

# Luke 10:25-37

Pentecost 8, Series C, July 10, 2016

Theme: How do you read the Scriptures?  
I. Looking for God's requirement  
II. Rejoicing in God's accomplishment

INJ How you look at things is often more important than what you see. While there are political examples I could use today, I think I will steer clear of them and go with a Biblical one. Remember the account of Noah and the flood? The facts are clear: worldly wickedness and Noah's faith. Water and an ark. Animals. A rainbow. Yet how you look at the facts makes a difference. What is the main truth God wants us to know from the flood? Is it that a just God will destroy wickedness? If you are righteous like Noah, you will be saved? Is God showing us how obedient Noah was so we can be like him? Or is the story about animals, teaching us to be nice to them because they are God's creatures? How do you read the Scriptures here?

We usually think we have a good idea of what the Bible tells us. Perhaps we can recite some passages still from confirmation class. The Sunday School Lessons still stick in our head, anyway, and weekly worship keeps things fresh in our minds. A man in our Gospel lesson today had tall credentials when it came to God's Word. He was an expert. He came to Jesus trying to trick him. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus turned the question back on the expert. "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

Jesus' question stands before us. How do you read the Scriptures? What is your understanding of them? I don't mean just knowledge – none of us are experts. How do you approach the Bible when you read and listen and study it? We will talk about two possible perspectives: we can look for God's requirement or we can rejoice in his accomplishment.

The expert approached God's Word looking for God's requirement. He wanted to know the directions, so he could follow them to heaven. Unquestioningly, he held Scripture in high regard. He devoted his life to knowing it all expertly, and to doing it all rightly.

Jesus recognized the expert's Bible knowledge and let him express it – to show the fault in his approach. What is written in the Law? God said what we must do to live eternally. "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 love your neighbor as yourself."

If we read this verse looking for God's requirement, we must take up the challenge. The expert in the law did just that. He figured he had done his best to love God. Carefully he had obeyed the laws of the teachers, rabbis and more. We are often like him. We figure we do pretty good coming to church each week, giving our offering, and reading the Meditations booklet most of the time. Loving God? We do that. At least as far as people can see. (Good thing the heart is hidden!)

A visible problem arises when God says to love our neighbor. People surround us all the time. How can we do good to all of them, always? This expert found a solution by narrowing the definition of "neighbor." If no one could clearly define who his neighbor was, he could not be faulted for breaking the law. So, the beggar or the needy or the widowed or the injured were not his neighbor. He didn't have to love them!

If we read the Scriptures looking for God's requirement, we also have to narrow down the expectations. To meet God's challenge, we must change it into something we can do. Look again at what God commands. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." God is not just talking about outward actions here, but our attitude, our thoughts, our desires. We cannot fear, love, and trust in God all the time with all we have. Likewise with our neighbor. No matter who we classify as our neighbor, we do not treat them with perfect love and respect all the time.

Jesus revealed the folly of hoping to meet God's requirement. He told the expert: "Do this [and keep on doing it always] and you will live." Those words ought to cut to our heart. Always love God and my neighbor? Even when I feel crabby or when they are mean? Yes. God's demand is absolute. "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Remember all the commands for righteous living in our lessons today? Guilt should weigh heavy on our conscience. God's wrath should tear us to pieces and throw us into fiery eternity.

Amazingly, however, we still defend ourselves. "At least I tried! And, I am better than you are at it!" The expert wanted to justify himself before Jesus with his question about who his neighbor was. He would not admit his guilt. How do we read the Scriptures? If we look for God's requirement, we defend our imaginary innocence! When we see our failure to meet the requirement, we kneel in repentance.

Jesus told a familiar parable, the parable of the Good Samaritan. His question at the end gives the point he was teaching us. "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" It wasn't the priest or the Levite. The Samaritan, a hated, despised, spurned and rejected foreigner, was the injured man's

neighbor. God's requirement is that we love our neighbor as ourselves. A searing hot knife strikes home in our heart, for we have not done it.

If we read the Scriptures from the other perspective, however, the searing hot dagger turns into a soothing, comforting and motivating hand. Look at this account with me now and rejoice in God's accomplishment. Then we will be reading Scripture with great profit for our eternal life.

