

A Path of Privilege and Rejoicing

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn to our Bible reading now. We're back in Luke's Gospel at chapter 10. If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, that's page 868.

Page 868. And we're going to take up our readings in our continuing study here.

And we're in the first section of the second half or the second portion of Luke's Gospel, which begins at chapter 9, verse 51, the big turning point, when after nearly nine whole chapters of the revelation of the Savior's glory from heaven, Christ revealing himself in word and deed as the promised Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus turns his face to his task.

He turns his face towards Jerusalem and the road to glory. And all the way now on that road, he's teaching his disciples, his followers, what it means for Christ to return to glory on a road that leads only through Jerusalem, only through the cross, only through the path of suffering.

And he's teaching everyone who will follow him what that road will be like, not only for him, but also for them. And we saw last time in the first part down to chapter 10, verse 16, that Jesus speaks very frankly about the pain and about the rejection that there will be for followers of Jesus in this world.

[1 : 34] But that's not the whole story. There's also much privilege and there's also much joy. And that's what he turns to here in chapter 10, verse 17. The 72, that is the followers that he had sent out to go and proclaim the gospel and word and deed, the 72 returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.

And he said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions that is over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In that same hour, he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit.

And he said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

[2 : 54] Then turning to the disciples, he said privately, Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see and did not see it, and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.

And behold, a lawyer stood up and put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, What's written in the law, in the Bible? How do you read it?

And he answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself. And he said to him, You've 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.

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.

[4 : 12] But a Samaritan, a hated foreigner to the Jews, 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, 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 said, The one who showed him mercy.

And Jesus said to him, You go and do likewise. Amen. May God bless to us this his word.

Well, let's turn to Luke's Gospel at chapter 10, page 868 in the Church Bibles.

[5 : 23] Can everyone hear at the back? It doesn't sound too loud to me. Are you hearing all right? Yes, you are. Okay. One of the characteristic features of the teaching of our Lord Jesus is that so often at the same time, it is both incredibly challenging and extraordinarily comforting.

And that's certainly evident here in Luke chapters 9 and 10, as Jesus begins to teach his followers about the only true path to the coming glory in his heavenly kingdom. From that great turning point we mentioned in Luke 9, 51, Jesus is now on the road to glory, to being taken up, as Luke puts it there.

And that's the goal of his journey. In the very last paragraph of Luke's Gospel, has us seeing Jesus carried up into heaven and into the glory after he's been raised triumphant from the dead.

But here, he teaches quite plainly that to travel that road to glory, he must set his face towards Jerusalem and the cross.

And also, he is teaching that everyone who follows him must walk with him that same road of pain and suffering. And we saw last time that he is clear that that path is one of pain and rejection in this world, both for Jesus and all who follow him.

[6 : 46] There will be real hostility for Christ's followers in this world, often for all sorts of wrong reasons, often for all sorts of unjustified reasons, just as the Samaritan times people were hostile to Jesus and his disciples then.

And nothing has changed in the 21st century, has it? There was an article in the Telegraph newspaper this week headed this, the Middle East is red with the blood of Christians.

And those 21 cops who were beheaded by ISIL last week are just the tip of the iceberg of those who are being murdered all over the world today because they are perceived to be Christian people.

But so Jesus warns his followers of that right from the very start. There will be hostility in this world on his account. And there will be homelessness. We saw that too.

The Son of Man is homeless on this earth and so will his people be. We'll feel homeless as Christians because it's true. We are homeless. This world is not our home.

[7 : 51] And so we'll be misunderstood and we will feel isolated and alienated always until we reach our true home. But not only that, because we are called also to be heralds of the gospel in this world, as the first part of chapter 10 was all about.

We're sent out as a sheep among wolves. We're sent out at the master's command into his harvest field. And we are to gather his certain harvest for glory.

And so despite the hostility and the homelessness, despite the pain and the rejection, there will also be privilege. And there will also be great rejoicing for us now in this world.

There will be rejoicing for all of Christ's followers, not only in the world to come, but also in this age of opportunity. And that's the great comfort that Jesus immediately goes on to teach his followers here from verse 17 of chapter 10 onwards.

