

## Luke 36 – The Good Samaritan

Throughout the ages, most of the people who have lived on the earth have believed in a supernatural being known as a god. It is only relatively recently that the belief that there is no god has infiltrated both the academic circles and the popular culture. Sometimes the reason that there is no god given by atheists is that there are so many different kinds of religions. In India there are Hindus; in China there are Buddhists; in the Arab-speaking world there is Islam and in other places there is paganism. Surely all of them can't be right, goes the argument, and this diversification of beliefs must mean that there is no god. But does that necessarily follow?

It is true that there are many beliefs in God, but this only means that mankind has a hard time grasping true facts about God. The variety of beliefs about God are not from the fact of many gods, but the different ideas that people have about who God is and what He wants. Every different religion has its own set of beliefs of what God expects from mankind and how to please Him. Muslims believe that in order to please God there are five things they must do, including pilgrimages and praying. Buddhists believe that kindness to all creatures will allow them to be re-absorbed into the essence of a great consciousness. But what does the Bible say about pleasing God?

The Bible presents different groups of people who had ideas about what God wanted, most of them not right. Ancient Israelites would worship God by serving idols, which is what it says in 2 Kings 17:33 says "They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence." In fact, the Bible says that those who worshipped the golden calf in Exodus 32 thought they were worshipping God Himself. In 2 Kings 5 we meet a man who worshipped pagan deities and came to know God as the true God. He thought that God would be pleased by taking bags of dirt from Israel back with him to Syria. The advent of Jesus didn't clear this question up for everyone, either. In Acts 15, we find some Christians who try to add burdens to other Christians by saying that God wanted all believers in Jesus to be circumcised as the Jews had done. This was refuted by a council of Christians who met, but it shows the differences among people about what is pleasing to God.

This question was bantered about in Jesus' day as well. While some had a lax view on what God wanted, others, such as the Pharisees, had a very high view of what God wanted. We will talk about this group of people later in this teaching, but for now I will say that they were people who took great pains to ensure that they were pleasing to God in everything they did, even to the point of making rules how one was to wash hands and how far to go on the Sabbath day. In the midst of this debate raging in Jesus' day, a man comes to Him and asks Him a question, which is found in Luke 10, if you will turn there with me this morning. Luke 10:25-28 says "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said unto him, 'What is written in the law? how readest thou?' 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.' And he said unto him, 'Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.'"

The Bible says that this man was a lawyer. When we think of lawyers, we think of people who defend or accuse people in court, but this is not the idea in this passage. Essentially a lawyer is someone who knows the law. In America, a person who knows the American judiciary law can help his side win the case, but in Bible times a lawyer knew the religious law, which also acted as the civil law. Hence, this man is the equivalent of pastor or scholar who knows the Bible well. More than that, a lawyer was someone who taught children the Law. He was in charge of the education of young people, whose education started as early as three years old. He was not a rabbi, but was someone who knew the Bible well. He stands and asks Jesus a peculiar question. He asks, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

When you or I talk about eternal life, we mean "How can I get to heaven someday?" Again, this question is answered by different churches. Some churches teach that in order to get to heaven, one must do certain works, such as being baptized, taking Communion, making confession, and having people pray for you once you are

dead. Others believe that you must be baptized as an infant and follow it up with religious classes in order to get to heaven. Still others teach that as long as you are a good person you can attain heaven. If I may, I will quickly say that as sincere and nice as these reasons are, they are totally against what the Bible says. God makes it quite clear in Scripture not only that no one can do any works to attain heaven and eternal life, but that there is no one who is good enough to get to heaven. Ephesians 2:8-9 says “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Romans 3:10-12 says “There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” The only way one can attain eternal life in heaven is by trusting that Jesus Christ took all of your sins upon Himself on the cross. We will talk more of this at the end of the broadcast.

But this man was not asking about how to attain heaven. Culturally speaking, he was using an idiom. He was asking how he should order his life in such a way that would be as close to the way that he would be living in heaven someday, assuming that he would make it there. The idea in Jesus’ day was that all Jewish people would make it to heaven, simply by virtue of being genetically Jewish. This is the idea that Jesus refuted in John 3 when Nicodemus came to Him. He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Nicodemus assumed that since he was a Jew, he would be in heaven, but Jesus said that only those born again could see the kingdom of God. This man, assuming that he would be in heaven someday, was wondering how he could live so that heaven would be a continuation of the life he lived now. How could he match the life those in heaven lived? He was not asking how to get to heaven.

