

Hearing and obeying the Word of God

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Date: 15 May 2011

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[0 : 00] Well, our reading this evening is also from the Gospel of Luke, after our helpful study this morning. We'll read this evening in Luke chapter 10, verse 25 to 42, which is found on page 869 of the Church Bibles.

Chapter 10, 25 to 42. And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

He said to him, What is written in the law? How do you read it? And he answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

And he said to him, You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

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.

[1 : 21] 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 a 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.

And the next day he took out two denarii, and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?

He, that is the lawyer, said, The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, You go and do likewise.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened and heard his teaching.

[2 : 31] But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, Lord, do you hear that my sister has left me to serve all alone?

Tell her then to help me. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. Amen. May God bless this reading to us. Well, one of Bob Fowle's favorite illustrations, and one of my favorite illustrations, is that of a drunk man on a horse.

I've never seen a drunk man on a horse, but Martin Luther used to use this illustration to describe how Christians can be unbalanced. They can fall to one side, get back on the horse, and then fall off to the other side.

We can swing between two equal and opposite extremes. And that's certainly true in terms of doctrine. It's very possible to grab hold of one particular doctrine at the expense of everything else, and to overemphasize that one particular doctrine.

[3 : 47] And that is indeed why many heresies have arisen within the church. But it's also possible to lay hold of one particular aspect of Christian practice, Christian discipleship, and to make that the key mark of being a believer.

And we can go to extremes in that way as well. That's why we have often this tension between a social gospel and the proclamation of the gospel. We can fall into one of either camps.

So, for a consistent, steady Christian life, we need balance. We need to be able to hold things in tension. And in Luke's gospel, Luke is especially concerned that we have balance in our understanding of Christian faith and practice.

In chapter 9, verse 51, Jesus begins a journey to Jerusalem. We read in 9, verse 51, When the day drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And after this turning point, Luke arranges topically for us Jesus' teaching. So he begins to teach about different subjects.

[5 : 04] He teaches about the importance of signs, the cost of discipleship, the role of prayer in the Christian life, the place of the law, and money. And then in chapter 13, Jesus begins to speak again of Jerusalem.

And he says, a prophet cannot die outside of Jerusalem. And then he continues on his journey. And he revisits each of these teaching topics, but this time in reverse order.

He talks again about discipleship, about prayer, about the place of the law, and again about money. Luke seems to be presenting for us, therefore, two sides of the same coin.

A little bit like, I suppose, 3D glasses. I went to the IMAX recently to watch Tron 3D. It wasn't a film about ourselves. It was actually about a man who gets sucked inside a computer game and his son comes to rescue him.

And I'm sure that's of interest to some of you, probably some of the younger males. But it was an interesting film, but it was in 3D. And what happens with 3D projection is you have two similar but distinct images.

[6 : 10] And they come together to create one composite 3D image. And what Luke seems to be doing in his gospel between chapter 9 and 19 is giving us two composite images of each of these subjects to help us develop a healthy, balanced view of Christian life and discipleship.

So this week and next week, I hope to look at two of these parallels. This week we'll look at chapter 10, where somebody comes up to Jesus, asks the question, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And there proceeds a discussion about the law. Next week we'll go forward to Luke 18, where somebody comes up to Jesus, asks the question, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And there is a discussion about the law. We hope to see how these two images complement and balance one another. Luke wants us to have a balance.

And these two stories, furthermore, complement each other. They represent two equal but distinct temptations in the Christian life.

[7 : 18] The first story, we have a lawyer, a man who knows the law very well. But in the course of his conversation with Jesus, it turns out he has problems applying it.

A certain man. That story is then followed by a certain woman named Martha. And we have this lady who is very keen to serve the Lord, to do things for him.

But who hasn't time in his life to listen to his word, to hear him speak. So Luke is presenting us with two dangers that face the Christian. That is, of spending so much time studying the word that we never get around to applying it.

Or spend so much time serving God that we never take time to listen to his voice. So I propose we look at that together this evening. And we'll begin in verse 25, looking at this man who knows but who doesn't do.

In verse 25, it gets off to a pretty ropey start. We have this man, a lawyer. And in Luke's Gospels, the lawyers are portrayed in a pretty negative light. They are the ones who refuse the baptism of John.

[8 : 28] They are the ones who conspire against Jesus. And he stands up to put him to the test. The same idea as the temptation of Jesus.

