

Real Christian Ministry

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[0 : 00] Eric, if you have your Bibles, turn to Luke chapter 10. Luke chapter 10. I want to thank Lawrence Crenshaw for filling in for Brian. Short notice like that when sickness came upon him.

And he's already learned the power of the methodical pause in the middle of reading Scripture that only ministers and video tech guys know.

Today I want to deal with a passage that talks about the greatest question that's ever been asked. It's asked a few times in Scripture. Once it is asked by Nicodemus who came to Jesus under the cover of darkness to find the answer.

The rich young ruler wanted to know the same thing. And then we see it again in our passage today. Although when it's asked today it's not a genuine question.

[1 : 01] It's not asked genuinely. It's like a set up question. It's like when they asked the preacher who was Cain's wife. You know. It's just to test them.

And they wanted to test Jesus. And they didn't really want to know what he had to say. They were just kind of needling him. So this was intended to be a set up question.

However, the way Jesus answered the question not only tested the listener. It tested all of us. He didn't set up Jesus.

Jesus kind of set us up to realize what it means to do real Christian ministry. Church, we do well to listen to Christ. Church, we do well to listen to Christ.

Even when he challenges us. Even when he shakes us up. Especially when he shakes us up. And this morning's passage does exactly that.

[1 : 58] It's found in Luke chapter 10. Luke chapter 10 verse 25. And it says, Jesus said to him, Correctly, do this and you will live.

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who's my neighbor? And Jesus replied, A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

And he fell among robbers. Who stripped him and beat him and departed. Leaving him half dead. Now, by chance, a priest was going down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But as Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, Take care of him.

[3 : 34] And whatever more you spend, I'll repay you when I come back. Which of these three, Jesus asked, do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?

And the man said, The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said, You go and do likewise. Now, you know that story, probably.

It's a very familiar story. As a matter of fact, if you were using the curriculum that we were using in Sunday school last week, you dealt with it last week, and you think the preacher ain't even done his homework. He's just doing the Sunday school lesson.

But I will tell you that the listener in the first audience, the one Jesus was talking to that day, heard this story with a little bit different light than we hear it.

And it always helps us to understand Scripture in the context that it's in. That's why it's important to read Scripture around the Scripture that you're looking at.

[4 : 43] But also to understand the cultural context of when he speaks this story, what it meant to them. It helps us through that filter to understand how it speaks to us even more.

And so when the listener in the first audience heard this, they came up with some conclusions right off the bat. One of them was the victim deserved it. He deserved it.

I mean, don't get me wrong. It's not right to attack and rob a man, but I mean, what was he doing there? Nobody with good sense travels the road to Jericho alone.

The road has a dark reputation. Josephus, a historian of that day, called it the bloody way. And if you go down from Jerusalem to Jericho, you really go down.

It is a 17-mile journey that drops rapidly from 2,800 feet above sea level to 1,300 feet below sea level, almost a mile in depth.

[5 : 48] It is a mountainous trek of rough terrain with 300-foot drops, limestone caves, massive boulders, all kinds of places for bandits to hide.

And they did. And that's why it was called the bloody way. In other words, it was a known danger. Now, I didn't do this last week.

Last week, I went to Mississippi and, praise God, got a contract on a house, on my house. Amen. Amen. Pray that it goes through and she gets a burden and gives a little more than she committed to.

But what if I told you instead that I took my family, after we watched some crime sitcom on TV, that I decided to take them to a notoriously dangerous place in a downtown major city in Atlanta, excuse me, in America.

I drove to Atlanta yesterday. Good example. But anyway, a major city in America to see the real crime scenes, just like we watch on TV. And when we went down in that dark alley at night, I got hit in the head and robbed, and I barely made it out alive.

[7 : 03] Now, I know you. You are a gracious people. You're kind. You've been gracious to us as we've come into a new congregation.

I'm telling you, Ralph Carter told me they're appreciative people, and he's right. And I appreciate that. You'd be nice to me. But when you went home, you'd have me for dinner.

The preacher has lost his mind. He deserved it. And his precious wife and his precious, how in the world could he?

The old boy deserved it. We ought to knock another knot upside his head. Because remember, we help those who help themselves. I mean, if you don't have any better sense than that, then just leave him by the side of the road.

