

Let's open in prayer, then a word of Scripture, and then as Kent might say, I'll be doing a little meddling today.

Jesus, I admit that I am afraid to do the work of an evangelist. Somehow the Gospel that saves me also scares me when I find out that someone else doesn't have it and needs it from me. So as I teach today from your word, God, and I talk about how to be an evangelist in my neighborhood -- how anyone can be an evangelist in their neighborhood -- don't let me be a hypocrite, and don't let me ask or command anything of my brothers and sisters which I am not willing to do myself. Help me God to love you more than I love my own comfort and peace, and to love other people at least as much as I love myself. And I ask you to do the same for those who are hearing this in your precious name.

A few weeks ago Paul Hamline asked me to participate in the teaching this summer, and the topic he gave me was "neighborhood evangelism." That topic can take us one of two ways: one way is to make a list of habits or tasks; you might take that list home and consider to try it, like the other lists in your home. If I give you a list, you may or may not do it. The other way is Jesus' way, and for that we need some Scripture to put into our hearts so that we can want what he wants, and then we will do what he wants us to do.

From Luke 10:

A lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" [Jesus] 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 and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And [Jesus] said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he [the lawyer], 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. 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. 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.”

Now, here is what I expect: you have all heard this story before. You have heard it, and you rightly commend the Samaritan, and you understand that we should do something kind for those we find who need kindness. What I also expect is a very simple question: “what does the Good Samaritan have to do with evangelism?” Because look: in this story, the Gospel doesn’t seem

to come up, right? The Samaritan didn't bring the man in the ditch to Jesus for healing, and he doesn't preach to him or tell him that somehow he needs to repent of bad company, which is how he wound up in the ditch in the first place. This story seems to be about some other good thing besides the Gospel.

Well, let's find out -- and along the way, let's see if it tells us anything about neighborhood evangelism.

The first few verses are pretty common stuff, right? There's a teacher of the law there, and he wants to test Jesus, and he asks Jesus a question: what is the greatest commandment? There are a couple of funny aspects to this, the first being that this was not really a new question, or a widely-disputed question. In Matthew and Mark, when the leaders of Israel ask him, Jesus makes the answer given here, but in Luke the Lawyer gives the answer to Jesus. The reason is simple: this understanding of the Law of Moses was not new. The teaching of the rabbis had been for a long time that loving God also meant to love other people. Consider Ps 89:3 which the ESV translates, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness." The common Jewish translation is: "The world is built upon kindness, as the heavens, with which You will establish Your faithfulness." It is said that the Rabbi Hillel who lives a century before Jesus taught that the whole of the Law of Moses was summed up by loving God and loving others. So this idea is not somehow groundbreaking. What is funny is that this lawyer thinks this question will somehow catch Jesus in some sort of puzzle.

The reason Jesus is not caught up in a trap here is obvious: for Jesus, Judaism wasn't that complicated. Jesus was concerned that somehow some people

made it complicated and then, because it was so complicated, they made other people stumble away from God. For example, if you read Mat 23, the Seven Woes upon the rulers of the people, Jesus says this:

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

He says that wanting to be called a teacher is something to be avoided. And then he says this:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Seeking out to make others into people who want that sort of recognition is the worst way to ruin them. Rather, Jesus says at the end of this passage that wanting to serve other people, and gather them together for God's sake, is what one ought to really want. That's part of what he means when he says here to the lawyer, "do this, and you will live." You don't have to have all the commandments of God fully memorized and correctly-ranked: you have to

Love God, and then love people. This was all of the law and the prophets, according to Jesus.

But the other really funny thing in this exchange is that the lawyer, who thought he was testing Jesus, feels like that simple answer requires him to justify himself for asking the question. That is: Jesus says that following God is pretty simple, obeying God has a pretty straightforward path, and because this seems too simple to the lawyer, he has to ask a follow-up: “Jesus: who is my neighbor?”

Before we go on, some of you can probably already see where I am going with this. That question from the lawyer is actually the first question in what we are calling “neighborhood evangelism.” Here’s the thing: if I asked you ... well, let me ask you: what is the Great Commission? Just shout it out if you know it: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” See: just like the lawyer, you know what God has said already. You know it. And if we had to end class right here, I could just echo Christ and say, “you have answered correctly, now just go and do it.”