When the devil puts him to the test. This lawyer stands up to challenge Jesus. But he asks a very valid question in verse 25. Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus directs him to the law. Which he of course knows it's his job to teach it. And he says, how do you read the law?

And this lawyer says, verse 27. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind. And your neighbor as yourself. And that was in fact the teaching of the Old Testament.

So the Shema, the great declaration of Israel's faith in Deuteronomy 6, was precisely that. You shall love the Lord your God with everything you have. And in Leviticus 19, God taught the people of Israel not to take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of their own people.

[9 : 36] But you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. So this lawyer knew what he was talking about. He knew what Paul knew and what we studied last week in Romans 13.

That love is the fulfilling of the law. Love for God. And love for our neighbor. But his problem was the application of that. No problem with the theory.

But his problem lay in the practice. In 1976, two American researchers did a very interesting experiment. They took a group of 40 theological students and decided to experiment on them.

They took them in one building and they gave them a task. They actually gave them one of two tasks. And they said to them, we want you to go to this neighboring building and to perform the task we have given you to do.

And they then split the group into two. One group, they said, you've got plenty of time. Don't rush. Just make your way to the building. And the other group said, the class is about to begin.

[10 : 40] We'd really appreciate it if you got there as soon as possible. So they sent these two groups out. And what the experimenters had done was arrange for a man to lie on the pavement. I suppose it would be a sidewalk in America.

And pretend to be unconscious or injured in some way. And what was fascinating was the students who had plenty of time, more or less all of them stopped to offer some kind of help.

But the students who were pushed for time didn't. About half stopped, about another half continued, just walked straight past him. And what was fascinating about this experiment was half the students that walked past him, their task was to go to the next building and to give a talk on the meaning of the Good Samaritan.

It is perfectly possible to know the right thing to do and yet not to do it. This lawyer says, what shall I do?

And he explains what it is he has to do. And Jesus says, well, do it and you will live. But in verse 29, he tries to prove that that is what he is doing.

[11 : 49] Desiring to justify himself. To show himself to be righteous. To show himself to be one who fulfills the law. He asks Jesus this question, who is my neighbor?

And I suppose he thought, like a lot of the Jewish people of the first century, that their neighbor was their own countrymen, their own people, the special covenant people of God. And perhaps he expected Jesus to say, well, you know, if you love your wife and your family and the people in your streets and the people in your synagogue, that's fine.

So long as you don't harm anyone. But Jesus doesn't do that. And Jesus tells him a story to expose precisely that he is not, in fact, loving his neighbor.

And consequently, he is not in the right with God. So in verse 30, we have this story which is very familiar. It's a story which has given its name to all sorts of things.

We have the Samaritan phone line, which you can phone if you're in need of help. There is the Good Samaritan hospital in many countries throughout the land, Good Samaritan schools, Good Samaritan homeless centers, Good Samaritan convents, Good Samaritan pubs, even.

[13 : 00] It appeared in Google when I was Googling Good Samaritan. It is a word which has entered our cultural language. But I want to look at it briefly just to overcome the familiarity with it.

It's the story of a man, verse 30, who was traveling from Jerusalem, which was a very high city, to Jericho. Quite a long road, a steep road, a rocky road, and especially a dangerous road where there were robbers and thieves.

And this man fell among robbers. He was stripped. He was beaten. He was left half dead. It's a pretty bleak picture. But in verse 31, there's a bit of hope, isn't there?

By chance, a priest was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. The priests ministered in the temple in Jerusalem, and a lot of them lived in Jericho. So this chap has probably just finished his temple duty, going home for his dinner to be with his family.

And we might think, wonderful, here we are, the pillar of the establishment, someone who knows the law, coming to the aid of this man. But what does he do?

[14 : 09] He sees him, and he passes by on the other side. But there's still hope, verse 32. And we have a Levite, maybe not so senior as the priest, but still a leading figure in the religious establishment, still someone who knows the law, who understands the need to love your neighbor.

Well, he saw him, and he also passes by on the other side. And then in verse 33, we're told, but a Samaritan comes. Now, we in Glasgow have terrible problems with sectarianism.

Very obvious recently in the national news. But the sectarianism in Glasgow is nothing when compared with the sectarianism between the Israelites and the Samaritans of the first century.

Around that time, one of the writers in Israel wrote this. Not in scripture, I should say. There are two nations that my soul detests. The third is not a nation at all.

The inhabitants of Mount Seir and the Philistines and the stupid people living at Shechem. Well, the stupid people living at Shechem are the Samaritans. It is said that they were publicly cursed in the synagogue.

