

Jesus, Our Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

I don't know about you, but I'm a lover of to-do lists. I simply can't imagine my life without to-do lists. One of the most undervalued things with to-do lists is not tossing the completed list immediately, but scratching it off so that you can look later at how you did. You look at what you were able to do and get that refreshing feeling of accomplishment... but how quickly that feeling goes away once you turn to the many things you didn't get to. How we go through each thing and make decisions about how we're going to think about them: "Clean the shower. Eh, I can do that tomorrow. What's one more day? Wish Joe and Ashley happy anniversary. Too late to call, and sending a text just isn't personal enough. E-mail so and so about such and such? There's only 24 hours in the day after all." Whether its excuses or genuine reasons, in some form or fashion, we *have* to justify to ourselves why something didn't get done.

Now keeping to-do lists is all well and fine, but in today's reading, we hear about the danger of "to-do list theology." Instead of finding a good reason for ourselves why our to-do list didn't get done, "to-do list theology" is trying to find reasons to give to God why we deserve to still have Him look kindly at us, despite how much we break the Law, that divine to-do list, despite our utter failure before the Law.

**"And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'"**

He's asking Jesus what needs to be on his to-do list! But ask a law question, and you get a law answer. For what do you *do* to inherit anything, humanly speaking? Literally... you do

nothing. Someone who you're in good favor with has to die and then you hope you're on the receiving end of his inheritance.

The lawyer didn't ask Jesus this question because he was despairing of how poorly He does with God's Law, that divine to-do list, and despairing at the logical conclusion of how such failure will be accounted for at death. This man knew the Torah and its commandments. He's just testing Jesus' Bible knowledge, to see if this alleged new prophet really has what it takes to teach the people. But test Jesus, and prepare to be tested yourself.

Jesus answered his question with a question. **“He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”** I'm sure the lawyer was thinking “Ha! I'll show him.” **So he answered and said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.”**

Jesus commends his answer. Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor as yourself. What a wonderful summary of the entirety of God's Law. In fact, the perfect summary, straight from Deuteronomy. **“do this and you will live,”** Jesus says. Give the Law question, and Jesus will give the Law answer. Eternal life can be gained by doing every last task on God's to-do list, but it requires that every task be completed perfectly.

Before turning to the man's response, let's think back again to our own daily to-do lists. Have you ever noticed that what we list tends to range from really broad to nitpicky specific? So that you might have “Read the Bible” or “Work out more” right underneath “Go to O'Reilly's after work to get the Fel-Pro High Performance Gasket Set.” And then you might read on some random page on the Internet that the narrower, the better. The narrower, the more able to be accomplished. But general tasks are also good to help you keep your eyes on the bigger prize.

Yes, you need to go to the store to get better fitting gym shorts, but if you don't have "Exercise more" on your to-do list, then you'll end up wearing those gym shorts to go to McDonalds.

Well if you were to look at Jesus' daily to-do list, it would read "love God, love neighbor," or even simply "love." Love is the fulfillment of the Law. Or if Jesus decided to be a bit more specific, his to-do list would have the Ten Commandments. And then maybe even more detailed according to where He was that day. Maybe the morning before he was betrayed he had written in the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment category: "wash disciples' feet." But ultimately, to wash his disciples' feet, or to pray, or to pay the tax to Caesar can be summarized by that one word: love.

We tend to think of love as a nice word. It's everywhere. But consider also how love is a terrifying word, especially as it comes out in today's text combined with the word "all." Love with *all* your heart, soul, and mind. To God, that word love *demand*s perfect love, and perfect love demands sacrifice, as St. John writes, "**No greater love than this that one lay down his life for his friends.**" Fully loving is the total and complete giving of yourself until there's absolutely nothing left to give. Do this love, and you will live. Love perfectly, and only perfectly, in order to live. That statement should terrify you, and rightly so. For love is not some abstract concept. Love looks like the Ten Commandments! (1) fearing and trusting in nothing else but God. Love is (2) praying. Love is (3) going to church and reading the Bible. Love is honoring your parents, helping your neighbors in all ways.