The first clue to rejoicing in God's accomplishment is to recognize who gives the command to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." Who is the Lord that we should listen to him and love him? Consider what he has done: he made us the crown of his creation. He watches over us, giving us every good thing. He sent his Son in our flesh to take our place. Jesus died for us and speaks his words of life in the Scripture. The Holy Spirit entered our heart at baptism and keeps coming to us through the Word. He strengthens our weak faith and enables us to love God with our heart, soul, strength and mind. The Spirit strengthens us and guides us and keeps us in faith. Who is the Lord? Our Savior!

When we rejoice in what God has done for us, we have a new outlook on our daily life. No longer is it a system of mazes and hurdles and hoops that we must jump through, but a continuous opportunity to say thanks to our Triune God. Jesus spoke this parable of the Good Samaritan to show us a thankful response to God's accomplishment of grace.

If we read Scripture with an eye to following the rules to get to heaven, we must despair of ever getting there. When we see Scripture instead laying before us Jesus, the one who followed the rules for us, then we can truly rejoice. When Christ Jesus hung on the cross, he reunited us to God and forgave our sins. His resurrection proclaims our victory over death and the unending love of our Father in heaven.

The Savior showed great love in dealing with this arrogant expert in the law. Jesus knew it was a trap, that the expert wanted to trick him. Jesus used the opportunity to expose his sinfulness and to call him to repentance. Jesus shows that a life of faith is not bound by restrictive rules, but a life of faith willingly gives thanks to God by obeying them.

How do you read the Scriptures? Observe the Savior in every way you can. His sacrifice met God's requirement. His accomplishment is what matters! When you see Christ clearly, faith will show in your actions.

The Samaritan in the parable was not looking to make fine distinctions in the law regarding who was or who wasn't his neighbor. He helped a man who was in need. The priest and the Levite saw this man left for dead, and argued that it was none of their business. God would not expect them to become ceremonially unclean, to mess up their schedules,

to dirty their hands, for a stranger! The Samaritan generously applied first aid, walked his donkey to the inn with the injured man riding in his place. He stayed up all night doing what he could, and promised the innkeeper whatever it took to send the man on his way healthy again.

Who is our neighbor? Jesus does not want us to consider that question, disqualifying this one or that one. Rather, he says: "To whom can you be a neighbor?" The world is a big place, and God does not make us responsible for all people. He does give us people and places where we can shine forth like lights in the darkness. Who do you know who needs your compassion, your comfort, your hands or your ears? Be their neighbor! Even if it is someone beaten and left for dead alongside the road.

We can only be a neighbor to others when we remember God's accomplishment. He forgave our sins in Christ Jesus. Since God so loved us, we will show love to God and our neighbor willingly. With Jesus in our heart, people will see him in our eyes and our arms. Our hearts must be changed first, though, before we can begin to do what is right. How do you read the Scriptures? We rejoice in God's accomplishment.

One last thing deserves our attention. We are not told what happened to this expert in the law after he encountered Jesus. Did he leave in unbelief? Did he become a disciple? We do not know. Our reaction to Jesus' words is more important. Will we leave here proud of the way we met the requirement, glad we have helped our neighbors in need? "All this I have done!" Listen to God's requirement again: "Love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind." No room for pride there. "Love your neighbor as yourself." Honestly, we have not done that, either.

How do you read the Scriptures? Lift your eyes to Jesus. Give him all your tarnished and ragged and sinful acts and thoughts. Abandon all pride before the one who died for you. Trust that Jesus has accomplished what you need. Receive the forgiveness he offers. Then go home and live in faith, being a neighbor out of thanks to God.

Back to the beginning. What is the main point of Noah and the Flood? It is not one of doom and destruction. It is not a moralistic encouragement to be like Noah. It is not about the animals. In the Flood Account, God reveals his grace to us by saving eight undeserving people. God kept his promise of a Savior alive and sent a rainbow to remind us he is always faithful. All the waters of a universal flood cannot wash away sin, but the power of God's word in baptism cleanses us and clothes us in Christ. As you read the Scriptures, rejoice in God's accomplishment for you, for you are reading about your Savior. SDG Amen.