

Godly Givers

"Who is it that you are going to help? Only the good?" That was a question one of you posed to me as we talked "out loud." (As a side note, I'll say this again: I always welcome requests, and that's how today's sermon came about.) A question that is good for all of us to ask. There are a couple of passages that come to mind when I hear that. One of them being the parable of the good Samaritan. The lawyer, after failing to test Jesus, attempted to justify himself by asking, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus gives a story of a man who was beaten and left dead on a road. A priest didn't stop to help him, nor did a Levite. It was a Samaritan who showed compassion. He cared for him, put him in the care of an innkeeper and agreed to take care of all expenses upon return. However, the number one teaching that sticks out can be found in a couple of places - today we'll look at Luke's account:

- **Luke 6:27-36** "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

It's natural to look for examples of what Jesus is talking about. In fact, that's the blessing of the Bible. You get to see, many times, principle in actions in a variety of settings. You'd be surprised how many narratives there are, and as you read you think, "I need to remember that one for myself or someone else" (but unfortunately I have a bad memory and forget until I read it again - haha). The Bible is filled with examples of mercy and benevolence. Whether you're considering King David's kindness to those who served Saul and his grandson, Mephibosheth, or someone less known to Israel like Dorcas as we recently discussed. It's throughout the word.

Then we come to Christ. He's perfect and completely consistent. As I was studying this week, I found myself asking the "why" question quite a bit. Be patient with me, but let's step back and ask "Why?" Why did Christ come to His people? One fair answer would be that He desired to redeem His people. I believe He also came to us in such a way, because it shows the love of God and we have great comfort knowing we serve a sympathizing Savior. There is another reason, I believe, that is self evident: God was giving us an example of perfection in the flesh. God didn't just give us a book. He actually came Himself and lead by action. Though we cannot see Him anymore, we can at least read about a perfect man/God who literally walked among His people. And while it's very important that we understand how God saves those who have faith in Him, not because of good works, it's very important that we be a good people.

As I continued to study the scriptures this week, I was looking at them through that view. Jesus was constantly teaching a people, face to face, how to be godly in just a few years. They needed to pay attention and take it to heart, because He would not remain with them forever. We get distracted so easily, but Jesus was never easily distracted. In fact, He was never distracted. When you consider this truth, it shapes how you read the passages. You can see, even more clearly, how He acted as a Father to His creation. He was patiently teaching and counseling. He sometimes had to rebuke. He even threatened those who reviled Him. Though He came in the flesh and had to learn obedience, yet He was God and completely prepared and equipped for the task at hand. He wasn't simply trying to make it to the cross as quickly as possible, while helping those

around Him at times. No, He almost seems as though He was purposely parenting for a few years before giving His life.

In fact, I'm so impressed with Jesus' life when it comes to serving others. It seems too good to be true, because you don't see people go through the kind of things He did and always stay perfectly focused while helping those all around Him - flawlessly. In fact, if I were an atheist, this would be one of my greatest criticisms of the Word: miracles are kind of low hanging fruit, but have you ever seen anyone like Jesus? Can that really be accomplished on earth? No, we've never seen it in anyone outside of Him. So, we'll go through some of these passages and we'll take note: He's not getting distracted with the perfect answer, getting caught up in politics, or trivial matters. He came for a purpose and He never lost sight of that. We need to learn from Him and try, at least our very best, to walk like Him. The point of doing this is to see how fundamental this principle was to Jesus. Take a step back and see what He's doing.

As we continue through Luke's account, here's what we find:

