

19. The basics of Christianity

October 28, 2007

LaShanda Calloway, a 27-year-old mother of three who had dreams of becoming a model, was attacked by two people with a knife inside the Noori Convenience store in Wichita, Kansas, on June 23, 2007.

The security camera footage of the incident showed other shoppers wilfully ignoring the dying woman. The video showed the 27-year-old Calloway struggling to her feet and collapsing three times without anyone helping her. Worse, one woman who stepped over Calloway four times while shopping eventually paused to snap a photo of her with a cell phone before she left the store.

This news brought sheer horror to many people. It is one thing to say, "I don't want to get involved," but it is a complete different thing to stop and turn around to take a photo of a dying woman with her cell phone and walk out the door.

Whatever happened to the idea of "Good Samaritan"? Wasn't that something we all are supposed to do – helping someone who is in need?

Even though helping others and loving others are mandates by our Lord Jesus, there is more important thing – worshipping and loving the Lord Jesus. Nothing should come close to that.

This morning we are going to see these two basic elements of Christianity in action. We cannot ignore one and choose the other only. It is not "OR", rather "AND". We must do both.

A. ANOTHER QUESTION TO TRAP JESUS

Luke 10:25-29 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" 27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' " 28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

It was a good question asked. But this lawyer had a bad motive, because he hoped to trap our Lord. However, Jesus is the One who trapped him. Imagine that!

It is one thing to seek the truth of God honestly. One can even have doubts because he or she does not understand. The Lord will faithfully make Himself known to those who diligently seek Him. But it is a completely different story to mock God. By doing so they will never find Him, additionally they put themselves in a very dangerous situation.

This lawyer knew what the answer of his own question. As a matter of fact he had it with him. Strict orthodox Jews wore round their wrists straps and little leather boxes called phylacteries on their foreheads, which contained certain passages of Scripture – Exodus 13 and Deuteronomy 6. So Jesus said to the scribe, "Look at the phylactery on your own wrist and forehead and they will answer your question."

But being a lawyer, this man couldn't walk away without the last word. But most of all, he wanted to justify himself. He tried to shift it back to Jesus and tries to squirm off the hook of responsibility by quibbling over the meaning of a word. Many of you still remember former president Bill Clinton's excuse when he told the grand jury regarding the sexual scandal with Monica Lewinsky. He argued, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is."

Jesus nailed him with the following profound story which even the lawyer had heard about.

B. THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:30-35 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho during Jesus' time was difficult and steep. The altitude dropped three thousand six hundred feet over a distance of twenty miles. Robbers loved that lonely stretch of road. They could mug, murder and rape without fear of intervention. Called "The Bloody Way," it was a threatening and dangerous road for a person traveling alone.

Generally speaking, Jews and Samaritans despised each other both racially and religiously. The culture gave the Samaritan plenty of reasons to hate this wounded Jewish man and pass him by.

Unlike the two Jewish religious people, the Samaritan loved him with a sacrificial love. He didn't wait to be asked. Seeing the need right in front of him was enough to compel him to action. He also gave freely of both his time and his resources. Two denarii would have provided for the man's needs in the inn for at least two or three weeks.

Some of you have heard a different take on this parable of the Good Samaritan. The worst thing we can do with any parable, especially this one, is turn it into an allegory and make everything stand for something. You can say: the victim becomes the lost sinner who is half dead, helplessly left on the road of life. The priest and Levite represent the Law and the sacrifices, neither of which can save the sinner. The Samaritan is Jesus Christ who saves the man, pays the bill, and promises to come again. The problem is that if we take this approach to Scripture, we can make the Bible say almost anything we please, and we are sure to miss the messages God wants us to hear.

Most of us can think up excuses for the priest and levite as they ignored the victim. "I don't want to get involved," or "If I help that bloody person with my good clothing, it is going to be ruined," or "This might be a bait to hurt me," or "I might get sued if something goes wrong."

By the way, there is Good Samaritan laws in the United States and Canada that are laws/acts protecting from blame those who choose to aid others who are injured or ill. They are intended to reduce bystanders' hesitation to assist, for fear of being prosecuted for unintentional injury or wrongful death.

