

August 10th, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 11”

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis

Luke 10:25-28

Then a certain expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What was written in the law?” Jesus replied. **“How do you interpret it?”**

The man answered, “ ‘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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

“Your answer is correct,” Jesus said. **“Act accordingly, and you will live.”**

Then the man, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who exactly is my neighbor?”

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

We are continuing our review of the last year of the Life of Christ. **Luke 9:51** records: **As the time approached for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, [Jesus] made a firm decision to go to Jerusalem.**

For the rest of His time on earth, Jesus Christ will be preparing His disciples for His return to heaven. In our last lesson we recounted the episode in which Jesus sent seventy men as forerunners to acquaint the people in the towns that He planned to visit on His last preaching tour with the knowledge of His, Jesus Christ’s, position and power.

Jesus was bringing access to the Kingdom of God to those that repented, and He gave His healing power to His disciples so that they could demonstrate His power to show the people that the Kingdom of God was coming. Jesus expected people to worship God and repent after they received the healings that He and His disciples bestowed, and talked of the impending disaster for those that did not respond. **Matthew 10:20-24** and **Luke 10:13-16** record:

Then He began denouncing the cities where He had done most of His miracles, because they did not turn from their sin.

“Disaster awaits you, Chorazin! Disaster awaits you, Bethsaida! If the great miracles performed in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have turned from their sin long ago and be sitting in sackcloth and ashes. I’m telling you, it will be better for Tyre and Sidon on the judgment day than for you!”

“And you, Capernaum—have you been lifted up to heaven? You’ll be thrown down into hell! For if the great miracles performed in you had been done in Sodom, it would still exist today.

So I tell you the same thing: it will be better for the land of Sodom on the judgment day than for you!

“Whoever listens to you listens to Me, and whoever rejects you rejects Me. And whoever rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me.”

In an earlier lesson on reconciliation Jesus instructed us, in **Matthew 18:15-17**:

Now, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him privately what he did to you. If he’ll listen to you, you have won him back. But if he refuses to listen, take one or two others with you because it takes two or three witnesses to verify any accusation. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the congregation. And if he refuses to listen even to them, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

During my teaching on **Matthew 18:15-17**, I made the point that the reason that we have to go to our brother and tell him his sin is that our brother may actually be ignorant of the reason for our irritation with him. God is irritated with our actions, and Jesus is sending out the disciples so that the people in those towns, and then us by extension, will know and not be able to claim ignorance about our sins and about God’s provision for us to repent and join His Kingdom through the ministry of Jesus Christ. Although the particular cities mentioned by Jesus may not have repented, there were others that did, and in which the power that the Lord gave to His disciples was effective. **Luke 10:17** says:

When the seventy returned, they joyfully reported, “Lord, even the demons submit to our authority when we act in Your name!”

Satan and the demons had to submit to the disciples that came in the name of Jesus. Satan and his demons are like vampires, in that, according to the vampire movies, vampires have to get your permission to come into your house. A vampire can not come in to bite you without an invitation.

The devil’s power over us works similarly. If we don’t invite him into our lives, he can’t get in. The devil does not work by direct action, but by influence. His temptation of Jesus is a good example. **Matthew 4:3, 5-6, 8-9** tells us:

3 Now when the tempter came to [Jesus], he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

5 Then the devil took [Jesus] up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

8 Again, the devil took [Jesus] up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

9 And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”

Notice that the devil never actually did anything to Jesus to make Him sin. He didn’t push Jesus off of the pinnacle of the temple or down on His knees to worship him. The devil makes suggestions, which is why he is called the tempter. We must constantly be on guard so

that the things that the devil suggests that we do aren't too emotionally appealing to us. We have no need to fear that which the devil can do to us; we have only be on guard to not volunteer to cooperate with him to our detriment.

Why would we volunteer to follow the devil? Why did the people in the towns that rejected Jesus do so? Their rejection was not because of Jesus' lack of mighty works, but because it is easier and generally more immediately satisfying to worship the devil than to worship the Lord.

Think, for a moment, about idol worship, which is devil worship based upon religious rituals. Religious rituals actually require very little of us. They take a minimum amount of time, and they require a minimum amount of participation. If we could satisfy God by simply showing up somewhere for an hour or two a week, that would be pretty sweet. It wouldn't be much more trouble to pay God off by giving Him an offering. It might cost us a little something, but we can put it in our personal budget and get the job done. But Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 23:23**:

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

The scribes and Pharisees are those religious leaders who are concerned about the minutia of religious ritual. But Jesus wants them, and us, to understand that there is no religious ritual that has any meaning in and of itself; religious rituals are only useful as reminders to us of our obligation to take care of the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith. Jesus tells a parable that reveals how unimpressed He is with meticulously practiced religious rituals, in **Luke 18:9-14**:

[Jesus] also told a parable to people who trusted in their own righteousness and looked down on others: **"Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.**

The Pharisee stood up and prayed to himself like this: 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other men—greedy, ungodly, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice each week and give you a tenth of everything I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance and wouldn't even look up to heaven. Instead he kept pounding his chest and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, for I'm a sinner!'