[15 : 23] And every day, the Jewish people prayed that the Samaritans might not inherit eternal life. Indeed, if you look at chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel, when the Samaritans reject Jesus, they do so because he's going to Jerusalem.

And how do his disciples respond? Chapter 9, verse 54. The relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans was not a happy one.

But how does the Samaritan behave? He journeyed. He came to where the injured man was. When he saw him, he had compassion. He goes to him.

He binds up his wounds. He pours on oil and wine. He takes him on his animal, delivers him to an inn, and pays for his ongoing care. He has compassion.

And verse 36, Jesus, presenting this picture to the lawyer, says, Which of these was a neighbor to the man? Was it the religious leaders who had the right pedigree, who knew what they were to do?

[16 : 33] Or was it the Samaritan who did? Who loved his neighbor and behaved as a neighbor toward him? And the lawyer understands.

Verse 37. He says, The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, You go and do likewise. You see, the lawyer had asked Jesus, What must I do?

And he told him what he had to do, But he didn't understand that he had to show compassion. And he had to show mercy. And he had to practice that. In order to demonstrate that he was fulfilling the law.

The lawyer knew what to do. But he didn't do it. Jesus says, You want to love your neighbor? Don't ask, Who is my neighbor? And try and restrict that. But ask, Who am I a neighbor to?

Who can I show compassion to? Who can I practice mercy on? It's quite a thing, isn't it? This man tries to justify himself. And yet Jesus shows just how empty that justification is.

[17 : 41] A man who knows the law perfectly. But yet who does not practice it. James says this in chapter 2. If you really fulfill the royal law according to scripture. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

You are doing well. But if you show partiality. You are committing sin. And are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law.

But fails in one point. Has become accountable for all of it. He knew the law. But he failed in one point. And consequently.

He became accountable for all of it. And the irony of this situation is that this lawyer. Is in fact the one in need of mercy. He cannot justify himself.

He cannot do what is necessary to inherit eternal life. Something else needs to be done for him to be saved. Now in the early church this parable was really rich pickings for those who loved allegory.

[18 : 40] Some of the early church fathers loved to see the parables really as pictures of something else. And they sought deeper, slightly mystical meanings in them. And they had a field day with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

And they said well Jerusalem represents the heavenly city. The man on the road is Adam. The thieves are the devil. And his demons who have beaten him up.

His cloak represents immortality. Which they have taken away. The Levite and the priest represent the Old Testament. Which cannot save. And the Samaritan represents Christ.

The inn is the church. The innkeeper is the apostle Paul. And so on. They saw this really as a picture of salvation. And I think that's really just going a little bit too far.

It might not be an allegory. But it's not impossible to see it as an analogy. This lawyer was concerned to do something. To inherit eternal life.

[19 : 38] To become an heir. He wanted to justify himself. And what was needed was not his own efforts. But in fact mercy. And Paul writing to Titus says this.

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared. He saved us. Not because of works done. By us in righteousness. But according to God's own mercy.

By the washing of regeneration. And renewal of the Holy Spirit. Whom he poured out on us richly. Through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that. Being justified by his grace.

We might become heirs. According to the hope. Of eternal life. The lawyer tried by his own efforts. His own knowledge of the law.

His own works of righteousness. To inherit eternal life. And to be justified. Jesus shows him how futile his efforts are. But Paul reminds us.

[20 : 39] That God desires we inherit eternal life. And that it is by his mercy we can be justified. Because of Christ. So let me ask you friend.

How do you approach God? Do you approach him with the attitude of this lawyer? Saying well I haven't done anything particularly wrong. I haven't hurt anyone. I've even loved my neighbor.

Or my immediate neighbors. As myself. Or do you come to him acknowledging. Like this lawyer. Ought to have acknowledged. Like James tells us.

That whoever falls on one part of the law. Is as if he'd broken it all. That we are sinners in need of mercy. In need of God's grace. In need of his justification.

Through faith in Christ. How do you approach God? But if you're a Christian. Of course this parable means. Something more.

[21 : 39] The lawyer certainly knew the law. He didn't keep it. But Jesus. Did the two things together. We saw this morning. The importance of proclamation. In Luke chapter 5. Jesus teaches.

He preaches. He evangelizes. He proclaims the gospel. But as Christ went about his ministry. He stopped to perform. Ministries of mercy as well. And as he approaches Jerusalem.

