

1.

The expert in the law may well have had a problem known as “false security”. He was carrying around in his mind the notion and idea that he could and already had met God’s demands for earning heaven. His sinful pride in himself refused to accept God’s way of salvation. He wanted to do it his way. He wanted to justify himself.

Perhaps if this so-called expert in the law had been asked the question, “If you were to die tonight are you certain that you would have eternal life?” he may well have answered “yes”. Then if the follow-up question were posed, “If you stood before God’s throne tonight, and he asked you ‘Why should I let you into my kingdom, what would you say?’” He may well have responded with the familiar phrases:

- “Well I have not committed any grievous crimes worthy of jail time.”
- “I have done my best and tried my hardest to be good.”
- “To my recollection, I have loved my neighbor and my God.”

Yet, why would he still seek to ask Jesus for still more suggestions of what he could do? Perhaps he has seen Jesus’ holiness and perfection and sees that he has met his match. Jesus was flawless. And now he had the opportunity to gain his approval. The primary flaw with everything that this man poses to Jesus is that his every idea revolves around himself. It never dwells upon his Lord. Therein lays the real insecurity. When we dwell for any amount of time upon our efforts, our deeds, our generosity to others, our acts of kindness, we must throw up our hands in hopeless despair. For we have failed again and again.

This man would soon be convinced. For Jesus will expose the prejudice and hatred within his heart. Visualize for a moment the kinds of hatred and rejection displayed by supposed men of God in Jesus’ parable. Both the Jewish priest and the Levite commit sins of omission in their failure to do what God wants them to do. They both saw a beaten and wounded man, and they walked by on the other side of the road. Even though Jewish law prohibited the touching of human blood, they should have also realized that the law of love presides over such possible forms of contamination. Other excuses may also have run through their minds.

- “Some of those who beat this man and robbed him may still be near by, waiting to ambush others.”
- “The man wasn’t moving, so maybe he is just beyond any help any ways.”
- “I haven’t had enough medical training to do this beaten man any good, let someone else help him.”
- “If others see me by his side, they might think I had something to do with this crime that had been committed.”

Remember, those first two men were his fellow country men. They were even his religious brothers. But then along came a Samaritan. Contempt for these non-Jewish people was well known and realized. Even the so-called expert in the law could not answer Jesus’ concluding question “Which of these . . . was a neighbor?” with the term “Samaritan”. Rather he said, “The one who had mercy on him.”

At one point in Jesus’ ministry the Jews approached Jesus with words of condemnation along with the suggested insult that he was possibly a Samaritan. John chapter 8, verse 48, records it this way, “The Jews answered him (that is Christ), ‘Aren’t we right in

saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?” This kind of hostility was sparked centuries before Jesus’ earthly ministry began. 721 years before Christ’s birth, the king of Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and took nearly 30,000 of those Jewish inhabitants into deportation. That same ruler of Assyria then summoned heathen peoples from Babylon and other places to colonize and occupy this conquered area of Israel. (The idea behind such procedures was to prevent this conquered territory from ever regrouping and revolting against Assyria.) So then this conquered territory became known as Samaria. It was the land between Jerusalem and the Sea of Galilee. Because these people intermarried with many of the Jewish people left behind all their descendants became known as Samaritans.

They not only became a new nationality of people, but their religious practices also changed drastically. Their religion was a mixture of Jewish and heathen customs. One major theological difference between the Jews of Judea and the Samaritans was the location of the chosen holy city of God. Samaritans claimed Mount Gerizim was the Holy City. The Jews laid claim to Jerusalem as the Holy City. This became a major point of contention. This civil war over where the center of worship should to be began when the Samaritans were denied the right to help in the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Samaritans, further, did not accept the same set of books from the Old Testament.

While the Jews in Jesus’ day did not need to accept the false teachings of the Samaritans, they still had no excuse to be rude and hateful towards any people, much less the Samaritans. Our sermon text today taught them to love every person, the Samaritan as well as their own countrymen. But do we need to learn anything different? Are we somehow above such wickedness? Surely, we know of such feelings of hatred and jealousy and envy within our hearts only too well. Perhaps there are Samaritans in our lives (those that are especially a challenge for us to love). They may be the people that we even see on a regular basis. Such as:

- Co-workers or supervisors
- Family members or in-laws
- Classmates or teammates.
 - + The problem goes deeper than those times we’ve spoken words of degradation, in putting others down.
 - + The problem can be worse than possible acts of violence.
 - + The problem goes beyond any plots of revenge.

The problem originates with a sinful heart. For the Apostle John writes in his First Epistle, chapter 3, verse 15, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.”

As true believers in God, we are to love all people, even those professing to be an enemy. Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” God dealt with feelings of hatred and prejudice in the heart of Jonah. In Jonah’s day, Assyria was the nation especially oppressing Israel. Then God sent the prophet Jonah to its capital city of Ninevah. His calling was to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins. Out of resentment and open refusal to help out such an enemy nation, Jonah tried to sail far away from God. Then we know that the Lord used a giant fish to swallow Jonah, to save him from drowning, and bring him back to the job God had assigned to him. God wanted Jonah to preach salvation to the unbelieving enemy of Israel

and God still wants us to share Jesus with those perceived to be our enemies. When, in fact, they are really our neighbors.

2.

The same Lord Jesus who died for us, died also for them. He has not drawn a line of division or separation among the peoples of the earth. Neither should we. Recall the picture of heaven as depicted in Revelation chapter seven, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (verse 9). Jesus alone has demonstrated and defined what true love is. His love alone is boundless, limitless and blind to our unworthiness.

The Good Samaritan, in our text, is a fine picture of our Savior’s love and compassion for us.

- The Samaritan loved a person, who otherwise would have avoided and despised any Samaritan.
- The Samaritan took time away from his journey to stoop down and wash the dirt from the bloodied and beaten man.
- The Samaritan spent his own money and sacrificed his own savings for a man whose name he never even knew beforehand.

Now consider Jesus’ act of love.

- Jesus loved you and me when by nature our natural mind was hostile to God.
- Jesus stepped out of the eternal glory of heaven, came to this earth and stooped down to wash us clean with the sacrifice of his blood.
- Jesus in truth spent himself for us. He paid the price in full. So that now we are restored to spiritual health through his love found in the Word and Sacraments.

St. Paul summed this truth up well in his second letter to the Corinthians chapter 4, verse 10, “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

- Because Jesus showed such perfect love throughout his ministry, we know that his holiness is sufficient to make us right with our God on the Last Day.
- Because Jesus’ payment on the cross was very real, we know that every sin of lovelessness and cruelty we have been guilty of is forgiven.
- Because Jesus rose again, we know that we too have the power of God to resist such tendencies to show hatred and contempt towards our neighbors.

Daily, we can confidently respond to our opening thought in today’s sermon, “What if I must stand before God’s throne and tell him why he should let me into his kingdom, what shall I say?” We can answer boldly and honestly, “Jesus did it all.” Jesus’ love is greater than my lack of love for others. Jesus’ mercy is greater than my sin. Our daily privilege is to heed Paul’s advice to the Ephesians, “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19). Indeed, we all have room for growth to be like the Good Samaritan, but because of our good and gracious Savior, we have the means and power to grow for his glory and for the growth of his kingdom.

AMEN.