It seems pretty simple. The problem, of course, is that if you are like me, you are already asking Jesus: “Lord, who are all the nations?” And we find ourselves in the same trap the lawyer was in -- the same sort of doubt or fear or other thing which is not faith but something else. Asking God, “who are the nations?” is the same sort of self-imposed problem that asking the question, “who is my neighbor?” is.

Follow me here: when John the Apostle is talking about this problem, he says it this way:

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

As far as arguments go, that's a pretty straight-forward argument, a pretty simple way to see it. God loved us; his love casts out fear; therefore we have to love not just in theory, not to love an invisible church with invisible love, but to love the people we really can see -- or else we can't really say we have love from God whom we cannot see.

Because of this, Jesus wants to make some other points to the lawyer (and to those of us reading this story) which I think helps us to see that this is not merely a new or updated to-do list. Jesus' answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" unpacks the problem in the lawyer's heart as well as the problem in our hearts as we follow along.

Let's look at the problem of the traveller. Jesus says this fellow was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers. What occurs to you when you see that phrase, "going down from Jerusalem to Jericho"? Anyone?

That's right - he's going the wrong way. To say someone is "going down to" Jericho from Jerusalem is interesting because Jericho is actually north of Jerusalem, but in this case it is actually going down -- because Jerusalem is up in the hills and Jericho is down in the valley to the north of Dead Sea. He's headed the wrong way, not toward the holy city and the temple and the place where God is, but away from it. And then it shouldn't surprise us that if he's going the wrong way, of course he falls into bad company and is robbed and beaten.

This is the fellow Christ is using as an example for us here: the fellow who has obviously gone the wrong way, and has suffered for it.

John Calvin says this when thinking about this passage:

pretending to be eminent worshippers of God, [hypocrites] openly violate charity towards their neighbors. It will be easy to infer from this, that the Lawyer practiced this evasion, in order that, concealed under the fake mask of holiness, he might not be brought into the light. So then, aware that the test of charity would prove unfavorable to him, he seeks to hide under the word *neighbor*, that he may not be discovered to be a law-breaker. But we have already seen that on this subject the Law was corrupted by the scribes. They reasoned out no one to be their neighbors but the ones who were worthy of it. This principle was received among them: that we have a right to hate our enemies. For the only method to which hypocrites can resort for avoiding the condemnation of themselves is to turn away as far as they are able that their life may not be tried by the judgment of the Law.

Jesus has set up the traveller to be someone who is, at face value, not worthy of love. See: He is not afraid of the Lawyer's problem because he is Jesus. The Lawyer came to test Jesus, and it turns out that the Lawyer is the one who will be tested -- by the example of a man who was going the wrong way from Jerusalem, and then by another man who did not worship God in Jerusalem.

The test that Jesus presents is one that ought to test us -- because it goes back to this great commandment of loving God and people. The man in the ditch is not necessarily worthy of our love, but let's be clear: he needs it. Without it, he's going to die.

From that perspective, the next two travellers are religious people. Let's go back to Calvin's commentary here for the sake of finishing his thought:

Christ compares a Samaritan to a priest and a Levite. It is well known what deadly hatred the Jews has against the Samaritans, so that, in spite of their living close beside them, they were always at the opposed to each other. Christ now says that a Jew, ... having been wounded by robbers, received no assistance either from a Levite or from a priest, both of whom met with him lying on the road, and half-dead, but that a Samaritan showed him great kindness. and then [Jesus] asks, Which of these three was neighbor to the Jew? The Lawyer could not escape from choosing the Samaritan to the other two. For here, as in a mirror, we behold that common relationship of men, which the scribes endeavored to blot out by their wicked reasoning. The compassion which an enemy showed to a Jew demonstrates that the guidance and teaching of nature are sufficient to show that man was created for the

sake of man. So we should understand that there is a mutual obligation between all men.

Do you see? If we want to know who our neighbor is, we should just look for someone who needs us. Look up from your phone, look up from your iPad, look up from your book, and look for someone who needs you.

