

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

– LUKE 10:25-37. – JULY 15. –

"Golden Text: – "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." – Matt. 5:7.

JESUS was a teacher and expounder of the Law to the common people, but he did not class himself with the Scribes and Doctors of the Law amongst the Jews. He had a different view of the Law from theirs and taught in a different manner. The common people heard him gladly, whereas the Jewish Doctors of the Law did not appeal to the common people at all or attempt to teach them, but merely discussed the great problems of divine law amongst themselves and with the more ascetic of the people – the Pharisees.

The common people, although they heard the Lord gladly, did not clearly comprehend his teachings, for he spoke to them in parables and dark sayings to the intent that the mass might not understand, but that the specially zealous Israelites indeed might be attracted to closer study and inquiry. To these he explained the parables, saying, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, but to all those without [outsiders, not specially interested followers] these things are spoken in parables." (Mark 4:11.) Nevertheless, there was something very attractive in the Master's style, so that even those who did not fully comprehend his teachings said, "Never man spake like this man"; and again we read, "They wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth," "For he taught them as one having authority [as one who understood his subject thoroughly] and not as the Scribes [not doubtfully]." – John 7:46; Luke 4:22; Matt. 7:29.

For this reason jealousy of Jesus sprang up amongst the Doctors of the Law. To them he was a rival teacher, and

accordingly they sought to entrap him, with a view to exposing him to ridicule before his followers, whom they recognized as "unlearned men." But in no case did they succeed; in every instance recorded the Lord's wisdom was too great for them – he entrapped them in their own arguments. The present lesson is an illustration of this. One of the Doctors of the Law, evidently thinking that our Lord's teachings along the lines of love and mercy were contrary to the rigid lines of justice as laid down in the Law, thought to entrap our Lord by a question. He would ask him upon what terms he could have eternal life. He expected Jesus to answer, "Eternal life will be given to all who manifest a God-like, loving, generous character," or that he would say, "You can have eternal life by becoming my disciple and practising my teachings." Thereupon this Doctor of the Law would at once call attention to the fact that the teachings of Jesus abrogated the Law, made it null and void – that he ignored the Law.

"WISE AS A SERPENT, HARMLESS AS A DOVE"

Our Lord answered this Scribe thoroughly out of his own mouth: he said to him, "You are a teacher of the Law; give us your statement of what the Law says respecting how eternal life may be obtained?" This was a pointed reply, and the lawyer was fully prepared to answer it, for, What saith the Law? was a common question amongst the Jews who quoted from the Law. (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18.) This was the very definition which our Lord a short time before quoted to the rich young ruler who came to him on one occasion. The lawyer evidently repeated a well-known formula of the Law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." Jesus replied, "Thou has answered right: this do and thou shalt live" – have eternal life.

THE LAW VERSUS THE GOSPEL

Why did Jesus thus refer to the Law? Why did he not avail himself of this opportunity for preaching the Gospel? Why did he not say to the lawyer – "The only way to obtain eternal life is through faith in me, followed by a full consecration to walk in my footsteps as my disciple"? Why did he not tell the lawyer, "There is no other name given under heaven whereby men must be saved but the name of Jesus"? Why did he not tell him, "He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son shall not see life"? – Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:12.

We answer that this would have been too strong meat for the lawyer in his condition of mind. It was necessary that first he should realize his own inability to keep the full letter of the divine Law, so that he might be prepared **[R3803 : page 201]** to look for divine mercy through Jesus. The difficulty with the Pharisees and Scribes was that they were pretending to keep the Law, pretending that they were justified by it, pretending to gain eternal life by it, although they very well knew that they all died like other men, and knew also, when they would reflect upon the subject, that the divine Law was so high, so grand, so complete, that in their weak and fallen condition they were unable to meet all of its requirements perfectly.

