

Loving our Neighbours

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Joy and Elaine, for reading. Please keep your Bibles open at Luke chapter 10 as we continue our series, as Barry said at the start of the service. Let me start by asking you whether you remember this hit song from the 80s by Tina Turner. Have a listen.

What's love got to do? Got to do with it? That'll do. I don't know if you remember that. You've got to love the hairdo, though, don't you? Oh, the 80s, good times.

But the question today is, what's love got to do with eternal life, actually? Because today we come to one of the most well-known stories in the Bible, the Good Samaritan, and it's made its way into our society such that there are schools named after it, like this Catholic school in Victoria, and even medical centers like this one in New South Wales.

But most of society has missed its primary purpose. Because Jesus tells this story to actually teach us we cannot get eternal life by loving our neighbors.

Only Jesus can give it. You see, what's happened is, like much of Jesus' teaching, our society has taken the moral, you know, being a good Samaritan, loving your neighbor, but missed the Messiah, that you can't get into heaven without him.

[1 : 47] Only Jesus can get us eternal life. Now, of course, in the process, Jesus does still show us what it means to love our neighbor.

And so what's love got to do with it? Well, we love our neighbor not to get life, but because we have been given life. That's the big idea of the passage today.

Let me show you from the Bible so you don't take my word for it, but God's word. Here, first, we meet a lawyer. So point one in the outlines and verse 25 in the Bible. I'll also put it on the screen for those who are live streaming.

So on one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. Teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Here is an expert in the law. In other words, a lawyer, a barrister, if you like. And the fact that he stands up to ask his question suggests that perhaps Jesus has been teaching and he's just finished.

[2 : 49] And then comes question time. What's more, though, we are told that it's not an innocent question. Do you notice he stands and asks in order to test Jesus?

He wants to test to see if Jesus really knows how to inherit eternal life. Or more precisely, the lawyer wants to test Jesus to see if the way to inherit eternal life is the same as what the lawyer thinks it is.

It's like when my kids got their L plates and one of them asked to drive our car for the very first time. I asked them some questions to test them to see if they knew how to drive a car the way I thought.

And they didn't do so well on the first question because I said, which one is the brake and the accelerator? And they got them around the wrong way. They've improved significantly since.

But this lawyer's question is doing the same thing, testing to see if Jesus knows the answer. But it's an important question still. I mean, eternal life is pretty significant for us, isn't it?

[3 : 59] And so how do we inherit it? Well, Jesus replies in verse 26 and 27. What is written in the law?

Jesus replied. How do you read it? The lawyer answered, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.

And love your neighbor as yourself. The two great commandments. Now, just as an aside here, do you notice Jesus' evangelistic strategy?

He actually starts with what the lawyer knows, which is the law. He says, well, what's written in the law? And that's not a bad way to do evangelism with others.

You know, starting with what they know or some common ground, perhaps a recent event in the media that you're both aware of. Or perhaps a concern they have in life and then leading them to the truth.

[4 : 59] This guy knows the law. And so Jesus starts with that. And the lawyer says we're to love God with our all and love our neighbor as ourselves.

This is how he thinks you inherit eternal life. And so is he right? Well, verse 28. You have answered correctly.

Jesus replied. Do this and you will live. Jesus says he is right. But hang on a second. Haven't been being taught for years and years and years.

That the way to inherit eternal life is by believing in Jesus. Trusting that his death really did pay for our sins. So that we might be forgiven and given eternal life instead of eternal judgment.

That's what we've been taught. But Jesus says, do this and you will live. In other words, keep these laws of love and you will live eternally.

[6 : 02] And so it looks like love has a lot to do with it. Doesn't it? But of course, we know no one can really do these laws perfectly.

Can they? I mean, have you always loved God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? Have you always loved your neighbor as yourself?

I haven't. I have some great neighbors and some not so great neighbors. One of the not so greats will mow the council strip.

And when I mow it, I mow it outside my house and his house because it's joined. But when he mows it, he'll mow only up to the fence line and then leave our bed. You know, he can do that.

Sure, that's fine. But it's a bit petty. Worse, he will throw things he doesn't want over our fence into our backyard. And so these petty acts have meant, I confess, I have not always loved him with my mind.

[7 : 07] In fact, sometimes I've even thrown the stuff back. But this lawyer thinks he has loved his neighbor all the time. Well, a limited number of neighbors.

See verse 29. But he wanted to justify himself, you know, prove that he does love his neighbor. And so he asked Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

The man wants to justify himself. He wants to prove that he does love his neighbor. And so he can inherit eternal life himself. The problem, though, is the word neighbor meant anyone who was near.

And so it could be anyone, couldn't it? Which makes the law a bit hard to keep. And so that's why he asks, and who exactly is my neighbor?

Wanting to narrow it down and limit it to just those he's able to love. After all, one way to help us love our neighbor is having less of them, isn't it?

[8 : 17] I asked a Bible study group last week what helps us to love our neighbor. And one person very quickly replied, when they move house. And I suppose that is one way.