Because even amid the rejection and pain, he's telling us that we can rejoice in the great privilege that we know that we are redeemed with great certainty in Christ.

[9 : 02] And that God is revealed to us with great and abundant clarity in Christ. And that we also have the privilege of reflecting in this world, the great compassion of Christ, as we also follow him to glory.

Let's look at what Luke has recorded here and what Jesus wants us to know about the rejoicing and the privilege that there is for all who truly follow him in his way. First of all, verses 17 to 20 tell us that we rejoice in a redemption of great certainty.

Verse 20, Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. We have the privilege, says Jesus, of knowing in this world that our redemption from God has great certainty in Jesus Christ.

In verse 17, we're told that the 72 return with great joy because they'd witnessed the defeat of evil in Jesus' name. And Luke wants us to see the real joy that is in that.

Joy in the power of Christ's kingdom over evil and the evil one. And the disciples here have been experiencing a foretaste of the result of Christ's death and resurrection and the great triumph that that was over all the powers of darkness.

[10 : 18] And Jesus is explicit himself about that in verse 18. Do you see? I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning. It's a prophetic foreshadowing of what his work was going to accomplish.

Later on in chapter 11, verse 20, again, Jesus says that the coming of his kingdom means the casting out of the devil decisively and forever.

John 12, do you remember? Just as Jesus is about to go to the cross, he cries out, Now will the ruler of this world be cast out, the devil? Paul says to us in Colossians 2, verse 14, that that is what the cross accomplished.

He disarmed rulers and authorities, triumphing over them in his cross. We saw the very same thing last week in Ephesians chapter 1, didn't we?

That Christ is exalted above every power and dominion in the spiritual realm. The apostle Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter chapter 3. angels and authorities and powers are subject to him, the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 28] So the Bible is very consistent about that. Of course, that doesn't mean that all the battles are already over for Christ's people.

Again, we saw last week Ephesians is equally plain about that. It goes on, doesn't it, to talk about how we will battle still. And we must take our stand against such powers that hold sway, as Paul says, in this present darkness.

All our struggles will not be over until Christ's whole plan and purpose is brought to absolute completion, when he comes again to reign upon this earth. But the outcome is inevitable.

And it's clear. That's why Paul says in Romans 16, verse 20, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. It's certain.

That's what John saw in his vision in Revelation on Patmos, isn't it? That the day is coming when the devil, when the great deceiver, will be cast down into the lake of fire and sulfur forever, never to emerge.

[12 : 34] See the vision in Revelation chapter 20. But already he had seen earlier on in Revelation chapter 12, that in the triumph of Christ's work on earth, that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, he says, is thrown down to earth.

And all his angels with him, all the demons with him. So the decisive blow against evil has been felled in the coming of our Savior into the world.

And in what he is going to accomplish on his road to Jerusalem and through the cross to glory. And that's what Jesus is expressing here. He's saying, I saw it. I saw Satan falling, cast out of the heavenlies at the imminent coming of the Son of Man.

And in verse 19, he is therefore being real when he says to his disciples, you shall, as Charles Wesley put it, tread the tempter down. God will crush Satan under the feet of his people as they proclaim his gospel of grace.

We will trample over every power and manifestation of the enemy, every symbol of evil, serpents, scorpions. He means every evil power will be crushed under your feet.

[13 : 53] I hope it's obvious Jesus isn't commanding us here to become snake handling cranks. Of course not. Look at verse 19. These are just ways of describing, aren't they, very graphically.

All the powers of the enemy is what he says. His point is that nothing shall hurt his people. Now again, it's plain and obvious just from the context here that it's in the ultimate sense that Jesus is speaking here just as Paul speaks in Romans 8.

Nothing in all creation, not even angels or rulers or powers or death or life or persecution or famine, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ultimately, Jesus here plainly isn't meaning that his followers will never be hurt in this world because he just warned us that we will face hostility. We will face homelessness.

We will face rejection. We will be despised as he was. But he does mean that Satan's end is assured and that not even he or any of his minions will ever be able to keep his loved ones away from their destiny, which is to share in his glorious kingdom.