Instead of Jesus telling him the answer to his question, Jesus the wise rabbi asked a question. He asked, “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” If my child asks me a question, I can tell him the answer and he is forced to accept it. However, if I ask him what he thinks and guides his answer, he is more willing to claim the answer for himself. Jesus asks the man what he thinks the answer is, but limits the pool of answers to those contained in the Scriptures. While there was agreement that the Bible was the ultimate source of answers, there were debates that raged about which ones were more important. It is true that sometimes the commands of God came into conflict. For instance, there were rules about helping the cattle of your neighbor if you saw them in distress. There were also laws about Sabbath. If, for example, you saw your neighbor’s cow in a ditch on the Sabbath, which one of these laws would you keep and which would you break? If you kept the law of helping, your exertion would break the law of working on the Sabbath. If you kept the law of Sabbath, you would break the law of helping your neighbor. It was for this reason that there was a debate about which laws were the most important.

Jesus asked this man how he read the Bible. What did he think, was the over-arching rule to help him discern what God wanted? How did he interpret things? The man answers quickly with the following: “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.” From all of the 613 commandments that were found in the Old Testament, this man chooses none of them. He skips the Ten Commandments and goes for the admonition in Deuteronomy 6, which says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” This is known as the *Shema*, and it was a foundational urging to love God with all of one’s being. The second thing this man says is to love one’s neighbor as he loves himself. This is the commandment found in Leviticus 19:18, which says “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.”

Jesus agrees with this man and says, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.” Jesus agreed with this man because He Himself had said this many times. He said in Matthew 22:37-40: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” These commandments, says Jesus, are foundational, and are

the sum of all the other commandments put together. Jesus' followers echoed this sentiment, saying in Romans 13:9 "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It also says in James 2:8: "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well." If every person on the face of the earth kept the two laws to love God and love his neighbor as he loves himself, there would be no need for laws. If I loved you like I love myself, I would not steal from you. If I loved God with everything I had, I would not lie, since that offends Him.

It is almost as if Jesus, having sufficiently brought this man to the right conclusion, turns from him and starts in another task. But this man is not done with Jesus. Verse 25 says that he was tempting Jesus, and trying to catch Him in a controversy, or something that would cause people to stop following Him. He is trying to expose some strange teaching in Jesus' doctrine, or yoke, and so asks a follow-up question. He did not trip him up with the idea of the most-important-commandment question, but he will try to snare Jesus with another question. The next verse, found in Luke 10:29 says: "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" He is not satisfied, and wants to justify himself. This means that he wants to clarify himself and distinguish his righteousness as being above Jesus'. His reasoning is as follows: "If I am to love my neighbour as myself, then please define for me who my neighbour is? Who must I love and who am I allowed to hate?"

We in America have endured centuries of discrimination against people groups simply for their "race," and it is only relatively recently that that awful stigma of racism has been largely erased. Men and women from all races are able to enjoy both freedoms and privileges any American citizen can enjoy. With such a culture, it is sometimes hard to remember that this is not the way most of the world has operated throughout the centuries, or even over the world. The problems in Darfur, Somalia, and Tibet are largely from the hatred one people group has for another. This has been largely normative, and it was back then as well. The Jewish people saw themselves as a privileged group of people, and so they were, because of the revelation that God had given them of His laws. Throughout the years, they had garnered hatred for various people groups, most of them Gentiles. This man was wondering who would be considered his neighbor, or someone to love.

Jesus, instead of answering him, tells a story followed by a question. He begins His story in verse 30, which says "And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." The road from Jerusalem north to Jericho was a seventeen mile descent from 2500 feet above sea level at Jerusalem to 800 feet below sea level in Jericho. It was a rocky and mountainous terrain, but one frequently traveled by those wishing to go to Jerusalem from Galilee. Its many mountains made it easy for robbers and thieves to hide and ambush those walking on the road, as is the case in the parable Jesus tells. Jesus says that these thieves first stripped him of his raiment. Clothing was not easy to obtain, and often became something desired by robbers. They also wounded him, either with their fists, or rocks and sticks. They then left him lying in the road to die.

Jesus calls him "half-dead," which was an important medical distinction. In the culture of the day, if it were clear that a person had been wounded but could recover, they were considered merely wounded, and could be treated medically. However, if it were clear that the person would not live long and were obviously dying, they were treated as a dead person. The term they gave to this person was *hoses* or half-dead and unclean. This means that the person was issuing blood and was considered unclean. Now, why does this matter? If you read the Old Testament, you will see that there are many laws about who is considered unclean. Leviticus 13 says that if someone has a suspicious rash, they are considered unclean. Leviticus 15 says that if there are any issues, or bodily fluids, coming from a person, they are considered unclean, to the point that anything that has been touched by that unclean issue is considered unclean as well. Those chapters go on to explain different bodily fluids in detail, something we do not need to do here, but suffice it to say that there was a heavy prohibition against any unclean fluid, including blood. This man beaten here was bleeding.