"I'm telling you, this man went home justified before God, and not the other man. For everyone who elevates himself will be humbled, while the one who humbles himself will be elevated."

The justification that Jesus mentions in verse 14 means being saved, and Jesus is telling us that thinking that we are pleasing God by observing rituals is not the way to salvation. We are going to observe the ritual of communion in a few minutes, but neither the bread nor the grape juice, in and of itself, has any power in our lives. Each week during our communion celebration, I mention that we need to focus on that which Jesus Christ has done for us, because without our remembrance of the fact that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty that we owe for the sins that we have committed, we are like the Pharisee, and our taking of the sacrament is in vain. Our communion with Jesus Christ is not in the bread and the grape juice, but in the fact that we remember that which He has done for us. **Luke 22:19** tells us:

19 And [Jesus] took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is

My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

The devil wants our religion to be ritualistic. He wants us to reject that which God wants us to do, that is, to call on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to change our lives, and so he tries to convince us that the accurate reproduction of ceremonies and rituals are sufficient to please God. And some of us fall for it.

But Jesus instructs us to be wiser, and to have a greater understanding of His mission than that. He admonishes us that the rituals will only be useful if they lead us to recognize our shortcomings and repent. Coming to church without the proper mindset is useless. The men that incited Pontius Pilate to have Jesus crucified were in the Temple of God every time the door opened, but they never really got the point of their repetitive religious rituals. As a matter of fact, the religious rituals themselves became the point of their lives, and although they performed the ceremonies religiously, meaning with regularity, they actually had no contact with God. We can tell that this is true, because when God, in the person of Jesus Christ, actually came to visit, they did not recognize Him and they did not honor Him. Instead, they became defensive when Jesus Christ pointed out their shortcomings.

People become defensive because they feel that the need to appear righteous when they are in fact, sinners. When we are defensive and our obvious sins are pointed out to us, we then either become angry or depressed. But, repentance is the antidote for defensiveness. If we simply agree with God that our nature is sinful and we are personally weak, then we can just acknowledge our sin and repent, which takes the sting out of our sin.

One of the most benevolent verses in the Bible is **Romans 3:23** which says:
23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

This verse takes away our need for defensiveness, because not only does it allow us to acknowledge our sinfulness, but also recognize that everyone else is in the same boat as we are. Thus there is no need to compete with anyone else to have a better reputation than they have, because we are all disreputable in the sight of God.

If we are all disreputable, how can we ever become saints, saint meaning someone that is part of the Church of Jesus Christ? Well, we do not earn sainthood, but sainthood is bestowed upon us. Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the Cross has saved us from eternal punishment in hell, which is the consequence of our poor performance, and as He saves us, He bestows sainthood on us. **1Thessalonians 3:12-13** says:

12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,

13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Since the reason that the Lord interacts with us is so that He can establish us, meaning to bestow mercy on us and grant us repentance and forgiveness of our sins, the Lord expects us to repent in response to the free gift that He is trying to give us. But the people in the cities in question, the Jewish leadership, and all that opposed Jesus Christ, refused to accept the Lord's free gift, reasoning that they didn't need it and didn't want it, thinking that they were good enough on their own to merit entrance into God's kingdom. Jesus' offer reminded them of their personal sinfulness and made them defensive, and so they rejected Jesus' offer of repentance and forgiveness in favor of self-righteous cruelty.

But the disciples were excited to receive Jesus' gift, as well as the power over the devil and his demons that Jesus bestowed upon them. But Jesus warned the disciples to not get too excited about the earthly power that He bestowed upon them, but to rather understand the real import of the free gift of salvation. In **Luke 10:18-20**:

But Jesus said, "I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven. I give you the authority to walk on snakes and scorpions and over all the enemy's power. Nothing will hurt you in any way. Nevertheless, don't rejoice in the fact that the demons submit to your authority, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

Jesus wanted to make sure that the disciples, whom He was sending to carry His word to the world, were not focusing on power, rituals and/or self-righteousness, but upon the goodness and the free gift from God, who sent Jesus Christ to carry out His plan that gives us eternal life. **Luke 10:21-22** tells us:

At that moment Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, saying, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You've hidden these things from educated and smart people and revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, this gave You great pleasure.