That's what the first century audience would have said. Tell you another thing the first century audience would have said. They would have said the clergy did exactly what they were expected to do. Now, I know we look at them and go, sorry, old preachers.

[8 : 07] But the reality is they did exactly what was expected. Numbers 19:11 and Leviticus 21:1, tells us that if something is dead and is touched, you are made ceremonially unclean.

And Jericho was a town of 12,000 priests. And they were on their way to perform religious ceremonies. They better not stop and get their hands dirty in the matter.

And these men didn't. They made a point to go around him on the opposite side of the road because in case he died, and they got sidetracked, they were like, don't look, just keep walking. Because if they came in contact with dead, it would not allow them to be a part of that process. The ceremonies that they were going to. Now, they knew the law, and there's a lot of other passages that tell them to help, but that's not the ones that they chose at the time.

Sometimes we have a tendency to pick the ones we want to pick too. Therefore, they did exactly what was expected, and the first audience would have expected them to do just what they did. I'll tell you what else they would have expected.

[9 : 21] When they thought of this story, the first century audience would have said the Samaritan was not supposed to help anybody.

This guy needed help bad. He didn't only get robbed. He got beat. He got stripped. He got left for dead. Don't expect a Samaritan to help because Jews hated Samaritans.

They called them mixed dogs, and I'll tell you why they called them that. Because Samaria is the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, and when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom, they exiled 27,000, and they only left a remnant behind.

Assyrian captives from other places also settled there, and for those that remained, they intermarried with the Assyrians that came into that area.

So Jews with Gentiles, and then they adopted into a lot of the foreign gods that came into that melting pot of an atmosphere.

[10:33] And by the time the Jews returned to Jerusalem, they had a hatred toward the Samaritans. All of them, not just the guilty ones, because they all compromised, the whole people.

No longer were they pure. They were mixed. They had mixed with the world. Listen, racism is not a new thing, and it was very real there. Therefore, when Jesus used a Samaritan to do the right thing in the story, he hit a nerve.

It was a shocker. Samaritans don't do good things. It'd be like making a Jew a hero to an audience of Nazis, or making a member of the Taliban a hero.

We just don't want to hear that kind of thing. It's unheard of. It's controversial even to suggest it.

And John's Gospel tells us that the Jewish leaders thought that Jesus was a Samaritan with a demon after hearing this story.

What in the world's going on? And that's why this story challenged everything. It crossed social barriers. It was uncomfortable. It was challenging. And the truth is, when you get to the heart of it, it still is.

[11:44] But Jesus taught it that day for a reason, and through the power and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, it applies to us as well today to teach us. And it teaches us a few things.

One of them is that real ministry is not easy. Real ministry is not easy. This lawyer is really just trying to goad Jesus. He asked him a hard question and provoke him and get him to say the wrong thing.

Religious folks often do that kind of thing to Jesus. And it didn't work. Jesus saw it coming. He didn't get mad about it. He didn't get in a debate about it.

No, as my grandpa said, he killed him with kindness. He surprised him with his answer. The lawyer wanted a formula for religion. Tell me what I have to do.

Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? That's not Christianity, folks. You can't do anything to earn your salvation. Eternal life cannot be earned.

[12:50] Christianity is surrendering your have-tos to God. In other words, you don't have to attend church to be saved. But you will if it's real.

There will be a drawing there if it's real. You don't have to reach out to others if you're saved. But if Christ has touched your life, you're going to want to tell others about it.

You don't have to tithe your money to the church and be a Christian. But if you are a Christian and you realize how much God has done for you, you realize everything that you have has been entrusted to you and it's not yours anyway, it's God's.

So why not give him back the portion that he tells us to? You don't have to pray to be a Christian.

But the reality is, if you are a Christian, you will pray.

You don't have to care about others to be a Christian. But if you are a Christian, you will care about others. The reality is, real ministry is not just loving those who are our own.

[14:00] It's not just loving folks that are like me. It's not just loving those that we think deserve it.

Real ministry is when you sweat, when it stings, when you sacrifice, when it's tough.

Not only did the Samaritan reach out to this guy, but he reached out to one that should have known better. He reached out to one who was, he reached out to one and took a risk when he reached out to him.

I mean, this could have been a trap to bait somebody. There could have been fentanyl on that dollar bill. I mean, you know, I was going to touch it, you know. Leave him alone. By the way, me and Mama found a 20 at Dollar General the other day.