- Healing a centurion's servant.
- Raising a widow's son.
- Healing many people and then going to bat for John the Baptist.
- Praising a woman who washed and dried His feet with her tears and hair. He points out how the host lacked basic hospitality for that time (no water for His feet, no kiss and no anointing).
- He continues to teach and has women servants who follow along.
- He delivers a couple of parables. Centers on what kind of people they will be? Will they produce or dry up or be choked out?
- Heads over across the Sea to help others while teaching His disciples to trust in Him.
- Helps a man who was demon possessed, though the rest of the community wanted Him to leave. Asks the man to tell his neighbors what God had done for him.
- He heals Jairus' daughter and a woman who'd been ill for 12 years.
- Sends out the 12 to proclaim the gospel and heal others.
- He feeds the 5,000 men (plus women and children).
- Tells His disciples how He's going to be rejected, killed and raised on the third day.
- The transfiguration.
- Heals a boy with an unclean spirit. Let's slow down a little and read the following passages:
 - **Luke 9:37-45.** I believe Christ's comments in vs. 44 may need to be considered in light of what just transpired. Christ had to heal the boy with the unclean spirit because the disciples were still struggling with their faith. Jesus wasn't going to be with them forever. Yet, He was patiently working with His disciples.
 - I believe Jesus made the point in verse 44 because He needed them to learn something valuable before He was gone. Here He is helping others and is about to give His life for the world, but they were still lacking faith (which is why they couldn't cast the demon out).
- Jesus has to correct them as they argue who the greatest is among them.
- Jesus has to rebuke James and John.
 - **Luke 9:51-56** When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.
- Jesus is training them to watch their cool and patience with people. The Samaritans didn't like that He was set to go to Jerusalem (the tension between the Jews and Samaritans). Jesus told the disciples to shake the dust off their feet if they were rejected . . . not kill them.

- Jesus sends out the 72 to preach the word - they are also casting out demons.
- Jesus gives the parable of the good samaritan.
- Jesus instructs Martha and then gives instruction on prayer. Emphasis on trusting God.
- Jesus casts out demons and is accused of doing so by Beelzebul.
- Jesus teaches about the sign of Jonah, them being a light and rebukes the Pharisees and Lawyers. Take note of his issues with them: many of it centers around how they harm others. They should give alms, focus on justice and love, and stop burdening others when they don't do it themselves.
- Chapter 12 discusses the boldness to accept and proclaim Christ while warning against worldliness and anxieties about physical needs. He encourages them to be prepared for when He returns.
- Chapter 13 addresses the need for repentance and God's patience and mercy.
- He heals a woman from her disability and then talks about the nature of the Kingdom.
- He encourages others to enter through the narrow door.
- He mourns over Jerusalem because of their rejection of Him.
- Chapter 14 begins with Him healing on the Sabbath. His accusers couldn't reply to His challenge.
- He noticed how people tend to put themselves first (when dining at the Pharisees home).
- He instructs them to be good to all, not just their friends. He gets a good "Amen" over that one, but He knows they're not getting the message, so He calls them out in another parable where God is calling His own, but they reject the call, so it goes out to others.
- He calls them to consider what it means to be a disciple.
- You've been patient. This is the last one:
 - **Luke 15:1-2** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."
 - Jesus then gives several parables to teach a lesson.
 - Do you think it's always easy to eat with sinners and tax collectors? God love you for loving the under dog . . . I do to . . . until I'm having to actually deal with them. Listen, we've all fallen short, but some people are easier to help than others. Some want to be helped more than others. You think it would have been easy for an Israelite to share a meal with Matthew? You think it would be easy to eat with a prostitute? "Yeah, I think so!" One may reply. And what if you found out she was the reason, the wedge, of your dear friends divorce. "She was the one he slept with?" Yeah, not so easy now, is it? People can be difficult. People can be fickle. People can have divided hearts. People can be ungrateful. Yet, we are to be patient and forgive. Consider **Luke 17:1-4**.
 - I'm not sure if this has made the same impression on you as it has me this week. If it didn't, it's not your fault. It will be because I had the advantage to read through these passages at a slow pace. I would read and go back through, and it was making an impression like it hadn't before. I've known for quite a long time what Jesus' purpose was and how much He helped others, but I think I get distracted from how much of a focus it was. We have got to be helping one another - whether it's spiritual or physical. It's fundamental.
 - **Galatians 6:1-10** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Jesus' whole point of coming to us seems to be for us, not for Him. His whole time and purpose on life, was to help and do God's will . . . which was centered on liberating us from the consequences of sin. You ask yourself: "what am I about?" A family could ask, "What are we about? What's our love and focus" We would hope that, day by day and week by week, we're centering our focus on God and others. This is what the law is about. This is fundamental. If you can't keep time - you're no drummer. If logic isn't your forte - you're no philosopher. If you can't manage money - you're no businessman. If you won't give effort to helping others - can we say we're being Christ like?