Can I make something very close to home for us? Let's say while you are driving on I-19, you saw a group of illegal aliens on the side of the highway. They are starving, thirsty, dusty and some are hurt. You are on your way to a very important meeting in your nice clothing. What would you do? Zipping by in 75 plus miles per hour and say, "God, help them," or call 911 and report it, but without stopping. Praying and calling for the emergency crew both are important and the right things to do.

I am NOT going to tell you what you need to do for this kind of situation. But I know what I would do. I would stop, call 911 and help them. Am I taking a chance? Possibly. But my God is able to protect me from any harm. If it is my time to go, I am outta here to heaven.

Let me put this more close to our situation. Outside of this auditorium, there are many Operation Christmas Child boxes from the Samaritan Purse organization to give Christmas gifts with Gospel tracts in their own languages to the children of the third world countries. You can spend \$12 per box and share the love of Jesus to those unknown children on the other side of the earth. I am sure that we can find \$12 per person from somewhere in our lives between now and Christmas. This is one of the ways we can love our neighbors.

Just because I have tennis racquet, a can of tennis balls and Nike tennis outfit doesn't make me to be a tennis player. I can say all I know about tennis, but it doesn't make me to be a player until I play it.

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also

Let me put it in another way: To row a boat, we need two oars. If I only use one oar to row, I would continue in a circle and go nowhere. In this illustration, one oar is our faith in Christ, the other our work for Him. It takes two of them to make a true Christian life. The work we do for the Lord does not make use Christians, but it proves that we are born-again followers of Jesus Christ.

C. YOU GOT IT, NOW GET AT IT

Luke 10:36-37 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The lawyer wanted to make the issue somewhat complex and philosophical, but Jesus made it simple and practical. He moved it from duty to love, from debating to doing. Jesus is warning us not to use these things as excuses for doing nothing.

If we all simply do what Jesus tells us to do regarding loving our neighbors – believers and non-believers alike, we would not have any church fight. Not only that, but also there will not be enough room in any Bible teaching church, because all the non-believers will be attracted to the love of Christians and they would come to those churches.

So, who is my neighbor? The one you know who is in need. Not all 4 billion people on the other side of the world. We can get there when we start to love and help one person at a time.

D. DISTRACTED FROM THE LORD

Luke 10:38-42 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." 41 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

For about two and a half years, Jesus had been on the road, ministering in village after village. The divine clock was ticking away His remaining six months on earth as He made His final journey toward Jerusalem, toward the Cross.

The village was Bethany which is located less than two miles east of Jerusalem. Martha's sister, Mary and her brother, Lazarus' home was a place where Jesus knows He could find a refuge among special friends who wouldn't demand miracles or ask leading questions to trap Him. It was a home where He knew He was loved and accepted and could find a rest.

The responses of two sisters to Jesus' visit were very different: Martha did nothing wrong in working hard for Jesus – that was good. Her problem was that she became distracted from Jesus with much serving.

We can get involved in ministries so much that we can forget why we are ministering and to whom. We can easily lose our focus from the main point of our ministry – Jesus – by neglecting time with Him in our daily devotion. We need to sit at Jesus' feet and be with Him.

Mary of Bethany was seen three times in the Gospel record, and on each occasion, she was in the same place: at the feet of Jesus. She sat at His feet and listened to His Word here, fell at His feet and shared her woe in John 11, and came to His feet and poured out her worship in John 12.

Because she was at His feet and paying attention to His Word, she could anoint Jesus with the oil of spikenard for His burial while His disciples had no idea about His death and burial even though they were told many times.

The key is to have the right priorities: Jesus Christ first, then others, then ourselves. It is vitally important that we spend time "at the feet of Jesus" every single day, letting Him share His Word with us.

The most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees. Unless we meet Christ personally and privately each day, we will soon end up like Martha: busy but not blessed.

E. WHICH ONE ARE YOU?

This story shows us three types of Christians:

1) People like Mary

Those who know how to serve and also sit at Jesus' feet.

2) People like Martha

Those who diligently, and with the best intention serve God, but without adding the one very important thing – focusing on Jesus – and it results in great frustration.

3) People who aren't doing either

These people do not spend time with Jesus, nor serve Him, because they are too busy with their own pursuits. They expect others do the work and serve them. It is no wonder why they don't grow spiritually. They are never-changing spiritual immature babies.