We took our chances, but anyway. Anyway. Those are the things that we would say today, and it ain't even affected, you know.

But that's no different than that day is what I'm saying. Remember, this is the bloody way. Notice as well, it was not just spot ministry.

[15:07] He didn't buy the meal of the guy behind him in the drive-thru. It was ongoing. He spotted a beaten stranger even after he was gone, and he supported him and took care of him.

Not endless support. Don't misunderstand me. Not endless support, but he helped him get up and get back on his feet, and you know what? I bet that was a pattern for the Samaritan, and the reason why is because the innkeeper trusted him.

And when folks are coming back to pay cash, you don't trust them unless they've come back before. It wasn't spot ministry.

It was ongoing ministry. Spot ministry. Let's be plain. Spot ministry is easy. Real ministry is not easy. It also teaches us this, that real Christianity is fruitful.

Real Christianity is fruitful. We like to talk about the gifts of the Spirit and what we're gifted at and those unique gifts and abilities that God has given us to enable us to do the work of the church, the gift of evangelism, the gift of proclaiming, the gift of teaching, the gift of faith, the gift of discernment, the gift of showing mercy, the gift of leadership.

[16:30] Man, if you give folks the opportunity to take a spiritual gifts test, which basically asks them what they think they're good at, they'll fill it up.

You know, they're multi-gifted. Just ask them. I mean, we like to know about that kind of stuff.

What's our gifts? But what about the fruit?

I mean, the fruit's what really matters. If you have the gifts but no fruit, you're unfit for the kingdom.

And what am I talking about? When I say fruit, it's Galatians 5, 22 and 23.

When the apostle Paul said, the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

You want to know what the Christian life's about? The fruit's where it's at, folks. If you want to live out your faith for the Lord Jesus Christ, the fruit's where it's at. And I promise you that if you pray over those matters in your life every day, the Holy Spirit of God will not only beat you up but he'll show you how to improve in those areas.

[17:37] Because that's where the growth is. Without fruit, you're not effective no matter what gifts you have. And if you have fruit without gifts, well, you don't. But even if you could, you'd still change lives because that kind of stuff gets people's attention.

It matters. Jesus teaches us it's not about what you got. It's about what you do with it. And so be fruitful.

He also teaches us this. Real Christians don't make excuses. Real Christians don't make excuses. The Samaritan didn't say, oh, no, I'm just a Samaritan. What are people going to think? I'm not even qualified to do that. He didn't say, he didn't say I didn't do it because I didn't know what to say.

How many times are Christians sidetracked from doing what God's burdened them to do? Because they don't know what to say.

[18:48] By the way, if you don't know what to say, don't say it. Just be there. People who try to defend the role of God in the midst of tragedy usually cause tragedy to be worse.

And your presence means more than your words. And if I walk in a heavy room and stand on the wall and say nothing, it's because I don't know what to say.

And if you don't know what to say, please don't say it. This Samaritan could have easily said, I don't have time for this.

He also did not look at the situation logically. Like the lawyer that asked the question would have expected somebody to look at something because that's what they look at is logic.

And logic does not always work. Let me tell you about this, oh boy. I heard of a man who decided to get married based on logic and scientific principles. He was 30 years old, logical age to consider getting married.

[20:01] And so he made a list of, in black ink, by the way, of, on quality paper, good paper, because he's logical and it's important.

And he made two columns. One column was why he should get married. The other column was why he shouldn't get married.

And when he wrote down those things, marriage outweighed not getting married. And so he got out another piece of good quality paper with his black ink and wrote down eligible, good quality young ladies.

And he got out index cards and he put their names on them and he listed reasons why he ought to marry each one. And he soon found one that he thought logically should be his wife.

And he asked her to marry him and she said, yes. And the marriage was a disaster because love don't wait on logic and logic does not lead to love.

[21:17] When the woman anointed the feet of Jesus, as I mentioned last week, it was not logical. It was love. The Samaritan did not act logically.

He acted lovingly. He acted when he had the opportunity to walk by the victim. He would have missed that opportunity.

The priest and the Levite asked, they responded logically. I mean, a dead body would have sidelined them for a week. The very thing that they were going to do, they would not be able to do if this fellow didn't make it.