Why was this significant? When you touched a person who had an issue of blood, you yourself were considered unclean. Leviticus 22:6 says “The soul which hath touched any such shall be unclean until even, and shall not eat of the holy things, unless he wash his flesh with water.” This meant that you could not participate in any religious ceremony until the next day, if you were someone who touched something unclean. Thus, someone who was half-dead was by some considered not only unclean, but as good as dead. Since this was true in this culture, it meant that certain people were careful about whom they helped. Leviticus also had strict laws about who could defile themselves for a dead person. It says in Leviticus 21:1-2: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people: But for his kin, that is near unto him, that is, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother.” Priests were not allowed to defile themselves for anyone, with the exception of his mother, father, son, daughter, brother, unmarried sister, or presumably his wife. This was the literal meaning of the law and was meant to be obeyed.

However, later in that same passage it makes another prohibition. It says in Leviticus 21:10-12: “he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes; neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother; neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the LORD.” The high priest was not allowed to defile himself for anyone, not even his immediate family. This was the way that God expected His people and priests to live. But in Jesus’ day, there was a debate that raged about whether it was acceptable for a priest or high priest to defile himself for someone who was almost dead, or half-dead. Some said that in a case where a person was half-dead, the priest could not defile himself, especially if he wanted to obey the Law. The other group said that since we are all created in the image of God, we are obligated to help other people if there is any chance that the person may live, even if it means that they defile themselves.

The two groups of people who represented these beliefs were called the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees made up the priesthood, and they took the Bible literally. They would not have allowed themselves to be defiled by someone who was unclean or half-dead. The Sadducees were very liberal in their theology, but took the first five books of the Bible literally, and would not have defiled themselves for a half-dead man, considering him as good as dead. It is these people, the Sadducees, who make up the first two characters we read about in the next few verses here in Luke. Jesus says: “And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.” The first man is a priest, who was not only God’s representative on the earth, but God’s workers as well. They were responsible for killing and rendering the animals that came in on religious holidays. They were responsible for all the work around the Temple. Though the Bible does not say, this priest could have been on his way to Jerusalem for such a religious holiday, or his turn in the Temple. Either way, he does not help the man because of his convictions.

The other man is a Levite. The Israelites had twelve tribes, one of whom was the tribe of Levi. They were singled out by God in Numbers 3 to be His special people, taking care of the physical tasks around the temple and teaching His word around Israel. They were also people who could not defile themselves, and so we see this man as well look at the injured man, but decide not to help him. Please keep in mind that these two men are Jewish men who refuse to help a fellow Jewish man who is in need. They believe the Scriptures, but feel as though the Scriptures forbid them from helping him, lest they become defiled themselves. These are the Sadducees. The other group of people that the Bible talks about are the Pharisees.

The Pharisees sometimes get a bad reputation for being horrible people, but they were seen as very religious and pious people. They also took the Scriptures literally, but recognized that there were sometimes that the Scriptures needed to be superseded. They believed that in the case of someone who still alive was made in the image of God should be helped if their life is in danger. Preserving life was more important than obeying every little part of the Law, they felt, and they believed that God would be more pleased with someone who tried to

save someone's life. They believed that every people group, even pagans and Gentiles were in the image of God and so should be saved and helped. Not every group believed this. Scholars have found ancient writings that say this: "Give to the devout, but do not help the sinner. Do good to the humble, but do not give to the ungodly; hold back their bread, and do not give it to them... For the Most High hates sinners and will inflict punishment on the ungodly. Give to the one who is good, but do not help the sinner." This was the idea of the Sadducees, but the Pharisees believed in helping everyone, with one exception. Every people group except for one should be helped, and that group was a people called the Samaritans. They were not considered to be in the image of God.

The Samaritans were a group of people that lived between the southern and northern portions of Israel. In Old Testament times, the nation of Israel had been split into two halves, known as Judah and Israel. Judah was mostly a godly nation, but Israel turned pagan very quickly and in 722 BC, God sent the Assyrians into Israel and carried them away captive. Some Israelites were left behind in the land in an area that came to be known as Samaria, and these people started to inter-marry with the pagans around them. The result was not a pure, Israeli line, but a group of people who were seen as half-breeds. To most Jewish people of Jesus' day, these half-breed Samaritans were beyond saving and beyond love because they had broken the command to not marry within their own kind. They were hated and despised, to the point where they would be killed. The fact of this hatred is seen in John 8:48, where the Jews who were angry with Jesus said to Him: "Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil." These Samaritans were not to be helped.

