

· L · U · K · E ·

# What Matters Most

## (10:25-37)

Leon Barnes

*“And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ . . .” (10:25-37).*

Questions, questions—everywhere you look someone is asking a question. And when people say, “I have a question to ask you,” the questions always seem to be the same, and most are about such insignificant things. But it is obvious when you read Luke’s Gospel that Jesus was inundated with questions. Some people were honest. Some were looking for a flaw in Him or His answers. Some were just wanting to show their own knowledge. If a person has done a great deal of study on a particular subject, he will often ask you a question about it so he can then tell what he knows on that subject.

The lawyer who came to Jesus was wanting to test Jesus. He was certain he already knew the answers, but this was a way of checking Jesus out. So he asked the greatest question of all: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (10:25). Wouldn’t it be great if someone would ask this question of us occasionally?

Jesus’ response is a surprise. Why did He not quickly give the correct response to the man and then challenge him to do it? But Jesus is the master teacher. He turned to the questioner and asked, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” (10:26). Maybe He knew the man had the right answer and He just wanted to cut through all the muddle. Maybe He knew that one is more teachable when you listen to his

thoughts first. Or maybe He just wanted to hear what the man had to say. The lawyer answered brilliantly: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (10:27).

What do you do when someone who is in error about many things in his life answers a question correctly? Should you look for a minor error to bring up so that those around will not see you as sanctioning the false teacher? Do you admit he is right about that but quickly point to all the things he is wrong about? Do you say, “You are speaking the truth, but we both know you really don’t believe or practice what you said”? Let us take our cue from Jesus. He told the man he was correct in what he said: “Do this, and you will live” (10:28). We say, “But wait, Lord, what about all the other things the man needs to do?” If a person loves God and his neighbor, he will submit to God in all the other areas of his life. After all, Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Most of the difficulties of interpretation on difficult Scriptures could be solved quickly if the beginning point was overwhelming love for God and each other.

### JUSTIFYING SELF

Having the right answer often holds little connection to the dedication one shows for God in how he lives. Often those who can inform others of the right answers do not live lives of love and compassion toward others.

The lawyer was of this sort. He wanted to

justify himself. When Jesus told him to go and do what he had said, he sought a way around that. Wanting to justify himself, he asked, "And who is my neighbor?"

How would you have answered? Probably, I would have given a direct explanation of who is involved in the command and chastised the fellow for asking the question. What a lesson for all of us as we try to teach others the way of God.

Jesus told a story about a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead. By chance, two religious leaders came by and saw the man's plight, but for whatever reason, did not take time to help him. Instead, they passed by on the other side of the road; but a Samaritan, who would have been regarded by the lawyer as a renegade religiously, came by, saw the man, felt compassion for him, and helped him. He bound his wounds, carried him to the inn, and took care of him. Even when he had to leave, he told the innkeeper to take care of the man and he would pay the bill.

It was a simple story. It made the strongest of points: A man may know the answers and still not have his religion affect the way he lives. Jesus could have taken the time to explain why the priest and the Levite passed by. The fact that He makes the mere statement that they did indicates the reason did not matter. No excuse would be good enough for passing by a wounded man. A religion that will not make us active in helping those who hurt is not worth having.

### **WHO WAS THE NEIGHBOR?**

When we speak in general terms, it is sometimes hard to identify the good and the bad. If we carry on a theological discussion of neighborliness, we may leave knowing new facts, but still have little or no more understanding of how to love our neighbors. In a story like the one Jesus told that had to do with real life needs, the good and the evil are easy to identify. Away from the general command to love God and our neighbor, Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" (10:36). Even a child would know the right answer. The lawyer said, "The one who showed mercy toward him" (10:37).

Imagine the answers that would have been given without the story. The huge question of whether one who is not a fellow Israelite is really

to be loved and served would have been predominant; but when the story of a hurt man and who helped him was before them, anyone could see the right answer. We can discuss if the church is to help those who are not Christians, if widows need the financial care of the congregation, or if we should get involved in helping the homeless or the drug abusers; but no good answers will come until a real live person who is in the situation is before us. Then words will not matter; only deeds will count. The Samaritan did right. The priest and the Levite believed right and taught right. Which example will we follow?

### **"GO AND DO LIKEWISE"**

When the answer was clear for the lawyer, Jesus challenged him to proper action. Have you ever wondered why the discussion stayed on love for one's neighbor instead of on love for God? After all, the greatest command is to love God with all our being.

Maybe it is because God identifies with the people. He told them of the judgment scene in Matthew 25:31-46 in which people were judged by how they fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and those in prison, and gave drink to the thirsty; but when the judgment was explained, Jesus said that what one does to the "least of them, you did it to Him."

Maybe it was because it is easier to claim love for God in the abstract without changing our day-to-day lives. We can say we love God while downgrading others; but with neighbors, the test is always before us. Flowery words are soon seen through, and demands are made.

Maybe it was because Jesus knew that this man's real problem was with other people. He knew and loved the law of God, but that love had not made its way into his concern for others.

Whatever the reason, this stands out: To be the servant God wants us to be, we must learn to apply the care for one another as fellow Christians and even fellow human beings to our lives. While it is possible for congregations of the Lord's people to plan programs to help open doors for being loving neighbors, such programs can never become the fullness of what we are to be in this area. We must individually get involved in the lives of people.

Instead of trying to launch a "Good Samaritan Ministry," wouldn't it be great if each of us determined to be a good Samaritan?