There are some people of the same kind today, who are ready to acknowledge that God has a perfect standard and that none can expect eternal life except as they harmonize with that standard; and many today, as well as formerly amongst the Jews, believe that they are sufficiently near the divine standard to have eternal life, and are therefore not looking for any Savior – not looking for a Redeemer to pay a ransom price for them and to grant them immunity and forgiveness of sin and reconciliation through him to the Father – the covering of their blemishes. It is necessary for all such to learn first the lesson that divine justice

has but one standard and that is a very high one. When they find how high God's standard is and how imperfect are their best endeavors to measure up to their requirements, then and not until then do they begin to look for help from the Lord in the attainment of life eternal. The Lord wished the lawyer to learn this lesson, and therefore exacted from him a statement of what the Law required.

The lawyer did not stop to haggle over what would be included in loving God with his entire heart, soul, strength and mind. Some one might claim to be loving and serving God and others might doubt the truthfulness of the claim, though unable to prove anything, since only the Lord and the man's own heart could judge perfectly in this matter. The lawyer passed over that great question as though it were nothing, as though it were settled, but had he sought to critically examine what such a complete consecration to the Lord would signify he would doubtless have found himself far short of its standard.

Let us not pass the question too quickly or too lightly – let us know that to love the Lord with all our heart would mean that the sum of all our affections would center upon the Lord, so that our love for him would far excel all of our love for the dear ones of the home and the family and of the whole world. To love the Lord with all our soul would signify with all our being – to manifest our love not only by our words and looks, by our praises, but by our services and all of our conduct in life, everything testifying that God is first in our affections and in all of life's interests. Thirdly, to love him with all our strength would signify that time and talent and influence would all be at the service **[R3804 : page 201]** of our God, that in everything we would be ready to be used, spent, in glorifying his name, in serving his cause as we might understand it to be his will. Fourth, to love our Lord with all our mind would seem to imply that we are to intellectually attempt to appreciate the Lord, to understand

his divine laws and to enter into heart sympathy with them, so that our service and worship would be the more intelligent, after the kind described by our Lord when he said, "They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" – intelligently.

"LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF"

The Scribe, passing over the obligations to the Lord, seemed to realize that his daily conduct would condemn him as a violator of the latter part of his own definition of the Law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." He apparently recognized this as his most vulnerable point, and that the Lord had entrapped him in his own answer. He knew how in his daily life he was not loving his neighbor as himself – that he was making a wide discrimination between those of his own class and the common people, the publicans and the sinners; and that even in his present endeavor to entrap Jesus he was not loving him as himself, as his neighbor, but treating him as an opponent. He felt that, like others of his class, he had a haughty, disdainful attitude toward the lower classes of his own race. He was skilled in the Law, however, and this was not a new point for him to evade. He had the same explanation of the matter that was common to others of the Scribes and Pharisees, namely, that their neighbors whom they were, according to the Law, to love as themselves, were those who belonged to their class, to their set, to their station in life. Apparently, therefore, with considerable confidence he replied to Jesus, "But who is my neighbor?" as though he would say, "That is a point, I presume, upon which we might possibly differ. I think that I keep the Law when I love and respect and fellowship those of my own class, and treat others with more or less of disdain. How could you apply the Law of Moses differently? I feel sure that you will agree that the Law meant that each person was to consider those of his own class as his neighbors, and to love them and cooperate with them and not with others of the outside world."

With marvellous wisdom the Lord framed a parable, such as the Scribe of the Law well knew might take place any day. He pictured the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, a bridle-path, in some places quite steep, passing through a gorge in the mountain – a vicinity infested with robbers, who lived in the numerous caves, and who not infrequently attacked passengers. Even today it is the custom for travelers to have an armed escort of Arabs on this journey to Jericho. Our Lord pictured a traveler on this road beset by the robbers, beaten into helplessness, stripped of his clothing. He pictured a priest passing by, seeing the man and hastening on, lest he also might be beset by the robbers; similarly a Levite passes by, unwilling to spend the time necessary to render assistance. Then a man of Samaria comes along, and, moved with sympathy, assists the injured one, binding up his wounds; and finally, taking him on his own beast to the nearest inn, he cared for him over night and made some provision for his further care.