When you see someone who needs you, that person is your neighbor, and you should love that person because God loved you, are you didn't deserve it, and that love is bottomless, and you can't rob God by loving someone the way God loved you. In fact, you show that you love God whom you cannot see when you love the person who needs you whom you can see.

This makes sense, yes? Any questions at this point?

Let's think about this one last way: The greatest commandment is to love God, and to love your neighbor. Jesus says **his** commandment is to make disciples of all men, teaching them to obey him, to obey God. So if we are to obey God, to obey Christ, what are we teaching me to do? Anyone?

That's right: we are teaching them to obey the greatest commandment. We are teaching them to love God, and to love their neighbor. Evangelism is both our obedience to Christ and our act toward other people to teach them to both love God and to love people.

Any questions about this?

This is why the story of the Good Samaritan is where I wanted us to start before we talked about what you could or might do to be a worker doing neighborhood evangelism. Some of you might have come into this discussion worried that what I came here to do was to teach you have to build a wooden grate -- they used to call them "soap boxes" -- which you can stand on in order to get high enough that everyone can hear you, and then start proclaiming as loud as possible John 1, or John 6, or Ephesians 1 & 2, or Rom 1-3, or whatever. That may in fact be street-corner evangelism, but that is not neighborhood evangelism. Others of you might be worried that I was going to try to convince you that you have to out-Mormon your Mormon neighbors and win awards for niceness -- trying to preach a Gospel without words, which is impossible.

What I am here to do instead with the time we have left today is to see that this passage of Scripture is our model for neighborhood evangelism because it obeys both the great commandment and the great commission.

For those of you needing to keep track of where we are, that's the introduction, and now I have 3 points to discuss with you:

1. Neighborhood evangelism crosses the street to find out who your neighbor is.
2. Neighborhood evangelism gives you the right-sized task.
3. Neighborhood evangelism doesn't merely understand what God has commanded: it actually obeys what God has commanded.

Neighborhood evangelism crosses the street to find out who your neighbor is.

The only thing I did not love about Benny Riley's lesson last week is that it stole all of the thunder of this week's lesson. But let's look at what Jesus says about the men who passed by the guy in the ditch who was beaten and robbed:

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, he passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was.

I know nobody believes this about me, but in spite of what you may think, I am an introvert. One of the attributes of being an introvert is that I would really prefer not to go and meet new people. I would also prefer it that if someone needs something they just ask for it -- come to me, and just ask -- and if I can help, I'll help. I would prefer that the world actually revolve around me, if I can say that out loud and not get immediately tossed out of church -- and by that I mean that I wish that everything that happens to me happens at a time and in a place which is convenient for me, and does not impose on me, and does not create any trouble for me. If I am honest with myself, I know that my default setting in life, as described by Jesus here, is to "pass by on the other side."

One of my pet peeves here in Arkansas is that when there's a car stopped in the road someplace, nobody passes by on the other side -- they all slow

down really, really slow to look. I'm pretty sure that's not what Jesus is telling us to do.

Jesus is saying that it doesn't matter what kind of son of Abraham or son of Levi you think you are: seeing your neighbor and passing by on the other side is the opposite of following the great commandment. Jesus is saying that if even a Samaritan can cross the street to see if the guy in the ditch is dead or not, we can also cross the street to see our neighbor.

Last week Benny talked about how he and Julie essentially had an open-door policy at their house -- everyone could come in. I think that's great, but the part that I think gets undersold in that scheme is that somehow Benny and Julie met these people and they knew it was safe to come in. They were good neighbors. Somehow they had to make the first move -- even if it was a sneaky one like letting their daughter do all the inviting.

I know everyone in this room knows it, but we live in a different world than even 30 years ago. Think about this: 30 years ago was 1987. In 1987, even cordless phones had to have a wired base in your house, there was no internet, no WiFi, and while cable TV was fairly common, most of us settled for 3 channels plus PBS. Compared that to the options we have right now -- and I mean literally, right now inside this church building, because I know all of you might be secretly streaming Netflix on your phone if this talk gets too boring (Phil Johnson once watched a football game on his iPad while I was teaching at a conference once, so I am certain that it happens). But 30 years ago, there was nothing to do except to get to know your neighbors. You had to go outside and see people even if you were only going to the Library.

Today, it's easy to think there's nobody to see because let's face it: we're all inside, bathed in what my wife calls the "blue light."