[15 : 12] And so we can rejoice in the power of Christ's kingdom over all evil. Yes, the battle will rage strongly still here on earth. John tells us that, doesn't he, in his vision in Revelation 12.

The devil is cast down and he's furious and he goes off to wage war against all the offspring of Christ, all Christ's people. But he also says immediately, but they have overcome him, they conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, by the work of Christ's salvation on the cross and through the proclamation of that glorious gospel in the world.

And his end is in no doubt, it is certain. Now isn't that a cause for joy as we walk along the road of many battles in the path to glory?

To know for sure the power of Christ's kingdom over evil. that our enemy will hold us no more. That the end of evil, all evil in this world, in our lives and in this world, that that end is surely coming.

And that all pain and all suffering and all wrongdoing, that it will come to an end. There is no doubt. I saw Satan fall.

[16 : 40] I have given you authority. Nothing shall hurt you. All that we do struggle with, all the things that do hurt us now in our own sins, in our own temptations, the propensity to evil that's in every one of our own hearts that we know of only too acutely, that it will not overcome us and keep us from reaching His glory.

And that a time is coming when all our self-hurt will be gone forever. That all our greatest struggles will be over.

Satan's greatest weapons that he uses against you in your life, and you know what they are, they will be banished. They will be utterly disarmed.

Isn't that a joyful thought to cling on to in the midst of our fiercest temptations? Or perhaps in the aftermath of our greatest failures?

Won't be forever. That's the great joy of Christ's power and the power of His kingdom over evil. Ultimately, and also, of course, as we too see that power at work in this world today in our proclamation of the gospel.

[18 : 07] As we see Satan's power over men and women being broken and their lives being changed and faith rising up in their heart and love to the Lord Jesus Christ and leaving behind the life that they had before.

Finding liberation from the bondage that they were once in. there's joy in the power of Christ's kingdom over evil.

But there's even greater joy according to Jesus in verse 20 in our place in Christ's kingdom. Don't rejoice that the spirits are subject to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

The greatest joy is not just that we experience the authority of heaven but that we have the assurance of heaven even now here in this dark world. Our salvation is not just about what we're saved from from Satan's realm but it's what we're saved for in the Savior's realm.

And there's joy of course in serving Jesus here on earth and serving the work of his kingdom now but the greatest joy still awaits us. The joy of serving him truly and forever without sin in his eternal kingdom forever.

[19 : 26] When I was a boy in short trousers when Billy was starting work here we used to sing a song in Sunday school I've got a home in glory land that outshines the sun.

And it's that assurance that Jesus is speaking of here that gives us the strength to walk the path now with Jesus. And especially when the road is rough and steep and we don't seem to be seeing the power of Christ at work as we want it to and when our gospel and our life seems so weak and when we really do feel like we're just like sheep out amongst wolves our place in his kingdom is secure.

It won't all be hostile resistance. The Lord's kind and his people will see and will share in the power of his kingdom at work in this world and there will be real fruit and we will see Satan fleeing many times in the march of the gospel of Christ.

But even greater than seeing and knowing and sharing in that power is to know that we share a place in that eternal kingdom. That if you love the Lord Jesus Christ if you've given your life to him into his keeping nothing shall hurt you.

That's his decisive word. You can rejoice because your name is written in heaven. We have a redemption with great certainty.

[21 : 07] What a privilege to know that despite knowing everything about ourselves and our own lives and our own hearts. What a joy even in this world.

But Jesus goes on doesn't he in the next verses 21 to 24 to speak of another great privilege. He says that we rejoice in a revelation of great clarity.

Verse 23 Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. We have the privilege of knowing in this world that our revelation of God has great and it has ultimate clarity in Jesus Christ.

And the Lord Jesus seems to find particular joy when his people ordinary people not people of great wisdom and learning in the world's eyes but ordinary people when they know him and share him with others share their personal knowledge of him so that others come to see and to share in the joy of Jesus.

Verse 21 says it's in that very hour when he hears all about the disciples fruitful mission of sharing the good news in that very hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and he praised his father in heaven for what he was doing through his ordinary followers as they proclaimed the gospel.

[22 : 29] By the way don't miss that we were singing about that earlier that Christ's people can bring real joy to their Lord. Some Christians are so twisted in their thinking aren't they?

