t one because we cannot keep the Law!

That is the point of the Law! The law was given by God to convict of sin, to show us how far short we fall from the holiness and goodness of God. That man should have realized that there was no way he actually kept that first part on loving God. That man should have grasped that he could not in any way, ever earn eternal life and salvation. That man, does indeed show his hypocrisy in the next question he asks. Because this expert in the law asked: **“And who is my neighbor?”**

The scripture very rightly gives us the reason behind his question. **“He wanted to justify himself.”** He wanted to show how he, expert in the law, wonderfully loved his neighbor as himself. But if that is true, then why does he ask who qualifies as a neighbor? In truth, as a Jew, he hated and despised any who were gentiles. As a Jew, he hated and despised as even lower those people of mixed race called Samaritans. As a Jew, he looked down upon, yes, despised any and all that he judged to be a sinner! Yep, he applied God’s law to so many others but did not apply the law to himself. He wanted to show how he was the good and righteous one, a man who followed God because he loved God with his all. He wanted to show how holy and good his life was and figured that Jesus would simply affirm his life filled with hatred and prejudice against so many. He was going to be wrong.

You just marvel at how expertly Jesus shreds the man’s viewpoint. He tells this parable. Notice the man who gets robbed is never identified as Jewish or gentile. He is just a poor man who fell victim to the wickedness and evil of men. He lays on the road, dying. A priest, yep a Jewish priest, supposedly a man who hears and follows God’s laws and ways, that priest seeing the man in dire need, well, he walks to the other side of the road and passes by as if he sees nothing. Every one of us here knows the total wickedness, the darkness that this passing by is.

Next is the Levite. A man of the priestly caste. A man whose entire extended family is dedicated to serving the Lord and this serving of the Levites goes all the way to the time of Moses. This Levite, again another supposedly godly and righteous man, he too passes by on the other side. The supposed believer who is filled with evil and darkness.

Now Jesus’ parable speaks of the Samaritan. Jews hated Samaritans. They justified this hatred because in Biblical history the Samaritans were rejected by God as participants in the rebuilding of the Temple of God after the return from Babylonian captivity. But God’s rejecting of this people from building his Temple was based on the fact that they had changed, altered and amended God’s Word to suit their purpose and their ideas. They had rejected the true God and so the Lord rejected them. That was an act of love on God’s part. An act whereby God was calling them to repent, to change their ways and hearts and to abandon this false religion they practiced, a religion that left the true God out.

If you understand this separating for the truth of God, you understand the point of love involved. This was not permission to hate, but rather an act to call for repentance. An act to bring their souls back to the true and only God. God was not teaching hatred, but rather love. Love for souls. Love for his Word and ways. Separating from fellowship is never about hatred, but rather about love and the eternal destiny of souls. The Jews, for centuries, have gotten this wrong!

This Samaritan that this Jewish expert in the law thought was the most vile and evil, did what was right. He showed compassion and care. He acted on his compassion and care. He helped the man. Took him to a place where he could recover. Paid for his care and even promised to pay more if needed. This man, branded as ungodly by the expert in the law, was godly in what he did.

Please note, that such is to be in our heart. Yet the point of this parable is not just that we are to take care of every single person around us with compassion and care. The point of the parable is that those who should have known the ways of God did not. The point is that the Jewish way of thinking was godless and horrid, filled with evil and sin. Because anyone who ever reads this parable instantly knows that the actions of the Samaritan were the right ones. When this Jew is asked by Jesus, **“Which of the three do you think acted like a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers,”** there is no way this Jewish man could not see his own hypocrisy, his own hatred and thus also see the stark realization that he, expert in the law, did not love the Lord his God either. This parable helps this man see that he is a lost and condemned sinner. He is not justified. He is not righteous and good, a man above others. He is a lost and condemned sinner before God because he did not truly and rightly keep the very law he confessed needed to be kept.

Jesus told him, **“Go and do likewise.”** Yet in fact this Jewish man could not do that. His own people would brand him a man who hangs out with sinners and who fails to keep the letter of the law. They would take away his status as an expert in the law and say that he was a false teacher destroying souls. They would treat him exactly as they treated Jesus, the holy and righteous Son of God because in truth, the did not grasp and truly understand God’s Word and what it plainly and clearly taught. God’s Word teaches that all are sinners and in desperate need of Savior. That Savior is Jesus.

We cannot save ourselves. Even our righteous acts are but filthy rags before God. We have nothing in us that is good and just, holy and pure, nothing in us that could cause us to earn, to do what is necessary to inherit eternal life.

We had a beloved member who as a shut-in, almost always would say to me, “Pastor, I hope I am good enough for heaven!” My answer was always the same. “You are not. You are a sinner who has no merit or worth before God. But Jesus was good enough for you. Jesus is perfect and holy and by simply believing in Jesus God will see you only with the robe of Jesus’ righteousness. Jesus is the Savior and the Way, not you!”

The true lesson here is this: Do you put your hope and confidence in Jesus or in your own goodness and merit. Then you are that expert in the law. You are not justified but shown to be a lost and condemned sinner. When your faith is in Jesus, then you will act out that faith. You will trust Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life. You will live your life in a way that shows that Jesus is your Lord and God, your Savior from sin. We do not chase sin and false faith but rather pursue Jesus and his gracious redemption that will save.

Now go back and think of the context I shared with you at the beginning. The sending of the 72 was all about hearing the message of the Savior who has come. To rejoice in our names written in heaven because of Jesus. And think of the story of Mary and Martha. Mary chose what is best needed, to hear and listen to Jesus, to put your trust and confidence in His Word and salvation. The same lesson is taught here. Jesus as the Savior. Jesus as the Redeemer. Jesus as the one we need to be justified and saved. Please, hear and believe in Jesus and his redemption not in some self-righteous, I am better than you religion. Love the Lord your God above all. Love Jesus and that will be accomplished for you. Amen.