To get to know people, you have to cross the street. My neighbor James has a big dog like my big dog, so I crossed the street to talk about his big dog. My neighbors behind us are trying to decide if they are going to build a fence between our yards because when we moved in where their house sit was a forest, and we didn't build a fence when we bought our house, but now ... well, I have a big dog. He's quite a conversation-starter. Down the street from us is a gay couple, and we met at a neighborhood picnic. Across the block is the older couple for whom we have been dog sitting for years because that dog behaves better after we have had her for a week.

And the thing of it is this: we don't just talk about yards and dogs. Because they have spent time with us they know that we love God and we love people in spite of my native introversion. But for that to happen, we had to cross the street and go to them to see them -- and as the story from Jesus says, we came to where they were, and when we saw them, we had compassion for them. We could see who they really are, and we were able to be good neighbors to them in every sense. You have to cross the street to do neighborhood evangelism.

Neighborhood evangelism gives you the right-sized task.

The point of Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan was not that the Samaritan, having learned how to minister to the man in the ditch, now scoured the highways and byways of Samaria and Judaea and to take in every single wounded and abandoned person himself. It was this: the one that he

saw, he took care of that one. He didn't turn a blind eye to the one that was obviously right there in front of him. The Samaritan did not simply go check on the man in the ditch, pull him out, and then hope he could crawl home from there. Jesus says:

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.'

He took on the task, start to finish, and even brought in the help needed which he could not provide. Start with one person, do all the work that you are supposed to do to show compassion to them, and then see what happens.

There's this story by the writer Loren Eiseley that some of you may have heard before. It's about an old man who used to go to the ocean, walking on the beach every morning before he began his daily routine. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore and in the distance he noticed a small boy. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out, "Good morning! Can I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to

the sea by themselves. When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water.”

The old man replied, “But there must be hundreds of starfish on this beach. I’m afraid you won’t really be able to make much of a difference.”

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, “It made a difference to that one!”

In that story, the boy was doing the thing right in front of him -- all he had to do is bend down and pick it up. In Jesus’ story, all the Samaritan had to do was cross the street and then show some compassion. Neither one is preachy, or didactic, or somehow too smart or too wordy. They simply take care of the business set before them.

That approach to being a neighborhood evangelist makes the task the right size for you. You do not have to take charge of every person within walking distance of your house -- but you can’t step over them either, or pass them by on the other side.

In his sermon “Evangelism the Right Way,” John MacArthur said this:

If you don't learn anything about evangelism, learn this. The best way to evangelize is to produce one reproducing disciple. ... Better to spend yourself on some individuals that they might become mature and that they might carry the Gospel. You know: Jesus didn't speak to large crowds very often and even when he did he spoke in parables and they

didn't understand it. He spent most of his time with 12 individuals, didn't he? That's really the heart of evangelism.

The right size of the task is not that you somehow take on the whole task of the spiritual well-being of all people. It is that you come to the one that you can see, and love that person and teach them to love God and other people. MacArthur says Jesus had 12 people -- and we know one of them was no good. Let me just suggest to you that if this year you crossed the street once, and added one person to your own personal circle of influence, and taught them this year how to love God and to love people, you yourself would learn better how to love God and to love people, and then next year you can try to meet a second person.

The right size of this task is not quantity, but quality and real action, real loving kindness.

Neighborhood evangelism doesn't merely understand what God has commanded: it actually obeys what God has commanded.

At this point, we are about 40 minutes into this lesson, and I have more to say about this last bullet point than we can do in 15 minutes. The major heading I'm thinking about here is the problem of religion. In the story from Luke we have been reading and considering today, the Lawyer is testing Jesus -- listen to that phrase as Luke wrote it: "A lawyer stood up to put [Jesus] to the test." The problem that the lawyer has here is not that he lacks a religion. He is a Jew. He has studied Moses and the Prophets, and probably the Rabbis and the rulings of the religious courts, and he has done it because those words summarize Judaism. He wants to be a good Jew. So he does not

lack a religion, and he doesn't lack zealousness or even a passion for holiness. He's thinking about the Law of God that describes holiness. He is asking a suitably-actionable question, yes? What's the one thing I should know about the law above all else? He has religion, he has a passion, and he has spent his life following his passion for his religion. What ought to be true for this fellow is that he's a true son of Abraham, a Jew among the Jews.

