

“25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? 27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. 28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. 29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:25-29).

INTRODUCTION: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Who is my neighbor? This question was put to our Lord in verse 29 of our text. Jesus answered by telling a story of a certain man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves.

We immediately recognize this as the parable of the Good Samaritan (READ vs. 30-35).

Jesus closed this story by asking, “36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? 37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise” (vs. 36-37).

Who Is My Neighbor?

That depends upon how big your God is.

In the earliest stages of Hebrew thought, God is pictured as walking in a Garden (Gen. 3:8-9). God of only the people of the garden.

Go back to the beginning of Israel as a nation, and Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, is associated with a mountain, Sinai (Ex. 19:10-11).

God of only the people of the mountain. Here God talked personally with Moses. In such primitive fashion the Hebrews conceived of God.

But the centuries passed. The Hebrew's were in Palestine, which, although it is no larger than the United States State of Vermont, seemed to them a great land.

No longer were they thinking of Jehovah as living on top of distant Sinai. He was with them in Palestine. They worshipped Him. He filled Canaan.

Their idea of Him had expanded and grown, and as they thought of that, and then thought back to the old conception of God upon Sinai...

They said, "For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods" (1 Chron. 16:25).

Nevertheless, the people, in the main, did not conceive of Him as being outside of Canaan. People thought of their gods as being limited by geography.

Remember David when, driven out by Saul to the Philistine cities, he said, “for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods” (1 Sam. 26:19).

The Hebrews thought of Canaan as Jehovah's ground. Leave Canaan, leave Jehovah. Other countries, other gods!

That is what the celebrated words of Ruth meant when, coming across the Jordan gorge from the land of Moab, where she had always worshipped Moab's god, Chemosh, she accompanied Naomi to Bethlehem, where Jehovah was God.

“16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Change countries, change gods! God of only the people of Palestine.

Centuries past. God continued to reveal Himself unto His people. People could not keep God geographically limited.

In the understanding of the people of Israel, Jehovah had expanded now to be the God of all the earth.

Isaiah said, “It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers” (Isaiah 40:22).

Again, with this improved concept they said, "The lord is a great God" (Psalm 95:3).

Still, there was heaven above and Sheol, the place of the dead, beneath. Did Jehovah have anything to do with those? Then the Holy Spirit moved the Psalmist to write:

"7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; 10 even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psa. 139:7-10).

This Psalm indicates a magnificent enlargement of man's concept of God. He was not God simply of the earth, but of the sky and of the abode of the dead.

Centuries passed and Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem in Judea. Jesus lived an incomparable life upon the earth and died upon the cross of Calvary.

Then, after centuries, the Christian gospel moved out into the Greek world. Hellenism impregnated the minds of that ancient world into which the early church went forth.

They preached, "27 that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: 28 for in him we live, and move, and have our being..." (Acts 17:27-28).

Or, again, "...God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16).

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "And the Word was made flesh (v. 14).

This God that revealed Himself in the Old Testament now comes to us in Jesus Christ.

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19).

Now, if God is God of the entire earth, then all men are my neighbors.

Jesus said, “19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:19-20).

If we believe the Lord's statement, then our obligations transcend the persons next door and reach out to the ends of the earth.

Those Like Us

It is almost always easier to preach the gospel to those who are "like us." On the first Pentecost after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ was a splendid Bible example of God's men preaching to their own people.

The Pentecostians were "Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5).

Those Who Are Unlike Us

The challenge is most difficult when we respond to the Lord's command to preach the gospel to those who differ from us culturally and ethnologically.

The gospel was preached to the Jews first, on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus, in Acts 2.

Later in Acts 8, the gospel was preached to the Samaritans. These were not full Jews, and were not outright Gentiles. They were one significant step removed from the Jews and toward the Gentiles.

In Acts 8:26-39 we have the record of the conversion of the nobleman from Ethiopia.

It is the judgment of some scholars that this record of the conversion of the Eunuch comes in the sacred history where it does because it deals with the next logical step.

Likely, the Eunuch was a "proselyte of the gate" thus, different to the proselytes of Acts 2, and a step beyond the Samaritans, but short of the full Gentile.

Then comes the conversion of "one of another nation" – Cornelius – the first "uncircumcised" person to come into the church of our Lord (Acts 10-11).

This gospel was to be preached in Jerusalem, in all Judaea, in Samaria, and "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Getting the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth would demand a preacher who was willing to "spend and be spent" in carrying the gospel message. He would have to be a very special person.

In God's plan this preacher was to be Saul of Tarsus. By the close of Acts 9, the preacher is ready. Saul has been converted to Christ and gives himself to the ministry of preaching.

Many problems in this connection had to be dealt with. The Jews had to be made to realize that the gospel of Christ was for both Jew and Gentile.

“5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. 6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. 7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us” (Acts 15:5-8).

The effect of the dissidents' position in this controversy at Jerusalem would have required the Gentile to first be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.

This would have the effect of compelling the Gentile to first become a Jew and then he could become a Christian.

This was firmly put down by the apostles of Christ with these words, “And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (v. 9).

Conclusion

Who is our neighbor? Who do you see? Whoever you meet or see today is your neighbor, and the Bible doesn't specify that only Christians are our neighbors.

Our neighbor is anyone that we can help. The divine obligation then is upon us to reach out to all men with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have three things to offer...our time, talent, and treasure. The best thing we can do for our neighbor is to love them, and the love of God should compel us to share Christ with them.

We need to let them know that God demands perfect righteousness to enter the kingdom, but God provides what He demands through Jesus Christ.

Do you know someone who is hurting in their soul? Try to help them with healing. Do you know someone who is hungry? Do what you can to feed them. Do you know someone who is outside of Christ and lost? Show them the saving message of salvation.

Remember, every human being in need is our neighbor. Do you love your neighbor as you love yourself? (Matthew 19:19).

Invitation

There is an ancient story about the time when Scottish chieftains wanted to raise an army to defend their homeland. They would set fire to a cross and carry it over the hills and through the valleys. The people, seeing the flaming cross, would then rally to the standard.

We present these words to you today, not with a flaming cross, but with a blood-soaked cross. Streaked with the blood of the innocent. Who will rally to this cross? Who will surrender to the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world?

He requires faith, repentance of sins, a confession of that faith, and baptism for the remission of sins. Won't you surrender to the Christ of that cross today?