But another way is to ask what this lawyer asked, and who exactly is my neighbor? Hoping to limit it down and have less of them. And for this Jewish lawyer, it would have meant no more than his fellow Jews.

Perhaps even those Jews who followed God's law. And so Jesus then tells this famous story to show him his neighbor is more than fellow Jews.

And what it means to love them. And so show him that actually he has not always loved his neighbor enough to earn eternal life.

So point to the lessons. Have a look at verse 30 to 32. In reply, Jesus said, A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers.

[9 : 20] They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road. And when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

So to a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him passed by on the other side. Now the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is, in some parts at least, narrow.

And it's a very windy road and it descends quite a bit downwards. Here's a picture of the actual road. Well, a section of it anyway. It goes for about 27 kilometers and it has caves along the mountainside.

At the top left-hand corner of the screen there, you can always see a cave, the opening of a cave there. And so it would have been easy for robbers to hide and attack travelers.

And in this case, leave this man half dead. Now the Old Testament law said, if any Jew touches a human corpse, they will be unclean, ceremonially unclean for seven days.

[10 : 26] And especially so for a priest, unless it was a close family member. But this man is not yet dead, is he? And what's more, they both see the man, don't they?

I mean, if you look at the road, it's a bit hard to miss someone lying in it, isn't it? And so this is not a case of the priest and Levi not seeing him. Nor is it a case of not being allowed to touch him because of Old Testament law.

It doesn't apply. He's still alive. No, no, this is simply a case of not loving him. They prefer to love themselves and just not get involved and risk whatever it might cost them to care for him.

Of course, in these traditional stories, the third person is always the hero. So we've had a priest, a Levite, and perhaps the lawyer is thinking, oh, maybe next we'll be an expert in the law.

Me. Either way, he would never have expected the person who does follow. Verse 33. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came to where the man was.

[11 : 38] And when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

The next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. Looking at look after him, he said. And when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.

Now, this would have been a shock for the Jewish lawyer. As many of you know, Samaritans were kind of half breeds. They had been there was intermarriages and there was mixed race. And so for the Jews who are pure, they despised each other.

I think Palestinian and Israeli today or Ukrainian and Russian today. They were enemies and despised each other. And so this would have been a shock to hear the word Samaritan.

In fact, Jesus kind of makes it even more shocking because he uses the word Samaritan. And the very first word of the sentence in the original language, even our English translations try and highlight that.

[12 : 47] Verse 33, grammatically, you might say, as he traveled, a Samaritan came with a man was. But do you notice a Samaritan? Bang. The person you'd least expect it, Mr. Lawyer.

He came along. And what's also shocking is the extent to which this Samaritan loves. The victim was probably a Jew since this road was in Jewish territory.

But the Samaritan doesn't care about race. All he cares is that this man is human. And so he shows compassion. He cares for him, bandages him, takes him to an inn and then pays for him.

In fact, he even opens himself up for extortion. Because did you notice, he says at the end, I'll reimburse you for any extra expense. He writes the innkeeper a blank check.

And the innkeeper could have marked up the prices, like the airline tickets at the moment. But the real shocker for this lawyer is that this Samaritan is not just the hero who loves his neighbor, not just the great cost that he incurred to love his neighbor, but that the Samaritan is also the lawyer's neighbor.

[14 : 07] Have a look at verse 36. Jesus then said, You see, so far we've been thinking that the victim is the neighbor.

And to love our neighbor means loving that victim who's in need. And that's true. And the lawyer may have even been happy with that if the victim was a Jew. But notice how Jesus now asks, Who was a neighbor to the victim?

To the mayor? Of course, loving your neighbor means you are a good neighbor to them. You're kind of neighbors to each other. That's the way it works, doesn't it? You know, you have neighbors next door to you and you are their neighbor.

It kind of works both ways. But Jesus deliberately switches the focus from the victim to the Samaritan. Why?

Or do you remember the lawyer asked, Who is my neighbor? And so Jesus is getting him to answer his own question by saying, Well, who is the neighbor here, Mr. Lawyer? It's his enemy, the Samaritan.

[15 : 20] You see, Jesus is teaching the lawyer that his neighbor is more than his fellow Jews who are near him. It even includes Samaritans who are enemies of him.

Jesus is broadening the definition, you see. Our neighbor is not just those who live next door or those who are near us in life like our friends, nor even those we meet along the road of life.

It includes even our enemies. It's a high bar, isn't it? One that the lawyer seems to struggle with. Because did you notice in verse 37, when he answers the question, he can't even say the Samaritan.

He says, And then Jesus says, Now, do you think, having seen who his neighbor now is, that this lawyer could go and do likewise?

Do you think this lawyer could now keep this law perfectly? Loving his neighbor all the time, even his enemies? I don't think so.

[16 : 34] You see, Jesus is trying to show him that he's not actually able to keep that commandment, love your neighbor, enough to earn eternal life. Last week, we saw that the disciples were to rejoice that their names are written in heaven.

