

Faith loves as God loves.

Text: Luke 10:25-37 for 8/4/2019 by Pastor Bolwerk

²⁵Just then, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶"What is written in the law?" he asked him. "What do you read there?" ²⁷He replied, "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." 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?" ³⁰Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹It just so happened that a priest was going down that way. But when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²In the same way, a Levite also happened to go there, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³³A Samaritan, as he traveled, came to where the man was. When he saw him, he felt sorry for the man. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day, when he left, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. Whatever extra you spend, I will repay you when I return.' ³⁶Which of these three do you think acted like a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?" ³⁷"The one who showed mercy to him," he replied. Then Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Of all the gifts God has given you, which one do you think is the greatest? Some might say Jesus. Without Jesus' saving work we would be eternally condemned to hell. Some might think of the forgiveness Christ won for us as the greatest gift from God. Perhaps you thought of God's love, something which we do not deserve, yet something God freely gives us. I would like to propose to you that there is a gift from God that is even greater than all of those; a gift so important that if God had not given us that gift the rest of his gifts would be meaningless. That gift is the gift of life. If we had never been born and we did not exist, then all God's other gifts would be worthless. God's other gifts would be nothing but empty words, because God cannot love and forgive what does not exist.

God has given us the gift of physical life. And through the power of his Word he has given us spiritual and eternal life through faith in Christ. Faith recognizes the importance of God's gift of life. In these words from Luke's Gospel we hear Jesus speak of how faith is moved by God's love toward us to love the lives of our neighbors. Today we learn that ...

Theme: Faith loves as God loves.

- I. It loves by caring
- II. It loves by sharing

God's entire law is summarized with one word: LOVE. The expert in the law certainly understand that truth as he tested Jesus. He wanted to know how to gain eternal life. Jesus pointed him right back to God's law and asked, "What does it say?" **He replied, "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."** (v. 27). God's Law shows us God's will, and God's will for us is that we love. We are to love God above everything else, and we are to

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love people exactly same way we love ourselves.

Yet we are very much aware of the fact that we have not kept this Law of Love. For as much as the truth hurts we cannot deny the facts. We know we haven't loved God every moment of our lives. Our hurtful words; our careless actions; our greedy thoughts, they all make it clear: God has not always come first. And we also have to admit that we have not loved our neighbor in the same way that we love ourselves.

In recognizing our lack of love, we realize how much we truly need God. We need God because, as the Apostle John tells us, **"God is love"** (1John 4:8). Out of his eternal and overflowing love, God cares for us. He cares for us even though we were worse off than the man in Jesus' parable who was attacked by robbers. You see that man was only "half-dead." We were completely dead. Our souls showed no signs of life; they showed no love for God, or for others. When God looked at us all he saw was the stinking corpses of our dead souls covered with the filth of our sins. Yet even in our horrible condition God did something that to us seems unthinkable: He gave up his life for us! **"This is how we have come to know love: Jesus laid down his life for us"** (1 John 3:16 EHV). The God-man Jesus sacrificed himself to rescue us. He died for our sins so that we could be made alive! The Apostle Paul wrote, **"But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved!"** (Ephesians 2:4-5). God loves about you so much that he has made each one of you alive spiritually through faith in Christ. He saved every one of you from eternal death! God loves you by caring for you. Each one of you personally knows God's love because you have experienced it firsthand: At the baptismal font where God made you his own child. At the table of the Lord's Supper where Jesus personally forgives all your sins. You experience God's love every time you hear the gospel.

Yet knowing God's love and having God's love in one's heart are two very different things. If a person knows God's love, but they don't show that love to others, then that person really has no love at all. The expert in the law had knowledge about God's love. The Priest and Levite in Jesus' parable also would have known God's love from the Scriptures. Yet, none of them gave any indication of that love being in their hearts. The Apostle John points out this false love when he asks, **"Whoever has worldly wealth and sees his brother in need but closes his heart against him—how can God's love remain in him?"** (1 John 3:17). John's question points to only one answer, "It cannot."

