

The title for today's message is: "**Just who is my neighbor?**"

The expert of the law said: **Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life.**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our scripture lesson takes place within the context of Jesus teaching the crowds that gathered to hear His words.

Now according to our text an expert in the law (a lawyer) questions Jesus regarding a fairly simple and plain teaching from Scripture.

He asks Jesus (maybe in order to test Him), "*What he should do in order to inherit eternal life*".

But Jesus turns the question around and asks the lawyer what he thinks, that is based on what Scripture says.

The lawyer answers Jesus, He said: "*You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind, and Love your neighbor as yourself.*"

Great! Jesus tells the Lawyer that he has understood the law correctly, yet the lesson Jesus was teaching doesn't end there, no!

Were told the Lawyer seeks further explanation from Jesus, probably to justify his own knowledge, and personal actions.

The Lawyer's question to Jesus is now; "*And who is my neighbor?*" Well, Jesus answers the lawyer's question as only the master teacher can.

Here Jesus uses a parable. He tells lawyer about a man who has fallen a fowl of some bandits and robbers.

And the people who travel by the lawyer and their reactions when they see him laying there in need of help.

Now Jesus tells us that the first person to walk by was a priest, a recognized religious leader. Yet he walked by on the other side of the lawyer ignoring him.

The next person to walk by was a Levite, a lay associate to the clergy. He likewise walked on the other side of the road ignoring the Lawyer.

And finally, the last person to walk by was a Samaritan, yet he didn't just walk past the lawyer. No, he stopped to help.

Remember now, the Jews viewed all Samaritan people as half-breeds at best. Half-breeds both physically, and spiritually.

Now its interesting that Jesus makes a significant point regarding the Samaritan, by commending the actions of the Samaritan.

He was the only one who shows compassion to the man in need of help. This good Samaritan alone displays mercy.

It seems that he is the only one in this story who truly understands who his neighbor is. And this man is put forth as an example for us all.

He is the person who recognizes the need of his fellow man and does all that he can to aid him.

Often we forget that our actions require re-actions. You will hear people raising

Let's take a look at the scene in the Garden of Eden, the home of our first parents Adam and Eve. They were given and shown God's love from the start.

They were given a perfect relationship with their Lord and Maker. And with this blessing they were also expected to return this love.

They were to love each other and love their Lord. Now the Fall into sin came as a result of them not loving the Lord above all else.

Instead, they loved themselves first and foremost. They sought their own individual gain.

Because of this idolatry, putting self before God, sin entered the world and destroyed the perfect harmony which God had created.

Adam and Eve separated themselves from God because they had desired to do their will, not God's will.

My friends, were as guilty as they were, we too often put ourselves and our own selfish desires before the Will of God.

Often we seek to serve ourselves rather than our Lord. We put our own interests before that of our God and our fellow man.

But you see, with the free gift of God's Grace, there also comes a duty, a responsibility.

With God's gift to us (of His mercy) comes a duty in the form of a divine command.

We are to love the Lord our God with all that we are, and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

With Christ's love entering into our hearts a number of things happen. Not only do we experience joy and peace in the recognition of our salvation.

But our hearts are now made able to express this mercy and compassion to our neighbor. As our eyes are now open to a whole new perspective.

We hear of other people suffering and our hearts are troubled. This is what happened to the Samaritan.

He saw the man lying there and he had compassion on him. Regardless of the cost to himself, he did what he could to help the man.

If you didn't know Christ's love for you, you would hear of suffering and pain and not recognize it as tragedy.

Since it wasn't happening to you, you might not care. Therefore leaving your heart cold.

But, with Christ in your heart, and with Christ ruling your life, you will experience this compassion; and you will be made aware of God's mercy.

You are told to do likewise to your neighbor. Now the greatest love ever, is when a man lay's down His life for His neighbor.

Now, while here on earth, Jesus recognized that every person on earth, was and is our neighbor.

And He loves all people with the same perfect love that His Father in heaven has for Him.

And Jesus expressed that love in His obedience to His Father's will, even unto death on a cross. Now, what does this mean for us here today?

What are we to learn from His sacrifice? Well, we learn not only did Christ die for us, but He won for us victory over death and damnation.

It means we are again able to have intimate fellowship with our Lord and Creator. We are not destined to die. That is not our fate.

We have been given life, here and in eternity. What we are to learn from this, is that Christ has reconciled us to our Father in heaven.

He has given us the perfect example of what real love and obedience is, as we live out our daily lives.

We are to love and serve God by actively seeking His will. His will is that we praise and honor only Him and that we care for our fellow man and deal with him in kindness and in mercy.

Our enemies have been destroyed, all who are left are to be our friends. We are to show them the same love that Christ does in that we are to lay down our lives for our friends.

This means sacrificing our selfish nature. Putting our self-centered fleshliness to death, and living according to the fruits of our faith.

We are to be kind, slow to anger, abounding in mercy, as our Father is to us. It's an important lesson; a lesson that teaches us. Just Who Is Our Neighbor.

Amen

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.