Furthermore, Samaritans would not help the Jews. The first reason is that Samaritans hated the Jews as much as they were hated by them. In Luke 9 a village full of Samaritans refuse to lodge Jesus in their town both because he was going on to Jerusalem and because He was a Jew. The woman in John 4 acts surprised that Jesus, a Jewish man, would want to ask her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink. The second reason Samaritans would have refused to help a Jew is that they too, like the Sadducees, believed in only the first five books of the Bible, and that they should be taken literally. He believed that he should not defile himself with any dead or half-dead person, but this is exactly the man that Jesus parades into this story. He says in Luke 10:33-35 "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

Onto the scene comes a man hated by all of Jesus' hearers, and he turns out to be the hero. Going against his own culture and beliefs, this Samaritan tends to this beaten man's wounds. Notice that while the robbers departed from the man, the Samaritan came to him. While the robbers stripped him, the Samaritan bound his wounds in his own clothing. While the robbers wounded him, the Samaritan poured in oil and wine, which were a means of both healing and killing any harmful bacteria. While the robbers stopped him from continuing his journey, the Samaritan put him on his own animal and took him to an inn. While the robbers stole all of his money, the Samaritan used his own money to help tend to this man. The Bible says that the Samaritan had compassion on him and helped him. In doing so, it is obvious that he was forced to touch him over and over again, putting aside his convictions.

Furthermore, this Samaritan tends to this man all night, and in the morning gives specific instructions. He says to the innkeeper: "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." Not only does he take care of this man, but provides for his future care and promises to bring him back to health. He shows love to his Jewish man, despite their mutual hatred for one another. It is at this point that Jesus comes back to the lawyer and asks him a jaw-dropping question that relates to their previous discussion. Luke 10:36 says that Jesus asks the lawyer: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" Remember, Jesus is trying to draw the man into an inescapable conclusion that is entirely his, and so he asks him a question for which there is really only one answer. You see, this man has been contending that he doesn't know who his neighbour is. Jesus puts the question to him.

The belief of the day dictated that everyone was a neighbor except the Samaritans. Everyone deserved love except the Samaritans. Everyone was deserving of time, energy, and the removal of personal mores except for Samaritans. But Jesus asks the man wanting to know who his neighbour was: "Who was the neighbour?" Who, asks Jesus, are you going to call the neighbour? The man is stuck. He cannot say that the former two acted as neighbors, yet someone had. The only other option was the Samaritan. Yet if he admits that the Samaritan was a neighbor to a Jewish man, he must also admit that he had an obligation to love a Samaritan, whether he was bleeding or not. The man is caught, but cannot bring himself to answer Jesus directly. Luke 10:37 says: "And he said, He that shewed mercy on him." He cannot answer "The Samaritan." He says, "the one who showed mercy." Anyone who shows mercy is a neighbor, yes, but more specifically, the Samaritan is a neighbor.

Jesus ignores his coy answer and Luke 10:37 says "Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." Jesus says to the man: "With this knowledge, act accordingly." Not only is there an obligation to show mercy on others, but there is an obligation to love your enemies. Jesus said this in Matthew 5:44: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." God had said this in the Old Testament: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee." God wants us to love those who are undeserving of our love. He wants us to show compassion toward those to whom we are not naturally inclined to do good.

Why does God ask this, and how does this tie in to what we were talking about at the beginning of this broadcast? I will answer that in the remaining few minutes we have. God created us for His pleasure and to do His Will. Revelation 4:11 says of God: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." We find out what that will is in the Bible. But mankind sinned in the garden of Eden through selfishness, which is at the root of every sin. We wanted our own way, not God's way, which destroyed the relationship with God man once enjoyed. Now there is enmity and rebellion, and we are objects of God's wrath.

But God in His love made a way for us to be reconciled to Him. It is not through any actions that we can do, but through His Plan. He sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: "For he [God] hath made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Galatians 3:13 said "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." 1 Peter 3:18 says "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God..." Jesus died to take our punishment upon Himself, so that we could be both forgiven and seen righteous before God.

How do we access this gift? By faith, or believing the promise of God. Romans 10:9-10 says "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." If you this morning will place your faith in what Jesus Christ did alone for you on the cross, you can be saved. If you will admit to God that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness, God promises that forgiveness to you. This is the only way to be pleasing to God. Every person and every religion may have its ideas about what God wants, but the truth is that Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Will you trust Him today? If you have any questions about what we have said this morning, please don't hesitate to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

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