A person who has faith in Christ responds to God's love by caring for others. The Good Samaritan demonstrates care motivated by God's love. **A Samaritan, as he traveled, came to where the man was. When he saw him, he felt sorry for the man. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and took care of him** (vs. 33-34). Notice, the Samaritan does not care who the person is: He does not look at his skin color. He does not care where the man came from, his social status, or how wealthy he is. He simply helps him. Also notice that he is not forced to help. He helps out of compassion. He helps out of a desire to relieve the suffering of a fellow human being. And he did not have to go looking for someone to help. He did not actively

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search for someone in need. The man who was robbed was right on the same road as the Samaritan. The Samaritan cared enough to stop and help as best he could.

What about us? When we see members of our congregation who are hurting and in need, or when we see the people of our own community suffering, how can we not be moved to care? Faith loves as God loves. Our faith loves by caring for others. This care that we show does not need to be anything difficult or spectacular. In fact it is often displayed in very ordinary ways. Do you have a next-door neighbor who is elderly, or disabled, or handicapped in some way? Are there certain things that are hard for them to do? You could help them with those things, like raking leaves or shoveling snow. But what if you are someone who cannot get out to do those things? What can you do for your neighbor? Do you know someone who is lonely? Call them. Write them a note to say you are thinking about them. Pray for them. While these small acts of kindness won't make the evening news, they are ways our faith can show God's loving care to others.

Caring for the needs of those around us means sharing with others what God has graciously blessed us with. Faith loves as God loves, which means it also loves by sharing. God wants us to share all the gifts he gives us, both physical and spiritual gifts. When Jesus says, **"Go and do likewise"**, he does not want us to just help people with their outward circumstances. He wants us to have the desire to change people's hearts. As long as the hearts of people are hardened against God, they will never be able to love as God loves. Jesus gives us a glimpse of these hardened hearts in his parable: **"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. It just so happened that a priest was going down that way. But when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way, a Levite also happened to go there, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side"** (vs. 30-32). It is easy to see the hard hearts of the robbers who beat this man and steal his possessions. Sadly, we also see the hard hearts of the Priest and the Levite.

You can just about imagine the thoughts of the Priest and the Levite. "There is nothing I can do help him. I would not know how; I'm not a doctor. I certainly don't have the time or the money to do anything for him. Besides, I'm really in a hurry to get where I'm going. Someone else will come along to help him."

Do any of those thoughts sound familiar? Have any of those thoughts run through your mind? It's hard to love like God, isn't it? Yet, as believers, what a blessing to know we can turn to our Lord Jesus and ask for his forgiveness. Trusting in Christ's saving work for us we know we have that forgiveness: forgiveness even for those times we failed to love our neighbor as ourselves. As believers we can ask Jesus for the ability to love just as he loved us.

Most of the people in this world don't know God's forgiveness because they don't know of God's gracious gift of love. Without faith in Jesus a person will never know what true love is; they will never know what true life is. This is why we want to share the spiritual gifts that God gives us. God wants us to share the good news about Jesus with all of our neighbors. Now, we may be tempted to ask with the expert in the law, "Who is my neighbor?" Well, your neighbor is not someone 100 miles away. It's the people right in front of you: your

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spouse, your children, your next-door neighbor, the person sitting next to you in the pew, the people in your community where you live and work and worship. Your neighbor is anyone you come into contact with on any given day. God wants you to share Christ with everyone around you. God especially wants us to share Jesus with those who do not yet know him. This is how we show true love, by sharing the gospel.

We don't have to go out looking for opportunities to share God's love. We can simply look to the needs of those who are right around us. We can share our physical blessings with the people in our community by donating to local food pantries, homeless shelters, or thrift stores. We can share our physical blessings with our family, friends, and neighbors providing for those needs we know they are struggling to meet.

More importantly, we can also share the spiritual blessings God has blessed us with. We can share the gospel with our neighbors telling them how Jesus lived and died and rose again to take away their sins. We can also pray. Pray for those who don't know Jesus. Pray that God's life-giving word may bring them to faith. And we can pray that God would give us the strength to share the good news of Christ's love with everyone we come in contact with.

How important it is to share the gospel! This life is the only time a person has to come to faith in Christ. This is why life is God's greatest gift to us. It's a gift we can love and care for because God has given us the power to do so, through faith in Jesus. Because of Jesus' saving work we know we have eternal life. So we love as a way to thank and praise God for giving us the wonderful gift of life through his Son. Amen.