He himself draws near to Jericho. And there is by that roadside. A blind man. Who calls out to him. And says Jesus son of David. Have mercy. Upon me.

And Jesus calls that man to himself. And he says to him. What do you want me to do for you? And he gives him his sight. And says your faith. Has saved you.

Jesus is the one who knew the law of God. And who did it. Showing mercy. To those in need. So as his followers therefore. Ministries of mercy.

[22 : 39] Ought to accompany. Our proclamation of the gospel. They ought to be a fruit. Of our Christian lives. And I think this. Parable gives a very good template. Of some of the principles.

For ministries of mercy. The first thing to notice. Is that. We need to ask. When we meet a need. Is this a genuine need?

This man was lying by the roadside unconscious. It's pretty clear. That was a genuine need. But many of the people we meet. Might not be genuine. If you're on the building evangelism team. You'll know that some people come in here.

Maybe not with the best of intentions. Is this a genuine need? Secondly. We have to realize. That ministries of mercy. Are often occur at inconvenient times.

The priest and the Levite. Were going home from work. They were on their way. To their families. To their dinners. We used to joke in the health service. About the five o'clock bus. This was in the emergency departments.

[23 : 38] You'd sometimes finish at five. And usually three or four people. Would turn up at five minutes to five. And you'd end up staying until seven or eight o'clock. Often it can be inconvenient.

So we need to be generous with our time. We need to be flexible. Second thing is. We need to ask. Is there anyone else who can help? At this time.

There was nobody on the road. This man was alone. The unconscious man was alone. And we're very greatly served in Britain. That we do have a number of charitable organizations. And Christian groups.

Who provide service. And ministry. And all sorts of different ways. But sometimes. There isn't anyone who can help. And yesterday. We had this. Very blessed concert.

With a choir from America. Trying to raise awareness. Of issues facing asylum seekers. And we were given leaflets. From a man in Manchester. This is a chap. Who was becoming increasingly aware.

[24 : 33] That many asylum seekers. Had nowhere to stay. And in fact. There was no one. To whom they could turn. So he began to take people. Into his house. He arranged to rent. Other houses.

Which you could then share with. People in desperate need. He said. I had no money. No office. No resources. But a mandate from God. He saw the need.

And he sought to meet it. Ministries of mercy. Can be inconvenient. They can be time consuming. We need to know. If people are genuine. And we need to ask.

Is there any other support. And it's also expensive. Verse 34. This chap poured on oil. And wine. He takes him to an inn. He gives the innkeeper.

Some rent. And he says in verse. 35. 35. When I come back. I'll pay you the rest. He had to put his hand. In his pocket. To help this poor man.

[25 : 29] It can be costly. Emotionally. And materially. To help people. In need. But as Christians. Of course. There is another thing.

We can do. And we can seek. To change the situation. One preacher. Said this. On the one hand. We are called. To play the good Samaritan. On life's roadside.

But that will only be. An initial act. One day. We must come to see. That the whole Jericho road. Must be transformed. So that men and women. Will not be constantly. Beaten and robbed.

As they make their journey. On life's highway. True compassion. Is more than flinging. A coin to a beggar. It is not haphazard. And superficial. It comes to see.

That an edifice. Which produces beggars. Needs restructuring. What he was saying is. You need to minimize. The damage of the Jericho road. By preaching the gospel.

[26 : 24] So that thieves and robbers. Will no longer be thieves and robbers. Instead they will do something. Meaningful with their hands. Something that gives. Instead of takes. Ministries of mercy.

Must be balanced. With ministries of proclamation. Declaring God's mercy. In saving sinners. And reconciling them. To himself. In saving sinners. So Jesus requires.

Of his followers. Not just that we know. The truth. Not just that we know. To love our neighbor. But that we actually. Go. And do likewise. Not to earn salvation.

But as a result. Of having received. Our salvation. By his grace. Through faith. But that poses a question. Because there is.

So much need. All around us. One friend of mine. Described it. Like a black hole. No matter how much. You pour in. It can always take more. And as we walk around. Glasgow. We can see that. We see.

[27 : 22] People outside. Bookies. Chained. To a life. Of financial insecurity. We see people inside. Pub. Drinking themselves. To death. We see sick people. Old people. Unwell people.

People with. Chronic problems. And as a church. There is in fact. No shortage of things. We could be doing. And the danger. That Luke wants to warn us about.