They say things that well because we're absolute sinners we can't do anything ever that pleases God. Well of course we are by nature on our own nothing but sinners.

Nothing in and of ourselves can be pleasing to God. But by grace we've been transformed and we're now his workmanship as Paul says to the Ephesians we are created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should do.

God has transformed us so that we can bring joy and gladness to his heart by the things we do. And that's what's happening here and that's why Jesus is rejoicing in his people. He's full of joy at what his own followers are doing.

Joining in the work of making the Father in heaven known to this world. And our God finds joy in the glad service of his saints when we do that. And by the way that's what the New Testament calls Christians isn't it?

[23 : 45] Not sinners. Sinners is what we once were. But all the way through the New Testament Christian believers are addressed not as sinners. What? As saints. We're in Christ.

We're servants of God. We're those who live to please God and to rejoice his heart. And that's what rejoices Jesus' heart. Here do you see verse 21? He rejoices that what is hidden from the wise and those of understanding.

Those who this world considers to have the answers, to be the last word on everything that really matters. But what is hidden from these wise people has been revealed, Jesus says, to little children, to ordinary people who have found Jesus and trusted him and found in him the real key to everything that matters in life.

you see, this world's wisdom just makes Jesus an outcast and a stranger. The son of man has nowhere to lay his head in this world, says Jesus. When the great and the good of this world were all in Davos the other week to discuss how to save the world, how to save the ozone layer, how to stop global warming as they arrived in their gas guzzlers in their private jets, by the way.

Was Jesus Christ and his gospel on the agenda? I very much doubt if the name of Jesus was ever mentioned that all weekend except as a swear word. Jesus is an irrelevance to those wise and understanding of our world.

[25 : 16] They are utterly blind to him, but, says Jesus to his father, verse 21, you see, you are Lord of heaven and earth, and only you therefore have the key to all knowledge and all life and all that matters in time and space and history and eternity.

And they can't see it. Because in their pride they won't see it. And so you've hidden it from them. But this is the marvel.

In your gracious will, he says, it has pleased you to reveal it all to the humblest and most insignificant ones here on this earth. To little children.

Well, quite literally often, yes, indeed. So often, isn't it? It's the simplicity of the prayers of little children that reveal so much truth about how to trust in a sovereign heavenly father.

But also, of course, he means it metaphorically. Because real knowledge of God, which is so rare, often among the theological heavyweights, can be so great and real in the lives of ordinary people, people of real faith who know and who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 38] Because true knowledge of God comes not from the searchings of a powerful intellect. It comes through the submission to the personal revelation that we have been given in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have in the gospel of Christ a revelation, indeed the revelation, revelation of great clarity and great completeness of our Father in heaven.

It's amazing, isn't it, when you think about it, that the Lord of heaven and earth, the mind that knows everything, can reveal himself exactly as he wants to, to whoever he wants to, even the humblest, least intellectually able and least sophisticated human being, so that they can know him truly and hear him and respond to him and know more about him than some of the brainiest people on this whole planet.

Isn't that extraordinary? Some people are so intelligent, so clever, they know so much, and yet they're totally incapable of actually explaining anything to anybody else unless it's some other boffin who speaks the same sort of elitist language that they do.

Our universities are full of people like that. God, but not God, God can and does reveal himself even to the most ordinary and humble so that everyone who will be a humble recipient of his revelation, everyone can know him and can share in his joy.

[28 : 15] And it's the joy of our God, joy of the Father and the Son together to be revealing himself in that way. That's what verse 22 is about. The Father has given this task to the Son and he is constantly revealing the Father to those to whom he chooses to reveal them.

And alas, so often it's not the wise and powerful in the world's eyes. Not many of you, said Paul to the Corinthians, were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Although, of course, thank God not all such wise and of noble birth are passed over.

That was the joy of Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon, wasn't it, who so supported the ministry and mission of the Wesley. She said, I was saved by an M. Because Paul says, not many of noble birth, not any of noble birth.

But what rejoices the heart of Jesus here is his followers, ordinary people, just children in the world's eyes. Nobody's.