The force of our Lord's illustration is only seen when it is remembered that the Levites were specially set apart for holy service to the Lord as instructors of the people, to guide them by word and by example in the ways of the Lord, and when it is further remembered that the priests, also belonging to this tribe, were a special family chosen of the Lord for the very highest service toward himself and toward the people of Israel. The picture is still further heightened when we recall that the Samaritans were a mixed people, whom the Jews despised and with whom they would have no dealings. – John 4:9. [R3804 : page 202]

With these things in mind mark the Master's question, "Which of these three was neighbor of the man who fell amongst thieves?" There was only one answer for the lawyer to make. He himself belonged to the Levite class condemned by the parable. The reply was, "He that showed mercy on him." Our Lord

approved of that answer and responded, "Go thou and do likewise" – go and show mercy, go and understand that any man in the world, friend or foe, is your neighbor and is to be loved and served by you as you may have opportunity. As you would have him do for you do even so for him; love him and serve him as yourself, as you would have him love and serve you under reversed conditions.

THE GOLDEN RULE

We have found some of the Lord's people disposed to evade the force of this requirement of the Law and its illustration by the Lord's parable by saying, "Yes, the Samaritan who showed mercy to the wounded man was indeed his neighbor, while the priest and the Levite who did not show mercy to him he should not consider to be his neighbors; hence the wounded upon recovery, should he ever have any dealings with that Samaritan who assisted him, should love him as himself, should be willing to lay down his life in his service. Whereas the other two who did not do neighborly acts ought not to be considered as his neighbors, and he should not try to love them as himself.

We answer that this is a distortion of our Lord's language. Indeed, he was seeking to counteract this very thought, which was common to the Jews, for it was a proverb amongst them that they should be loyal to neighbors but bitter to enemies. The word neighbors signifies those who are near, and the Scribes and Pharisees were in the habit of applying this to those who were near in sympathy, in sentiment, in faith, in sectarian relationship. Thus a Pharisee would gladly serve another Pharisee, and a Scribe would gladly serve another Scribe, from a clannish, selfish spirit, regarding each other as neighbors in the sense of the Law, and that others of a different class were more or less opponents, either to go unloved or, if they oppose themselves, to be hated.

As Christians we must take a much higher view of the matter than this. We remember our Lord's words in opposition to this very thought. He said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:43-45.) Any who will not come to this standard of love, not only for friends but also for enemies, cannot long be recognized by God as his children.

Our Lord originated the Golden Rule as a full statement of the divine will, which must govern all who would be his disciples. That Golden Rule does not say that we shall love as brethren those who have done kindness for us. Our Lord condemned that selfish kind of love when he said, "If ye love them that love you what thank have you? Do not even the publicans and sinners the same?" Such an interpretation, therefore, as would make this parable to teach that we should love as our neighbors those who have hazarded their lives for us would be far beneath the teachings of our Master, and, he says, would be on a parity with the usual sentiments of sinners.

As followers of the Redeemer we are to have the much higher standard; we are to recognize every one who is in adversity and needing our help as our neighbor, whom we should love sympathetically to the extent of being ready to do for him or her whatever service we might be able to render, to the extent that we should wish that person to do for us if we were in his difficulty. To whatever extent we can get this high standard of love, sympathy, cooperation, generosity, kindly feeling in control of our hearts and to be the rule of our conduct, in that proportion surely we will be the more Godlike, the more Christlike, for, as our dear Redeemer remarked, God is kind even to the unthankful.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Our Lord's requirements of us as his disciples go beyond merely the loving of a neighbor. We must have at least a sympathetic love for our enemies, so that we would not only not endeavor to injure them by word or deed, but that we would be ready and glad to assist them as might be in our power. No one, however, is to suppose that the Lord means that we are to love our enemies as we love the Lord himself, nor even as we love our brethren. Our love for the Lord and for the brethren is love of the very highest type – love which appreciates the principles represented in our heavenly Father's character, which all who are truly his are seeking to copy.

Our love for our enemies and for many of our neighbors must necessarily be along lines of their characters: their hopes and their plans are very different from those which we have adopted. As is our Lord's, so our love for them must be of the sympathetic kind, even as is the love of God – "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish." God does not love the world with a love of fellowship, nor are we to do so. Like him we are to have the love of sympathy for the world. Realizing its fallen and depraved condition we are to be glad to do all in our power for its rescue, for its comfort along lines of justice and mercy.