And it's much easier to say, I don't have time for this. Because the reality is, we only have time for the things that are important to us. So the question is, what's important to us?

We've pledged our life to Christ. We've pledged our life to serve him.

[22 : 26] If today you're a professed Christian, so what's important to us? And you may say, well, to do such as this would be fanatical.

To put yourself out like this? Now look, preacher, I mean, you know, I love the Lord and the church and all that, but I'm not going to get fanatical about this thing.

So let me get this straight. Christ left the glories of heaven to be born on earth in a cattle stall. To face every temptation that we would ever face, what scripture says, and to endure all of it sinlessly, only to be opposed by the church of that day and endure the worst torture and the worst execution known to man studied by the Roman Empire to know exactly the best way to torture a man before you kill him.

so that you and I who fall to too many temptations will have the opportunity to have our many sins forgiven and go to heaven when we die, but he didn't mean for us to get fanatical about our faith, yet we're to follow his example.

Let the church sit on their tough, proclaim their way is right, and dare the world to join them. Or let's get outside the walls and make a difference for Christ.

[24 : 11] Because Jesus said, this is what it means to have eternal life. So how do we do that?

We follow the example of who, of what? a Samaritan.

I heard about a PGA golfer, don't know who it is, that won \$48,000 one weekend, rough weekend in PGA. He won \$48,000, and when he had the check in his hand, a lady came to him with a baby in her hands and said, my baby is deathly ill and needs surgery, and it is \$25,000, and I don't have the money.

And the man took the check, endorsed the back of it, and handed it to her. The next day, he got a call.

from an official with PGA and said, you've been fleeced. He said, what, is the baby all right?

[25 : 37] He said, yeah, the baby's all right. He said, the woman was messing with you. She took your money. You've been fleeced. He said, is the baby all right? He said, yeah, the baby's fine.

He said, good. That's all that matters. With every head bowed, and every eye closed, I think God leads us to do what really matters.

And I'll tell you what really matters is if you are here this morning and there's never been a time in your life when you've given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, I am thankful today that today is the day of salvation.

That Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and the offer that he makes to those that he comes in contact with in the first century is the same offer that he makes to you today. That if you'll come and say, Lord, I come as I am.

I know I'm a sinner. I know I've done wrong, and I ask you to forgive me, to cleanse me, to come into my life, and to change me, and from this day forward, I commit my life to follow you. If you've never done that, or you're willing to surrender your life to the Lord Jesus like that, we're going to stand in just a moment, and we're going to sing, and we're doing it for you, to give you the opportunity to come.

[27 : 08] If you come, I'll make sure someone talks to you about what it means to give your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you're here, and you have done that, but as you watch those people go through baptism waters today, you realize that you've never publicly professed that private faith in a way that is in obedience to the Lord, and as I tell many baptism candidates, the reality is that is a hindrance and a hurdle in your Christian walk.

Until you obey God in that first step of obedience that not only Christ showed us by example, but also impelled us to do, unless we do that, there's a hindrance there.

So maybe you want to come this morning and say, preacher, I have given my heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, but I've never been baptized as a believer, and today I want to come just the way

Christ showed us to come.

Maybe God's drawing you to be a part of this congregation. God's blessed us in recent days with many who have felt led to come and join us along this journey. We're not perfect, nor are you, and so man, we get along great.

So you come as God leads, and we'll happily guide you through that. You have questions about that and wonder about that, my phone number, I'm easy to contact.

[28 : 22] It's all over the bulletin. You let me know. I'd love to talk to you about that. And then I sit among a lot of priests, Levites, good old church folk.

We believe the right thing. We're sitting in the right place today. Seemingly doing the right thing. God says, are we doing what really matters?

Are we staking out our life to follow his will and his way in our heart and life? I don't know how God's leading you. I don't pretend to know that, but I know that you'll never be satisfied until you follow him. And so you come as God leads you.

Maybe you'll make a decision for the Lord where you are. Maybe you'll make a decision for the Lord privately at this altar praying. Maybe you want somebody to pray with you. I'm here. Just obey God. Let's not hinder the Holy Spirit by not doing what he tells us.

Lord Jesus, I love you. Thank you for the privilege and opportunity you give us today. Lead us right now, oh God, I pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 31] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.