[29 : 27] And yet, here they are in Jesus, having a revelation of great clarity of God and who he really is. And so, in turn, being able to reveal him to others so that they will come to know him.

And that is the joy of Jesus. That is the joy of the whole of heaven, as we'll see later in Luke 15. That's what makes the angels rejoice. Nowhere in my Bible does it tell me that there is rejoicing in heaven and among the angels in heaven every time somebody graduates with another theological degree.

Nowhere. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against them. I've got one myself. I found it in the back of my filing cabinet, actually, the other day. I've been there for about 15 years, gathering dust.

But those things are not the things that bring rejoicing in heaven. Yet, when every one ordinary sinner repents and has their eyes and their heart open to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, then the whole of heaven erupts in joy.

And so you see verse 23, there's no greater blessing than to see with eyes opened by Jesus and to hear through the gospel of his kingdom that which is more valuable than all the wisdom of this world combined.

[30 : 46] and so to be able to share with others, with those that we know and love, to share with them the only revelation of real clarity of the Lord of heaven and earth, of the living God, the one who is able to write names in the book of life and give assurance of a place in his heavenly kingdom.

don't miss the challenge by the way. This is a claim of absolute exclusiveness, isn't it? Jesus is clear in verse 22, look at it, all authority has been given by the Father to the Son in this matter of revelation.

He chooses to whom he reveals the Father. In other words, you cannot know the God who is Lord of heaven and earth without knowing him through Jesus Christ, the Son.

There's absolutely no question of all religious roads leading ultimately to the same God. No one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal them.

Absolute exclusivity. And that means that any so-called God who is not known through Jesus Christ is no God at all. He's anti-God.

[32 : 14] Ultimately, he is a satanic deception. That might be a real challenge to some. But it is also, isn't it, a very great comfort to those of us who follow Jesus.

Because we cannot know Jesus without therefore knowing the Father absolutely clearly and truly. We can have and we do have absolute clarity in our revelation about who God is and what he is really, really like.

We don't need to fear ever that there's some dark side to God, some unknown side to God that one day we will discover and will surprise us and fill us with horror. That he'll turn out somehow to be terrible, that he'll be different from all that we'd hoped he would be.

Now you see, Jesus is telling us if there's nothing un-God-like about Jesus, he reveals the Father absolutely exclusively, but also that means that there is nothing un-Jesus-like about God.

He reveals the Father clearly and truly and ultimately to us. And what a great comfort that is, is it not? To know that the Jesus that we know shows us the heart of the Father, the Jesus we know from the scriptures tells us truly and ultimately about the Lord of heaven and earth.

[33 : 41] What a privilege we have. How blessed we are, says Jesus in verse 23, that even amid the pain and rejection of this world as disciples, we have what prophets and kings longed for.

We have the privilege of knowing even now in this world that our knowledge of the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, has a great and complete clarity through Jesus Christ.

And what confidence we can therefore have in sharing that message, in certainty, in such a world of confusion that we have the ultimate revelation, the ultimate key, the ultimate answer to every issue in this world of humanity.

I wonder if you sometimes feel a bit inferior, a bit inadequate as a Christian among all the brain boxes, all the smart people who seem to think that they've got the world all perfectly sussed out and explained. Do you feel that sometimes?

Well, don't feel like that. If you know Jesus, you are in a league of knowledge that leaves Nobel laureates floundering in the dark. That's the truth.

[34 : 53] And you have something that can be shared with anyone, even the smallest child, even the simplest, smallest, most insignificant feeling person in this world.

What a blessing to see what we see in the gospel of Jesus. But of course, such a great privilege comes always with great responsibility.

We have a revelation with great clarity of the heart of the true Lord of heaven and earth, the gracious heavenly Father who is full of compassion and mercy and who reveals himself to the lowly, to the humble, to the undeserving.

Now here, this is just the second time in Luke's gospel that Jesus speaks about his father. The last time was in Luke chapter 6 in the Sermon on the Plain where he commands his followers, remember, to love their enemies and to lend, seeking nothing in return.

And he says, you will be sons of the Most High for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful even as your heavenly father is merciful.