There seems to be a limitation to the love commanded by the Law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" – not better than thyself. Hence if it came to the place where a neighbor's life was in jeopardy, and we could assist him only by the sacrifice of our own life, it would not be a requirement of the divine law of love that we should sacrifice our life for his – that would be loving him better than ourselves, and therefore more than the divine requirement. Neither should we expect a neighbor to love us better than himself, so that he would sacrifice his life for us.

Should he attempt to do so it would be our proper attitude of mind to hinder it, not to allow him to work a permanent disadvantage to himself, more than we would have been willing and glad to have done for him. It is in this particular that our Lord's course in the sacrifice of his life on our behalf transcends anything that was required of the Law – in giving his life a ransom for many, he did more than was required by the Law. It is for this reason that it is denominated a **[R3805 : page 203]** sacrifice. To do the whole Law was his duty, but when he went beyond this, and gave his life a ransom price for mankind, that was a sacrifice, and as a sacrifice it was appreciated by the Father and specially rewarded with more than everlasting life. And the same rule applies to us, for as he was so are we in this world – we are to walk in his footsteps. – 1John 4:17.

The demands of the Law are still to do to our neighbor as we would have him do to us. We are to do nothing less than this to anybody; but as followers of the Lord, imbued with his spirit of sacrifice, we are joyfully to lay down our lives for the brethren – in harmony with the divine program which is now selecting the little flock, the household of faith, as sacrificers with Jesus, to be by and by joint-heirs with him in his Kingdom and in its great work of blessing and rejuvenating the world. It is very necessary that we have clear views respecting this subject of the demands of the Law, the demands of justice upon us toward any creature, and also as respects what would properly come in as a part of our sacrifice.

"THE LAW IS FULFILLED IN US"

We noticed in the beginning of this lesson that our Lord gave the Scribe instruction in the Law instead of preaching to him the gospel of grace. Now let us note that the Lord applies to his followers both the Law and the Gospel. God has but one standard, but one Law, and never will abolish it. The Law

Covenant indeed, after serving its purpose, ceased; but the Law of God, upon which that Covenant was based, will never fail. We as well as the Jews are commanded to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. This is the standard before us as well as before the Jew. The Jew could not keep it – he found himself deficient not only in respect to his treatment of his neighbor, but deficient also in the fulness of his love for his Creator, which must overbalance all other loves and manifest itself in all the conduct of life.

Only our Lord Jesus could or did keep that love in the absolute perfection of its very letter and spirit. However much a Jew living before our Lord's time might have had the right disposition of heart as respects the Law, because unable to come up to its requirements he could not have eternal life. Our position is different. Our Lord Jesus, having kept the Law, gave his life a sacrifice for Adam and for all of his race; and we who now come to a knowledge of this fact, and by faith accept it, have a standing with God in Christ, so that our best endeavors to keep the Law are supplemented by the merits of Christ and thus made acceptable to God. In other words, if we do our best in the matter of loving God supremely with our hearts, with our whole being, with our strength, with our minds, and our neighbors to the extent of our ability as ourselves, God will accept that good endeavor as though it were perfection, making up for its defects through the merit of Christ's sacrifice. Thus the Apostle tells us, "The righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us who are walking not after the flesh [not seeking to please ourselves and our fallen dispositions and attributes] but after the Spirit [to the best of our ability seeking to be in accord with the very spirit of the divine Law]."

THE GOLDEN TEXT

Our Golden Text reminds us of the Apostle's statement, "He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20.) In other words, the measure of the love which fills our hearts will find expression toward our fellow-creatures who have need of our sympathy and attention, and if we show ourselves deficient here it will imply a deficiency of our love for our Creator. If, on the contrary, we are merciful to others, generous, kind, taking pleasure in doing what we can for the relief of our fellow-creatures, especially to the household of faith, this will be an indication of the spirit which our Lord will appreciate and own if it be accompanied by a trust in the precious blood of Christ. Such merciful ones of the Lord's followers shall obtain mercy at the Lord's hands. He will deal gently with them, forgiving their blemishes and weaknesses in proportion as they have this spirit of generosity, forgiveness, toward those who trespass against them.