Nevertheless, we in our Old Adam love to water down this word "love" and water down the *difficulty* of the Ten Commandments in order to justify ourselves, in order to convince God in our own mind, that we're worthy of Him.

So Jesus responds to the man's statement with "**Do this and you will live.**" Good luck with that, because such a task as "Love God. Love neighbor" is *impossible* to ever check off this

side of eternity. And the lawyer knows this, but he doesn't know any other way to escape hell, so his tactic is to take the summary of the Law and narrow it down...and water it down...to make it achievable.

**But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And *who* is my neighbor?"** This is classic Phariseeism. Knowing you can't do the Law as it's written, so finding a narrow to-do that may be *based* off the Torah, but designed to make you *feel* like you're actually doing all of God's Law. The lawyer tries to reinterpret the law to: really, you should only love those who can love you back. That's a checkable to-do list item that can make him *feel* like he's doing the Law.

So Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. You want to know, O lawyer, who your neighbor is that you should love? You want to make the Law easier? Well try this then. Your neighbor is the one who's *hard* to love. Your neighbor is the one that gets in your way. Your neighbor whom you are to love is the one who fell among thieves, naked and dying. But nobody would blame you if you walked by. But then after you leave with your heroes, the priest and the Levite, a Samaritan comes to the scene; one of those good-for-nothing half-breed heretics. He went the distance to care for this man, sacrificing a whole day and much money to his care, and didn't even stick around long enough to get anything back in return. If you want to be judged by the Law, then you're a slave to the one who would do it better than you. You're a slave to this Samaritan.

As you can imagine, the lawyer was destabilized. He knew Jesus was right. The Law promises life *if* you can do it. "Do this, and you will live." Don't do this, and you're dead. The law can say "love God and love your neighbor," but it can't produce that love, not even a bit. Your friends on Facebook can say, "All we need is love," but that post on Facebook can't produce that love. A Good Samaritan law can't produce a Good Samaritan. The only one who

can truly do the law, who can truly love, is one who has been freed from the Law. Only one who sees and know his sin can see that sin forgiven. And only he who has his sins forgiven can then truly love. For without faith that Christ is the end of the Law to all who believe, you can't love. Without knowing that your justification before God comes in Christ and not by yourself, you are only driven to hate God and your neighbor.

But Jesus didn't merely come to amplify the Law to the prideful, He came to fulfill it *for all, for you*. He didn't only come to expose this Pharisee tendency within us, He came to cover our hypocrisy with His perfect consistent love, with the perfect sacrifice. **“No greater love than this that one lay down his life for his friends.”**

He came for the lawyers, the Pharisees, the priests, the Levites, the Samaritans. He came for us beggars left for dead in our sins: all flesh; fulfilling the Law of perfect love. He did it all *for you*.

And so...who is your neighbor? Jesus became our neighbor, our Word become flesh to offer Himself once and for all and for all humanity. He became the Good Samaritan, who left the throne of heaven and descended into the ditch of this world. He came to rescue you who are wounded and unable to do anything for yourselves. He submitted Himself to fall among thieves, to be stripped of *His* clothing, beaten with many blows, and finally, after 6 hours of being abandoned in the ditch – not the ditch, but abandoned to die on the cross... it was finished, and He bowed his head, and gave up His spirit. He was crucified for your sins and raised for your justification!

Do you wish to be justified before God? Of course you do. It's the deepest desire of all people. But look to the Law (and what you can do to love God in order to be saved), and you will perish by the Law. But take the better route. Christ died for you. He perished in your place.

Believe this. He and He alone justifies you, not by works, but by grace through faith, as a gift, that you may be set free from the Law. You're no longer a slave to the divine to-do list. Only a son. You are free to love, because of Christ who loved you first. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, to life everlasting. Amen.