[36 : 05] We have the privilege of knowing that this God is the true God of earth and heaven. And so we are called in knowing him to join in, making him known to others, and in doing so, to reflect the great compassion and mercy of our father among the people of this world.

And that privilege is what verses 25 to 37 are all about. We are to rejoice, says Jesus, in being a reflection of that great compassion.

We have the responsibility of showing to this world and in this world a reflection of God's great compassion revealed in Christ. After telling this story about the compassion and mercy shown by the traveling Samaritan to his wounded enemy, Jesus looks his questioner in the eye, doesn't he?

And he says, go and you do likewise. You see, the litmus test of whether we really do know the father through Jesus is whether we truly love like the father through Jesus.

Are we true sons of the father? Or is it, as Jesus said back in Luke 6, 46, do you call me Lord but not do what I tell you?

[37 : 29] Well, according to Jesus, that is what shows whether repentance and faith is really real. It's not just hearing his word, it's doing it. He said it's the fruit on the tree that tells us what the heart of the tree is really like.

And so it's the love and the compassion and mercy on the outside that shows whether our hearts are really touched and changed by the spirit of the father's merciful grace.

And when we see this parable in context like this, it helps us, I think, not to get confused. Some people do get confused with it. They think it's all about salvation by works or something like that.

That's not the point at all. The Laura's question isn't in fact based on a wrong premise. As though asking what you do to inherit eternal life was somehow wrong.

Jesus doesn't think so. Jesus answers him plainly and he tells him what he must do in verse 28. Do this and you will live, says Jesus. He says to the man, what does the Bible say?

[38 : 32] The man answers rightly according to Jesus in verse 27. The Bible tells us to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and to show that in your love for your neighbor.

Well, quite right, says Jesus. That's it. Do that and you will live. Not complicated. It's simple. But it's not easy. Hence the man's follow-up questions.

He wants to justify his question. Sure, it wasn't a stupid question. It's a real one. What does that look like in practice? He's saying, who is my neighbor? In other words, how far do we have to go?

Now, that's not an unreasonable question to ask. Now, this man may have had mixed motives. He was trying to test Jesus. He may have had a bad motive in that. But the question does raise a very real issue.

Are we to give to every single beggar that we see? Are we to go on giving to such an extent that we ourselves become beggars ourselves? Are we to feel personally responsible for every starving person this whole world over?

[39 : 41] We can go on and on, can't we, asking questions like that? But you see, Jesus, in answering this, man, turns the whole question around and focuses on the question not of who is my neighbor, but what does it mean for me to be a true neighbor?

That's his question in verse 36, isn't it? Which of these proved to be a neighbor? And that's the heart of the issue. And it's the same thing that Jesus is always going back to.

Who are his real followers? Chapter 6, verse 47. Whose faith is sure on a foundation that will last? Well, it's those who hear the words and do them.

Not just hearers only. Who are his true family? Chapter 8, verse 21. Those who hear the word of God and do it. And he's just said in chapter 9, verse 23, that the disciples who are actually his are those who actually take up their cross and follow him in doing it.

And so here, having spoken repeatedly of those to whom he has clearly and truly revealed the Father, he teaches that those who really belong to the Father and share the heart of the Father will inevitably show the compassion and mercy of the Father as a matter of course, whatever circumstances they find themselves in.

[41 : 01] And with whomsoever they come across in their lives. And Jesus shows us that for real sons of the Father, questions like this are never settled on the basis of limiting rules, but on the basis of limitless love.

And that's the point that the parable makes. It makes it so powerfully in showing us starkly who doesn't reflect the Father's mercy as well as who does. It's the vast gulf that he's showing us between sham and substance, between hollow religion and heart relationship with the Father through Jesus.

And the sting, of course, is in this year's surprise to any Jewish ears listening to this story. Here's a Jewish man going down the road. He's beaten up. He's left half dead. And two eminent readers and knowers of the law come past, a priest and a Levite.

paragons of knowledge about the things of God. Do they help? They just pass by.

They do nothing. They are hearers and not doers of the word. Therefore, as James tells us, they're deceiving themselves. But then comes along this half-breed, this religiously corrupt Samaritan, an enemy of the Jewish people, and he walks by.