What has happened instead is that he has utterly missed the point of being a Jew in spite of knowing the words that describe the point perfectly – words which God himself gave to understand it. Jesus asks 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 and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." He knows he ought to obey God and therefore love people. Yet with the very son of God standing right there, he does not know him, or even who his neighbor is.

The problem of religion is that it can make us want the wrong things, and when we are doing neighborhood evangelism; we should be on-guard to never make someone want the wrong things.

Dr. James White is fond of saying, "What you win them with is what you win them to." Let me repeat that: What you win them with is what you win them to. Neighborhood evangelism ought to be how we win people not merely to a religion, but to the real Jesus who is not a book or a slogan, but a savior. We ought to be working against having the kind of religion which is only in our heads by making sure that we are not teaching people only to memorize words but rather that we are teaching them that the words tell us who God

is. They tell us he is a real person. And that just like every other real person, we have to behave toward God in a real way.

There is an amazing video making the rounds right now by Francis Chan. In it he is giving this example of how things work in his house, and he tells his daughter Rachel to go clean her room. He goes about his business and comes back an hour later and Rachel meets him and says, “Dad, I’m really excited about cleaning my room -- so excited that I called some of my friends over and we’re going to study your instructions to clean my room. We are going to memorize the instructions -- we are even going to memorize them in Greek!” And in the meantime, Francis looks in the doorway and the room isn’t cleaned.

Listen: I am not against Bible-reading. We are here reading the Bible today to get convicted about this stuff. I am not against studying other authors who wrote good things about the Bible – I have quoted some of them here today. But I am telling you that in your neighborhood, lectures do not make good neighbors. Show people what you believe, and then tell them what you believe – and let me suggest something pretty shocking: if what you show them isn’t appealing, maybe what you are trying to tell them is the wrong message.

Here’s how I know this. I’m reading from Acts 2 right now (41-47):

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and

signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The first time the Gospel was preached after the resurrection of Christ, the people who received it were changed into generous, thankful, glad people – and they had favor with others. If your Gospel does not make you into a generous, thankful, glad person, ask yourself why.

When we get into this business of following Jesus, we have to remember that the aim of the charge to follow him is NOT a systematic theology that is recited from a full library, a finished seminary degree and a reformed confession of faith. Paul says to Timothy that “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Faith in God cures and restores our conscience; a restored conscience causes our motives to get pure, and pure motives result in the kind of Love that God has always asked from people - a love which walks out and crosses the street. It is not enough that we have a religion with the right name, or the right saints and teachers, or from the right city on a hill rather than the little town with a poor reputation. We must have a religion that is actually caused by a relationship with God who has saved us from sin, changed our hearts and minds away from everything else that we might think will justify us, and causes us to love the way God, whose name is Jesus, wants us to love.

The reason it is important to be a neighborhood evangelist is that this is how you know you are not merely a hearer of the word of God, but a doer of the word of God. This is the way you know you are not like the lawyer who wants to justify himself by asking Jesus, “I understand love, but what do you mean by ‘neighbor’?”

So to wrap up today, what should you do next? Jesus makes it pretty clear: if you understand what God has said, you should go ahead and go do it. Don’t quibble about what sort of love you might give or whether your neighbors are on the even-numbered side of the street or the other side. You honestly don’t even need to make a huge master plan for evangelizing your zip code or even your Property Owners Association. Go about your business, but look at the people God has already put inside your way, and have compassion for them.

This is the place where our Calvinism ought to really kick in, right? Because we don’t believe in the God of “pot-luck”. We believe in the God of Providence who doesn’t make mistakes. If someone is in front of you who needs you, God put that person there. If God put a sack of money in front of you with your name on it, you would know that was providence. If he sent you a box of good books, you’d see that as a providence. He has put people in your life who are in his image, and they live right there next to you. That is also his providence for their good, and for yours.

Show them you are grateful, and generous, and glad – and love them like they belong to you. They are your neighbors. They are the nations. They are the ones God wants you to tell about him as if you really love Him, and as if you really love them.

Let's pray.