

JESUS' SURPRISING ANSWER

Joel 2: 27-29
Luke 10:25-37

Faith Community
October 24, 2004

Introduction

Last week we talked about reading carefully what is in the Bible. We looked at ways in which we sometimes come to a biblical passage assuming that we already know what it says. Often when we read carefully, we find out that what the Bible says isn't what we expected.

I have a confession to make; I have read our New Testament lesson this morning hundred's of times – literally! In all those readings it never struck me what Jesus really says in those words. There is a surprising message that I missed because I was looking ahead to what I thought was more important. I was looking ahead to the second part, and missed the impact of the first part!

I

In the first verses of this account, a Jewish lawyer comes to Jesus and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The Jewish leader wants to know what to do to get to heaven. How does Jesus answer?

Jesus says, “What is written in the law?”

The man answers, “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.”

Jesus says, “Right answer. Do this and you will live.”

II

A Jewish lawyer comes to Jesus and asks what he should do to have eternal life. Jesus answers that he must follow the Jewish law which says love God totally, with all your being, and love your neighbor as you love yourself. (He goes on to show that our neighbor is everyone, even our enemies).

This is the same teaching that Jesus presented all through his ministry. Jesus' answer to this Jewish lawyer is, if you follow the Jewish law, you will have eternal life.

This Jewish man is saved by living faithfully as a Jew. How else can we possibly understand what Jesus has said here?

III

What's interesting is what Jesus did not say. Jesus didn't say, “You must believe that I am the only Son of God.” He didn't say, “You must accept me as your personal savior.” What he did say was, live faithfully by this Jewish law – which is also the law I give you.

Jesus taught this law as critically important all through his ministry. In Matthew, a Jewish lawyer comes to Jesus and asks, “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus answers – love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Then he says, “And a second is like it: ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The heart of the law he points to is love. First, to love God absolutely and with everything you have, and also to love your neighbor in the same way you love yourself.

Jesus responds to this man by saying he can have eternal life by obeying completely the law of love.

IV

Is Christ then our Lord and savior? Absolutely – we must accept Christ as our savior. Is Jesus God’s only son? Of course he is! For you and me in our time, trust in Christ is absolutely required. From our perspective, we know who Christ is and we want to have a personal relationship with him.

Jesus statement to this lawyer doesn’t change a thing for how we approach God and Jesus. The Bible is telling us in this instance Jesus’ told a Jewish lawyer that to have eternal life he needed to live faithfully by the Jewish law, which says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

The lawyer Jesus met didn’t have the advantage we have of knowing who Jesus was – remember all this took place before Jesus death and resurrection. For that man at that time, Jesus said follow this law and you will have eternal life. It’s the law at the heart of Jesus’ teaching too.

V

This encounter between Jesus and the Jewish lawyer does warn us however about taking over God’s decisions.

This experience warns us not to be too certain who God can and will save. It is not up to us; it is God’s decision. God is free to offer eternal life to whomever God pleases. We are not to make that judgment – it is left with God.

We see people today who are anxious to tell us who will have eternal life and who won’t. There is a whole movement within the church’s that says no one will be saved who doesn’t accept Jesus as their personal savior.

Often, it is refined to say no one will be accepted by God who doesn’t see Christianity the way they see it. You can usually spot this kind of thinking because it uses terms like “a REAL Christian” or “Those who TRULY worship God” as if there were artificial Christians pretending to worship God.

Judgment is in God's hands, not ours. It is a difficult choice none of us should want to make, and fortunately, God has relieved us of that burden. Don't worry about judging whether someone else is going to receive eternal life – we have enough to worry about with our own lives! Don't judge the eternal situation of someone else. That's not your job. As Jesus put it, "Judge not, that you be not judged!"

Jesus' encounter with the Jewish lawyer shows us that we don't know what God's decision will be. God is always surprising us with grace!

Conclusion

A woman who was a member of this congregation a long time ago recently emailed me with a question that really disturbed her. Here is what she said, "Do you believe that only individuals who are baptized and accept Christ as their Lord and Savior will be received in heaven? If so, what happens to the others – such as Jews, Muslims, Non-baptized individuals (including children)?"

The experience we have seen this morning tells us two things: work hard to help everyone know the love of God, and leave the judgments about others to God.

Because we have been accepted by God and know the love God has for us in Christ, we want other people to know that great experience. Jesus' word is such good news that we want everyone to know it and commit to it.

God doesn't ask us to judge others. In fact, Jesus warns us strongly that judging another's eternal future puts ours in danger! Tell everyone you know the good news of Jesus Christ. Don't judge what will happen to anyone else, you have no idea what God can do.

Amen.