



Week 2: Love/Forgiveness

Day 1 - The Good Samaritan – Luke 10:25-37 (part 1)

A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to gain eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?” He responded, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.” But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus replied, “A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days’ worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, ‘Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.’ What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?” Then the legal expert said, “The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.”

Understanding the Passage:

This is one of the many times Jesus is openly challenged by his contemporaries. Jesus was making a big splash and doing things that were out of the norm. He had gathered critics. So a lawyer desires to test Jesus. Two questions are posed: (1) What must I do to inherit eternal life? (2) Who is my neighbor?

Two valid questions for someone who desires to live a faithful life. And Jesus answers the first question with a question and then the second question with a parable. The parable is so radical and such a vivid story that it’s easy to focus solely on it. It’s easy to simply teach on the parable and leave out the questions.

The focus of this parable is obviously love of neighbor. Love that crosses racial boundaries, social norms, disease spreading barriers (that’s for you germaphobes out there), and financial boundaries.

But that’s all just the teaching of the second question. You see, the author of this passage is telling us something by not leaving out the first question. The first question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” takes this passage to a whole new level. The two questions cannot be separated. Love of neighbor must have some type of relationship with eternal life. Jesus turns someone who is focused on the eternal, the later, the reward, the after-life... Jesus turns that person to the HERE and NOW. Jesus says, you who want eternal life? You who are seeking heaven, you who are interested in the Kingdom of God... it’s right here, right now in the moments you are pouring out extravagant love on your neighbor.

This parable is yet another invitation from Jesus to us to participate in the in-breaking of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. This is Christ's extravagant love poured out for us to access and give to others.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Why is love of neighbor so important to the rhythm of life for a Christian?
2. Have you or has someone you've known been so focused on the promise of heaven that they miss the glimpses of heaven here on earth? What does this look like? How can we live as if the kingdom is present here and now?
3. Where can you participate in this type of kingdom ministry? What's realistic and attainable for you and your family?

Day 2 - The Good Samaritan – Luke 10:25-37 (part 2)

A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?" He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live." But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, 'Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.' What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?" Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him."

Understanding the Passage:

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a story that exhibits God's abundant love. This love that knows no bounds. This love that pours itself out for us. This love that moves towards pain and conflict, not away. This love that crosses the road and goes out of its way to bring healing and love.

The Samaritan was doing something very out of the ordinary. Something that people would frown upon. The Samaritan was interacting with a Jewish person. Different customs, different religion, different racial make-up... just different. The man who was left for dead and the Samaritan were vastly different from one another. Not only were they different, but these two people groups hated one another. The priest who walked by and crossed the road was actually the closest to the victim in terms of social group, race, and religion. Yet he moved farther away from the man. The hearers of this passage would have been shocked to find the Samaritan to be painted in such a positive light.

This passage teaches us that Christ's love knows no bounds. Christ's love doesn't obey rules created by generations of hate and conflict with others. Christ's love extends to all people regardless of what they've done or what group to which they belong. Christ's love both paints us in a positive light when we need it the most. Christ's love moves toward us in our times of need.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What are some ways you could cross social norms and rules in order to pour out extravagant Christian love on someone?
2. How can you be a conduit of love to those life has discarded? Where might the people be who no one else will touch?
3. Have you ever been untouchable and in need of forgiveness? What did that feel like? Where you granted forgiveness and mercy or did things not turn out so well?

Day 3 - Wedding Feast – Luke 14:7-14

When Jesus noticed how the guests sought out the best seats at the table, he told them a parable. “When someone invites you to a wedding celebration, don’t take your seat in the place of honor. Someone more highly regarded than you could have been invited by your host. The host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give your seat to this other person.’ Embarrassed, you will take your seat in the least important place. Instead, when you receive an invitation, go and sit in the least important place. When your host approaches you, he will say, ‘Friend, move up here to a better seat.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, “When you host a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected.”

Understanding the Passage:

The setting of this parable is a meal among religious leaders in someone’s home. Conflict erupts when Jesus heals a man in their presence on the Sabbath. To make matters worse Jesus begins to teach them about radical hospitality and love. Jesus, once again, was bucking the system.

A system that is still in place for us today. Who does one invite to dinner often? People we enjoy. People we like. People who are in our social or professional circles. People who don’t make us feel uncomfortable. People whose very presence would not make us think about the sad realities of this world.

This parable is scandalous for those religious leaders to hear. Jesus was suggesting they eat with Gentiles. Jesus was suggesting they break the rules and invite the outcasts into the inner circle of their lives. Not just invite them to a church function so they can be served, but really invite them, sit with them, eat the same food, and honor them. Honor those who cannot show honor to you in return. Invite those who cannot repay you with an invitation.

This parable begs the questions: how far does love and hospitality extend? How far does it extend in the lives of Christ’s disciples? How far does this concept extend into our lives?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Consider this type of radical hospitality. What form would it take today? How can you join Jesus in bucking the system?
2. What’s keeping you from extending radical hospitality? Schedules? Fears? Social norms?
3. Who might you consider inviting to your table?

Day 4 - Debtors – Luke 7:36-50

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. After he entered the Pharisee’s home, he took his place at the table. Meanwhile, a woman from the city, a sinner, discovered that Jesus was dining in the Pharisee’s house. She brought perfumed oil in a vase made of alabaster. Standing behind him at his feet and crying, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the oil on them. When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what was happening, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. He would know that she is a sinner.

Jesus replied, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher, speak,” he said. “A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay five hundred people for a day’s work. The other owed enough money for fifty. When they couldn’t pay, the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?” Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled.” Jesus said, “You have judged correctly.”

Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? When I entered your home, you didn’t give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but she hasn’t stopped kissing my feet since I came in. You didn’t anoint my head with oil, but she has poured perfumed oil on

my feet. This is why I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven; so she has shown great love. The one who is forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The other table guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this person that even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Understanding the Passage:

This is a story of forgiveness and great love. Two debtors, with debts a scale of magnitude apart, and both are forgiven their debts. The denarii was equivalent to a day’s wage – so one man owed almost two months’ worth of wages, while the other owed closer to two years’ wages. With that in mind, it isn’t any wonder that the man with the larger debt had more for which to be grateful.

This story gives us assurance and peace about coming to Jesus in our greatest need. Jesus welcomes all who have messed up and fallen short of the glory of God. Those who might have reason to feel farthest from God’s grace are precisely the people who have the most to gain from his forgiveness. Jesus even expects that those who have the larger debt, those who feel furthest away, will respond with more love and devotion than the ones who may not have wandered so far. For us, we can acknowledge and rejoice in the fact that there is much to be gained for the least and lost. For us, we can acknowledge that the “smaller” acts of grace and forgiveness may come to seem ordinary and commonplace if we do not guard against it.

The truth is, we are all indebted to the forgiveness and love of Christ, and we all have been forgiven a great amount. The grace we have been shown is indeed worthy of a response of devotion like the woman kissing the feet of Jesus. And if we forget our gratitude, there is the gentle reminder of Christ, and the invitation to recall the love we first felt upon receiving the great gift of God, rather than stern condemnation.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Do you ever forget your awe and gratitude toward Christ, like Simon? Why do you think we sometimes do forget?
2. What practices can we incorporate in our lives in order to continue to show gratitude and love for the great gift of forgiveness we have been given?
3. How far have you wandered from Jesus? When you returned were you met with love and kindness? How can you exhibit this same love and kindness to others who need to know they can come back to Jesus, come back home?

Day 5 - Ungrateful Servant – Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?”

Jesus said, “Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle accounts, they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold. Because the servant didn’t have enough to pay it back, the master ordered that he should be sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, and that the proceeds should be used as payment. But the servant fell down, knelt before him, and said, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ The master had compassion on that servant, released him, and forgave the loan.

“When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one hundred coins. He grabbed him around the throat and said, ‘Pay me back what you owe me.’ “Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I’ll pay you back.’ But he refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt. “When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended. They came and told their master all that happened. His master called the first servant and said, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me. Shouldn’t you also have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ His master was furious and handed him over to the guard responsible for punishing prisoners, until he had paid the whole debt.

“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don’t forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Understanding the Passage:

Sometimes it seems like forgiveness – true forgiveness – is not something of which we are capable. The offense happened, we process, we forgive, maybe even reconciliation occurs. And yet, the pain of the offense won’t leave us. We return to the grudge. The wounds, the scars, the trauma... all still there. Notice how even after being set free the slave’s own unforgiveness brings him back to a place of imprisonment. When we harbor grudges, bitterness, unforgiveness, we are chained to all of that. We are imprisoned. We are stuck and cannot move forward. This parable, though terrifying at times, offers insight into this strange and other-worldly concept of forgiveness.

This passage comes immediately after Jesus teaches on how to manage conflict between Christians (vs 15-20). If one sins against another, the one who was sinned against should go and directly address the one who transgressed. Jesus gives us a way to manage issues between us and it involves forgiveness. Today’s passage, without acknowledging the verses before it and other teachings by Jesus, is utterly terrifying. It seems to imply that our forgiveness of sins is bound up with our ability to forgive others. And this would be terrifying if we were left alone in this process. But Jesus gives us explicit directions so that we can find a way to release one another and be freed up from the snares of unforgiveness.

The whole of Scripture offers us much on this concept of mercy and forgiveness. We come to the table with many tools. This first is that God is merciful and forgiving. This is good news for us for obvious reasons, but also because we were created in God’s own image. This implies that we have the capacity to forgive and to forgive abundantly. We also have just been given some practical tips on how to manage conflict in Matthew 18:15-20. Then we know that we have the Holy Spirit with us who reveals our hard-heartedness and then empowers us to forgive.

The Holy Spirit gives us all that we need to be set free from the damaging wake of unforgiveness. Look to verse 26-27. Out of pity for him, the king released him and forgave his debt. The word pity here can also be translated as compassion. This word is also used to describe the compassion that Jesus feels when he performs certain miracles. This is the word utilized in the Good Samaritan to help the one in need. Compassion is our ‘on ramp’ to offering forgiveness to others who have wronged us. That compassion is a gift from the Kingdom of God. It may seem like forgiveness is an impossible task, but we were made in the image of God, which implies we have the capacity for great things like compassion and forgiveness.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Who do you identify with in this parable? Perhaps you’ve had the opportunity to show mercy and forgiveness like the king. Perhaps you struggle to show mercy to others. Perhaps you stand in need of forgiveness.
2. Why is forgiveness an important part of the Christian life?
3. What’s your experience with forgiveness (good or bad)?

Video Questions:

1. Christianity involves love of God and neighbor. How do these two concepts intersect?
2. Recall a time you’ve been forgiven. What was that like? How does it inform the way you forgive others?
3. Where does forgiveness show up Jesus’ teaching? How can we take this concept seriously in our everyday lives?
4. Fear makes people do strange things, but the same can be said for Christian love. What about Christian love would be considered strange to those who don’t take it seriously?
5. What is forgiveness? What is not forgiveness?
6. Is inclusion a part of Christian love? How can this take form in our relationships?
7. Discuss the adage ‘forgive and forget’. Is that possible?
8. What is the relationship between love and forgiveness for Christians?
9. What personally challenges you about forgiveness? Which parables on forgiveness are most helpful or unhelpful?
10. What is God’s posture toward us as it relates to love and forgiveness?