

Two Supreme Questions of Life

(Luke 10:25-37)

There are two supreme questions of life, questions that could revolutionize the world if people would ask them and then heed their answers. Though we are unsure of the precise circumstances that give rise to the lawyer's question in Luke, we do know that immediately after addressing his disciples with a blessing (**Luke 10:21-24**), Jesus is confronted by a lawyer. The lawyer, supposedly well-versed in the **Pentateuch** (first 5 books of the Old Testament), attempts to embarrass Jesus. He tries to show him up before the public. It is clear from verse 25 ("a lawyer stood up to test Jesus") and verse 29 ("But he wanted to justify himself") that this man's motives were far from honorable.

The lawyer was not seeking the truth. His purpose was to trap Jesus, to lead Jesus to discredit himself by giving some unusual answer that would arouse the people against him. So, the **first supreme question** the lawyer asked, trying to trap Jesus was, "What must I do to inherit eternal life."

Jesus affirms the expert's understanding of what is required: to love both God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). He tells the expert, "Do this and you will live" (v. 28).

Note that the lawyer's question stressed works. He asked, "What must I do (v. 25)?" To him, salvation was by works. God was going to accept him because he was or could become good enough. He had no concept of the part that God's love and grace played in salvation.

Note how clearly Jesus led the conversation to spell out the steps to eternal life. **First**, the law has the answer to eternal life. If a man wishes eternal life, he must look into the law of God. Note Jesus' instructions to the lawyer, "How do you read it?" The lawyer had a little leather box called a phylactery, which we've talked about before. Several passages of Scripture were in the box, two of which were Dt. 6:5 and Lv. 19:18. These were the two verses which he quoted.

God has given us the answer to eternal life in clear terms—so clear that we are left without excuse. He has given us the answer in written words. It is in black and

white, certain. and unmistakable. He has given us the answer in the life of Christ himself. God has caused the words to be lived out in a human life, giving us the example of the Ideal Life.

In addition to the law having the answer to eternal life, if a man wishes eternal life, he must love God supremely. “Love the Lord your God” we heard in verse 25. Love God as your very own God. This is a personal relationship, not a distant relationship. God is not impersonal, not far out in space someplace, distant and removed. God is personal, ever so close, as though face-to-face. The command is to “love the Lord your God.” Loving God is alive and active, not dead, and inactive. We are, therefore, to maintain a personal relationship with God that is alive and active.

The lawyer, aware that he cannot fulfill the law’s demand, tries to justify that lack of love for his neighbor by asking the **second supreme question** of life, “Who is my neighbor (v. 29)?” Note the lawyer sought to “justify himself.” He sensed that Jesus was saying that he had not done the law; he had failed to love his neighbor. So

he asked the logical questions, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered and drove the point home to the human heart by doing what he had often done—he gave an illustration.

There was a traveler who was foolish and irresponsible. He was foolish because he traveled the road between Jerusalem and Jericho that was known for its danger. It was about 21 miles in distance, in a wild country, a rugged, rocky pass much of the way. It was a favorite habitat for marauding thieves, so much so it was called *the Way of Blood*. Travelers never journeyed there alone. They always traveled with caravans. Therefore, this traveler was irresponsible, foolish, and reckless. Some would even argue that such foolishness was undeserving of help.

There was a priest who placed his religious work and ceremony before the welfare of the man. Note this was a religionist, and did not even make a move toward helping the man. He “passes by on the other side” which means he rushed away. The priest was probably hurrying to meet his evening religious duties. The trip

was a day's journey, and he would have to rush to make it. There was also religious rule that made a person unclean for 7 days after touching a dead body. This ceremonial ritual caused a priest to lose his turn of duty at the temple. The priest was not about to sacrifice his primary work and privilege for the man.

Then there was the Levite who placed safety above compassion. The Levite was touched with enough feeling to walk over and look at the man. But he shrank from helping. Perhaps he feared being identified with the robbers, or feared that the robbers might still be lurking behind the shadows of the surrounding cliffs, or he felt that meddling with the poor soul was just too much bother to undergo.

The good Samaritan placed compassion before everything: prejudice, opinion, work, time, energy, and money. The *good Samaritan* teaches beyond question who our neighbor is. The good Samaritan gave his heart, his compassion, his all in order to help the desperate man. The injured man was a Jew. The good Samaritan and the Jew were of different races—races who hated

and despised each other. No prejudice has ever run deeper than the prejudice between these two. Yet, the good Samaritan had a sense of common humanity. He was a man who saw another man—not as a Jew and not as an enemy. This was most strange, for the Jews cursed the Samaritans, and there was the likelihood that the injured Jew would curse the Samaritan when he had recovered. However, despite all, the good Samaritan saw a fellow human being in desperate need, and he was moved with compassion for him.

The good Samaritan gave up his work, time, and energy to help the man. Note what he did. Each step is significant in showing how we are to love our neighbors. He went to him and reached out personally to help. He bandaged up his wounds and eased his pain. He poured oil and wine into his wounds and gave of his own goods. He set him on his donkey, sacrificing his own comfort. He provided rooming for him and provided the basic necessities. He took care of him: nursed and looked after him personally.

Note the time, energy, and money involved in this. Showing love to one's neighbor is putting love into action; and putting love into action requires time, energy, and money. Love is not just an idea or a feeling toward God. It is *practical acts and commitment* to help any who need help. The good Samaritan saw to it that continued compassion and care were given. Two silver coins amounted to somewhere between 24 to 48 days of room and board—a considerable sum. And note: the good Samaritan said that if it cost more, he would pay it when he returned. The good Samaritan saw a desperate need and did *all he could* to help.

The Lord's commission was forceful: go and do likewise. Note a striking point: Christ still did not answer the lawyer (the expert in the law). There was no need. The answer was strikingly clear. If the lawyer wished eternal life, he had to "go and do likewise." He now knew who his neighbor was: it was any person who needed mercy, whether a friend or just an acquaintance or even an enemy. The lawyer was forced to admit this. However, more than just a confession was needed. Love was

needed. The lawyer and all of us need to demonstrate love as we go about our daily affairs. We must help our neighbors—all those around us who hurt and are suffering.

So, what are the **lessons** we can learn from this Scripture reading in Luke?

There are **four** key lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading in Luke. **First**, love your neighbor as yourself. The story illustrates that “neighbor” is not limited to our friends or family, but includes everyone, especially those in need. **Second**, show mercy without boundaries. The Samaritan, despite his differences, offered help to the injured man, demonstrating that compassion should extend to all. **Third**, actions speak louder than words. The priest and the Levite passed by, while the Samaritan acted with compassion and kindness, highlighting the importance of taking initiative to help. And **fourth**, Biblical generosity is not picky. The

parable teaches that love is not selective and we should be generous towards all, even those who are different from us.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Lord, open our eyes to see the needs of those around us, and grant us the wisdom to know how to respond with compassion and love, as you have shown us in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Grant us the courage and the will to put your love into action, to serve our neighbors, to be a blessing to them, and to reflect your love to the world. We pray for a world where compassion and love prevail, where the needs of the vulnerable are met, and where justice and peace prevail. May we be part of that change, reflecting your love to the world. Guide us to be good Samaritans in our daily lives. Help us to see the opportunities to serve, and to make choices that reflect your love and compassion for others. **Amen.**