That is, that they have eternal life. And then Jesus praises his father for revealing these, well, for hiding these things from the wise and learned, but revealing them to the little children, lest that the wise think their own wisdom or effort has secured their eternal life.

But he's revealed it to the little children, like the 72 disciples, who were to depend on God, just like little children depend on parents. And then in the next section of Luke's gospel is today's passage.

Along comes this lawyer, a wise man, who thinks he can earn eternal life by keeping those two laws of loving his maker and loving his neighbor. In other words, that he can get eternal life by what he does.

Notice the repetition of the word do in this passage. He says, what must I do? Jesus says, well, theoretically, you could do this and you will live. But then comes the good Samaritan to show the lawyer what it really means to love his neighbor.

[17 : 56] And Jesus says, go and do likewise. Go and do that, Mr. Lawyer, and see how you go. He's trying to get the lawyer to realize he can't do enough to earn eternal life.

He needs to turn to Jesus instead. You see, the wider context and this lawyer's opening question shows us that the big lesson from the good Samaritan is that we cannot justify ourselves by what we do.

We cannot earn our way into heaven by loving our neighbor enough. It's too high a bar for us to reach. I mean, is there anyone really who always lives like this good Samaritan?

Anyone? Anyone? And so what's love got to do with eternal life? Well, our love, nothing.

We cannot love enough to earn eternal life. Jesus must earn it for us. Instead, we ought to be like little children who trust, therefore, and depend on Jesus, on what he has already done at the cross and not what we do in life.

[19 : 11] For Jesus is the ultimate neighbor, isn't he? He doesn't pass us by in our sin, but he has pity and mercy on us. He healed us.

He healed us. That is, forgave us and brought us not to an inn, but to his father's family. All at the great cost, not of a couple of denarii, but of his own blood.

It's by trusting in Jesus and what he has done that we inherit eternal life. And so the first application for us this morning is, do you trust in Jesus to inherit eternal life?

Are you trusting in what you do, your good deeds, that they'll be good enough to get you into heaven? We're to trust Christ.

And for those who have, then the second application is to thank God it doesn't depend on us. I mean, if our neighbor includes all those who are near us along the road of life, then that includes those lousy drivers on the road every morning I take their kids to school.

[20 : 16] And if I have to love them to inherit eternal life, then I must confess I'm in trouble because I haven't always. But thank God it does not depend on us.

How good is the Christian message? Thank God eternal life doesn't depend on us, but on Jesus. And thirdly, in response then, we are to go and do likewise.

We are to love not to get life, but because Christ has given us life. We're to love our neighbor and be a good neighbor, just as Jesus was to us.

And so how are you going at loving your neighbor? Not just those literally next door, though they are sometimes the hardest of all, but those along the road of life, whether they are from a different country or make different choices or dress differently to us, or even our enemies who make life difficult for us.

Don't mishear me. To love our neighbor doesn't mean we have to agree with their decisions or choices, but it means we can still show compassion to them when they're in need, even if it costs us.

[21 : 31] A little while ago, I think it was the beginning of this year, I was talking about a person I knew of who was at Aldi, and they were in a line, so they had some neighbors in the queue, and their neighbor who was paying at the checkout didn't have enough money to pay for the groceries, and so this person paid for them.

About two weeks after I told that story, I heard of another person who was from our church, actually, and who did the same thing. I think it was the same Aldi, even. He was here this morning.

It costs him money, but that's loving your neighbor, isn't it? Another person told me about a time they got off the bus with their shopping, only to trip up the gutter and spill their shopping everywhere.

Two cars passed by. The first was a group of local kids who wound down the window to laugh, and the other car was a lady from a different country who had limited English, but still stopped, helped this person pick up their groceries, and drove that person home.

Now, it's pretty obvious who was loving their neighbor, isn't it? Loving a neighbor, though, means more than just loving them practically. Do you remember our first reading?

[22 : 40] It talked about not lying, nor deceiving, nor swearing falsely against our neighbor. And so how we speak to others, whether it's to build them up or tear them down, is part of loving our neighbor.

And even loving them spiritually, if they're not Christians looking for opportunities to share Jesus with them, that they might have eternal life. And if they are Christians looking for opportunities to encourage them, that they'll continue unto eternal life.

The hard part in this, of course, is that it might cost us, whether money or time or comfort or patience on the road, Andrew, or even the risk of it possibly backfiring.

Like the time I was on a bus, and I stood up to let a lady sit down, and I was told off for being a male chauvinist. But we're to love our neighbors in need, even if it costs us, even if they're our enemy.

What's love got to do with it? Well, we love not to get life, but because we have been given life through Christ. Let's pray.

[23 : 55] Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you that you give us eternal life, not because of what we do, but because of what Christ has done. But Father, in light of that and in response to that, please help us to love our neighbor.

It is sometimes really hard, especially when they annoy us or make life difficult for us. We need your help. So by your spirit, we pray, give us grace to love our neighbors just as Christ loved us.

We ask it in his name. Amen.