[42 : 26] What will he do? Will he take the chance to finish this Jew off and have one less troublesome, pompous Jew in the area? No.

He is the one who proves to be a neighbor, going the second mile and the third mile and heaping mercy and love even on this enemy of his people.

He shows great love and compassion reflecting the love and compassion of God himself. And Jesus fixes his questioner's eye. And he says, now, who proved to be a true neighbor, a true lover of God?

Now, again, don't misunderstand. Jesus is not saying for a minute that what you believe about God doesn't matter, that religious differences aren't important.

The message is, well, it's all the same in the end. We should have no religious enemies. Of course he's not saying that. He's only just spoken the words in chapter 10, verses 10 to 16, that tell us that what you believe about Jesus and his gospel matters eternally.

[43 : 34] That there will be plenty of enemies, therefore, for God's people. And he's plain, the enemies of God's people will face God's judgment in the end. That's abundantly clear. But what Jesus is saying is that if we are true sons of our Father in heaven, who shows mercy and compassion even to enemies, and is kind even to the ungrateful and the evil, who is patient, not wanting any to perish, if we are his true sons, then whenever we encounter somebody in dire need, even if they are our sworn enemies, then we also will rejoice in the privilege of reflecting the great compassion of our Father, ensuring mercy even to those who will refuse to be neighbors to us.

That's true Christian love. That's what exhibits true Christian faith, according to Jesus. And by the way, that is true tolerance, isn't it?

Which is a Christian virtue. Not the secular perversion that we're told today that just wants to see all beliefs as the same. And tells us, therefore, we're to respect all beliefs equally.

No! Are we to respect beliefs that are hideous and perverted? Like vile racism? Like anti-Semitism? Like beheading people?

In the name of your savior, your prophet? No! True tolerance means that we can have only contempt and disgust at a man's beliefs if they're like that.

[45 : 21] But that we will nevertheless show respect and indel real love for his person, whoever he is, especially when he is in dire need and distress, even if he's a sworn enemy.

That's real tolerance. And this parable simply shows us the kind of compassion and mercy that marks the hearts of those to whom the Father of mercy has been truly revealed in Jesus by the Son of God.

And whose hearts, therefore, are the true home of the Spirit of the merciful God made known in Jesus Christ. Because it's his compassion that's at work here, isn't it?

And doesn't this story also show us so clearly a perfect description of what our Savior has done for us? Look at verse 33. He saw.

He had compassion. He came and bound up his wounds. As someone's written, that is the gospel. The gospel of redeeming grace.

[46 : 30] These simple words underlie the whole mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. It was not man's merits, but his misery that drew him from the glory into the brokenness of this world.

And he goes on to speak of the hardness and self-centeredness of the priest and Levite who offered no help for all their apparent knowledge and all their religion. It's the gospel alone that can deal with such self-centeredness.

This is why he came to die for us, to break the power of self in our lives, to give us a new heart and a new spirit, to plant a spirit of love and compassion in us, to live his life of compassion in us.

you go and do likewise, says Jesus to the man and to every one of us who will follow him.

We have such privilege and such joy of a redemption that is absolutely certain in Christ. Our names are written in heaven and we have a revelation that is abundantly clear in Christ how blessed we are to know truly the Father made known to us in Jesus.

[47 : 51] And therefore what privilege and responsibility is ours to reflect the abounding compassion of Christ in this hate-filled world. Jesus says, go and do likewise.

Show mercy and prove to be neighbors, sons of our Father in heaven. Even as you go as sheep among wolves amid much hostility and feeling homeless and as outsiders.

And as you go proclaiming the glorious gospel among these enemies, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Be merciful even as your Heavenly Father is merciful. Go that way, says the Lord Jesus Christ, into my harvest field, proclaiming my kingdom and the harvest will be bountiful and Satan will fall and will be trampled under your feet also.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you for the joy and the privilege of our great salvation. All you have given us to know and all you have given us to be.

[49 : 27] Help us together as a church and every one of us as disciples of the Lord Jesus to go and do likewise and may the mercy of our great Savior be rejoiced in this city and in this land and in all the world until Jesus comes.