Is the danger of. Over busyness. In the Christian life. Some years ago. In fact. Many years ago. Charles Spurgeon. The great London preacher.

And philanthropist. Hit something of a low. He was prone to. Bouts of depression. He was a very busy man. Of course. Preaching regularly. Writing books. Writing stories.

Sermons. Running an orphanage. Running a Bible college. But sometimes. He just felt. Really low. And on one occasion. He said. That he. Was impressed.

[28 : 15] With the idea. That he was only. A waiter. And not a guest. At the gospel feast. He was only there. To serve other people. And not to enjoy. Being a Christian.

And so. He went to a village. And he said. He was determined. Never to preach again. Until he sorted. The issue out. So he found himself. In a little Methodist chapel. And a local preacher. Began preaching.

And as he listened. To the sermon. Tears began to flow. And Spurgeon wrote. I was moved. To the deepest emotion. By every sentence. Of the sermon. I felt. All my difficulty. Removed.

For the gospel. I saw. It was very dear to me. And had a wonderful effect. On my heart. I went to the preacher. And said. Thank you very much. For the sermon. And the preacher.

Asked who he was. And Spurgeon told him. The preacher began to blush. And he said to him. Why? It was one of your own sermons. That I preached this morning. And Spurgeon said.

[29 : 11] Yes. I know it was. But that was the very message. I wanted to hear. Because I then saw. That I did enjoy. The very word. I myself preached. Spurgeon needed.

To be reminded. That he was a guest. And not just a waiter. At the gospel feast. Well Jesus. Enters a village. And he is welcomed.

Into the home of Martha. And Martha. Verse 40. Is distracted. With much serving. With much doing. And she wants the Lord. To rebuke Mary.

Who is sitting at his feet. Listening. And says. Don't you care. What a thing to say. To the Lord. Don't you care. That my sister. Has left me to serve. Alone. Tell her to help me.

And Jesus says to her. Martha. You are anxious. And troubled. About many things. But one thing. Is necessary. Mary has chosen. The good portion. Which will not be taken. Away from her. So busy serving.

[30 : 10] She didn't have time. To stop. And to sit. At the Lord's feet. And to listen. To his words. Well that is a perennial danger. Isn't it friends?

I'm always encouraged. To get the notice sheet. And I look at the activities. And pray for the activities. But we must always be asking ourselves. Are we so busy serving. That we have no time to sit.

At the Lord's feet. We have to look at our own lives. And say. Are we so busy serving. That we're likely to burn out. Instead of burning on.

For the Lord. Are we so busy doing things. That we have no time to listen. To his word. And what he has to say to us. About our lives. And about our families. And about our work.

It's interesting. As we've been reading through Romans. In the morning. Chapter 1 verse 1. Paul says. I am a slave of God. In chapter 8. He reminds us.

[31 : 06] The spirit of God. Causes him to cry out. Abba Father. The spirit of adoption. Not just a servant. But also a son. As Jesus was preparing.

To say farewell to his disciples. He said. I no longer call you servants. I call you my friends. We mustn't forget. The Christian life. Is not simply one of service.

But of friendship. And fellowship. With God our Father. And with Christ Jesus. His Son. Who loved us. And gave himself for us. Two equal.

And opposite dangers. It is possible. Especially in an evangelical church. To have the right answers. And to do nothing with them. But it's equally possible.

Isn't it? To never listen to God's word. To never take up our scripture. For ourself. To forsake the fellowship. Of the saints. And to just go the way. Of all the world.

[32 : 05] Luke desires. That we walk straight. That we be balanced. In our discipleship. And he gives us these passages. To encourage. But also to warn. Let's pray together.

Father. Father. Amen. Amen. Father. We thank you so much. That it is by your grace. We are saved.

Because of your great mercy. Lord. We can inherit eternal life. Not because of anything we've done. But all because of your Son. And who he is. And what he has done for us. So we ask Lord.

This week. That we will not be slow. In hearing and obeying his words. That we might seek to love you. And to love our neighbors as ourselves. And might be very sensitive. To those needs around us.

Which we are able to meet. With our time. With our resources. With the gifts you have given to us. But Lord. We pray that we might also have time to retire. To be with you.

[33 : 03] To sit at your feet. To listen to your voice. And to hear your words. Speaking into our lives. We thank you that you care so much for us. That you want us to be mature.

To be balanced. And to be fruitful for you. And so we ask this week. That you will help each of us. To encourage one another. And to pray for one another. To that end. And we ask this in Jesus name.

Amen.