"Everything has been committed to Me by My Father.

"Nobody knows who the Son is except the Father, and nobody knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

The gift of salvation can only be bestowed by God and by His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, but Jesus wants us to know that, through Him, the gift is available to anyone that wants to accept it. Jesus says, in **Matthew 11:28-30**:

"Come to Me, everyone who is weary and carrying a heavy load, and I'll give you rest. Put My yoke upon you and learn about Me. I am gentle and humble in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My load is light.

Luke 10:23-24 says:

Then in private He turned to His disciples and said, "The eyes that see what you see are greatly blessed! I'm telling you that many prophets and kings wanted to see the things you see yet didn't see them—and to hear the things you hear but didn't hear them."

So Jesus publicly claims to be the Son of God, the one to give rest for those in need of God, and the one that knows that which the educated and the intellectuals are too smart to realize. Jesus informs His disciples privately and says to the world audibly and publicly that all of the things of God have been committed to Him, that He is the one that can intercede with God for us, allowing us to receive the rest and peace of God. That is quite a statement, and one of the learned men there decided to challenge Jesus. Our text, **Luke 10:25-28** records:

Then a certain expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What was written in the law?" Jesus replied. "How do you interpret it?"

The man answered, " '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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "

"Your answer is correct," Jesus said. "Act accordingly, and you will live."

So the conversation went like this. The expert in the law asked Jesus, “What must I do to be saved?”

Jesus answered the expert, “Since you claim to be an expert in God’s law, and God’s law defines salvation, you should know what the law says.”

“Of course I do”, responded the expert, “but I’m testing you. Interpret the law for me.” That is what the expert said in **Luke 10:29**:

Then the man, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who exactly is my neighbor?”

The expert was look for a Biblical definition of neighbor with some clarification on the syntax of the word. He expected Jesus to talk about the law, as in **Leviticus 19:17-18**, which says:

17 ‘You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.

18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

This passage of Scripture, along with the rest of the Old Testament Levitical law, was based upon God’s command to the Israelites to go to the Promised Land, to destroy all of the inhabitants of the land, and to take over the Land in the name of God and the Israelites.

Deuteronomy 20:16-18 records:

16 “But of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive,

17 but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the Lord your God has commanded you,

18 lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the Lord your God.

In the Old Testament Law, the Lord commanded the Israelites to destroy the evil pagan influences in the Land to prevent the Israelites from going astray and following other gods. But Jesus has come to influence both the Israelites and those other ethnicities to come into His Kingdom. So unlike **Leviticus 19:17-18**, Jesus’ definition of a neighbor has nothing to do with ethnicity, but rather to do with the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. In answer to the expert’s probe, Jesus tells the wonderful story that is found in **Luke 10:30-32**:

Accepting the challenge, Jesus said, “A man once took a trip from Jerusalem down to Jericho. Along the way robbers attacked him, stripped off his clothes, and beat him, then went away, leaving him half dead.

“Soon a certain priest happened to take the same road. When he saw the man, he crossed to the other side and kept going. Not long afterward a Levite came to the same place, saw the man, and also passed by on the other side.

Jesus mentioned that the man taking the trip started from Jerusalem to inform the expert that the half-dead man was a Jew. Those that crossed the road to avoid the wounded man considered themselves to be righteous for doing so, as they were following the strict letter of the law. **Leviticus 21:1-4** says:

1 And the LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: ‘None shall defile himself for the dead among his people,
2 except for his relatives who are nearest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother;
3 also his virgin sister who is near to him, who has had no husband, for her he may defile himself.
4 Otherwise he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself.

The Levitical law is even more stringent for the High Priest. **Leviticus 21:10-11** says:
10 ‘He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes;
11 nor shall he go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother;

So, holy people are not to touch dead bodies, and the holier you are, the more you are supposed to avoid corpses, including even your deceased parents. Now the Jew on the road was only half dead, but a lawyer, meticulously keeping the letter of the law, would not approve of a priest getting involved with a wounded, half dead man because a half dead man might go all the way. The priest and the Levite, whose job was to minister the things of God before the Jewish people, decided that being ceremonially clean was so important that they ought not try to save the life of this half-dead Jew for whom they were supposed to perform rituals in the Temple, because he might die and defile them.

Can you see the inhuman absurdity of carrying the letter of the law to its’ illogical extreme? Of course, the question that one should ask is: What does the law of God proscribe as a penalty for a priest or a Levite that touches a dead body? The answer to this question is found in **Numbers 19:11-13**.

11 ‘He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days.
12 He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean.
13 Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him.

So, the penalty to the priest or Levite would be seven days of ceremonial uncleanness, and having to take a bath in water on the third and seventh day. The question for the lawyer is; would it be better to let the man die or to have to take a week off from performing ceremonies? The answer, to me, is obvious. Jesus makes it even more obvious as he finished the parable, in **Luke 10:33-35**:

“But then a traveling Samaritan came by, and when he saw the man, he was filled with pity. He examined him and dressed his wounds, applying wine and oil to them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and brought him to an inn, where he took care of him.

When he left the following day, he took out two days’ wages and gave the money to the innkeeper. ‘Take care of him,’ he instructed, ‘and I’ll repay you for whatever else you may spend.’

I hope that you remember from our last lesson that Jews and Samaritans generally had no dealings with one another because of their ethnic differences? But, in Jesus' story, the priest and Levite, who considered themselves holy men, used the law of God to justify allowing a man of their own Jewish race to die so that they would not become ceremonially unclean, something which they could remedy in seven days. The pagan Samaritan, however, who wasn't a worshipper of God, had the humanity to help his enemy, the Jew, because he was spiritual enough to understand that in a life and death situation, neither race, color, ethnicity, national origin, or religious or political affiliation should stop someone from helping a person in need. Jesus asked the lawyer for his evaluation, in **Luke 10:36-37**, saying:

“Now then, which of these three men do you think was a neighbor to the man who was robbed?”

The expert in the law replied, “The man who showed kindness.”

“Go,” Jesus said, “and act in the same way.”

Now Christianity itself is a life and death situation. **Romans 6:23** tells us:

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And, Jesus says, in **Matthew 11:28-30**:

“Come to Me, everyone who is weary and carrying a heavy load, and I'll give you rest. Put My yoke upon you and learn about Me. I am gentle and humble in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My load is light.

Whom does Jesus call to eternal life? Everybody. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, how much money you have, who your parents were, where they came from or how much money they had, or what you have done in the past. **Romans 3:23** tells us:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

If you know that you are a sinner, that you have sinned, you have the opportunity to join the club. All of us members are sinners. The fact that I've been in church more than you and have studied the Bible more than you doesn't make me better than you, because we all fail God's test. Think about it. If a perfect score on the test is 100 points, and passing on the test is a 70, and I get a 50 on the test and you get a 40, which one of us failed? And unlike some classes, Jesus does not grade on the curve. God's word is straight scale. It says, in **Ezekiel 18:20**:

20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

But the Bible clarifies this passage, in **Romans 3:10-12**:

10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”

This is the description of every unsaved person. There is no demographic that changes this fact. Man or Woman, Jew or Gentile, Protestant or Catholic, Black or White, Oriental or Occidental, Republican or Democrat, Hawk or Dove, Rich or Poor. But there is only one person that can change the fact of our sinfulness, and that person is Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us, in **Romans 6:20-23**:

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How do we access this wonderful gift of eternal life from God in Jesus Christ?

First we must realize that Jesus Christ died physically on the Cross of Calvary, as a sacrifice in our place to pay the penalty that we owe for the sins that we have committed.

Then we must recognize that Jesus Christ rose, physically, from the dead, and, after He rose, He walked and talked with His disciples, in one case with over 500 men at one time. Jesus left us the Biblical and historical record of His resurrection to prove to us that He is God and that He can provide us the forgiveness of which He tells us to preach.

Then, we must recognize our own personal sinfulness and lose the defensiveness that we have about our sinful conduct. And once we recognize our sin and lose the defensiveness that we have about our own personal sinfulness, we can then repent of our sins and leave them in the past. We will not be perfect, but we can always be better, growing in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We must yield to the Power of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sends us once we choose to believe in Him; the Spirit that instructs us, on a daily basis, to live even as the Good Samaritan lived, helping others and spreading the Good News of the Kingdom of God as Jesus called His disciples to do.

We will then be able to put our sinful pasts behind us, and move forward, not being directed by our own power or might or self-esteem, but being directed by the love of God, by the grace of Jesus Christ, and by our communion with the Holy Spirit.

Then we will not leave people by the side of the road because they are unclean and we don't want to them to affect us, but we will recognize that we are at the table of Jesus Christ only by His grace, and that as we have received His gracious gift, we have the obligation to show others how to receive His gift as well.

Who is my neighbor? My neighbor is anyone who has a need that crosses my path whom I would like to meet my needs if I had a need and I crossed their path. Our neighbors may not be half-dead, and needing us to patch up their wounds to keep them alive, but they may need Jesus Christ so that they can have everlasting life. Let us yield to the Holy Spirit and help those with whom we come into contact to live past this life into the next one.

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis
Family Life Baptist Church