

FLEA VIDEO #11 - "SERIOUS KINDNESS" (Luke 10:25-37)

6.16.20

In these days of so much concern about our rights, an appropriate question comes up: What are our obligations to our neighbors? How much should I feel responsible to do for somebody? And, as long as we're asking, exactly who is my neighbor? Jesus had a great response to that very question. That's our story today.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus was often confronted with scribes and Pharisees whose questions to Him were meant to somehow trip Him up or trap Him in His words - anything that they could use to discredit Him.

Jesus responded with a question: **'What is written in the Law?'** He replied. **"How do you read it?"** Essentially, Jesus is telling the guy, "You know the answer." So, the guy answered: **"'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.'"** In this expanded quoting of Deuteronomy 6:5, he is essentially answering that we are to love with the full spectrum of everything we are - emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually. The context of "your neighbor" from Leviticus 19:18 would have been understood by that audience as referring to "your people." This is a huge distinction because of how Jesus is going to redefine that word.

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." The scribe, however, responds somewhat differently. **But he wanted to justify himself so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"** He is literally trying to get out of this impossible standard with which Christ has challenged him, so he tries to limit what the term "neighbor" means. If it can be defined in a narrow way, possibly a more favorable way, maybe he has a better chance of actually meeting that standard. After all, some people would be easy to view as neighbors, while others would be far more challenging. He's in good company: The prevailing opinion among the religious elite was that one's neighbors were only those who shared their righteousness. Therefore, anybody viewed as "wicked" - tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles and, especially, Samaritans - could be hated and avoided because they were enemies of God. For the scribes and Pharisees, there never was any concept of, "Hate the sin, love the sinner." That was God's intention, but never theirs. They had literally elevated hatred to the status of a virtue, obviously making the second Great Commandment completely dependent on the definition of "neighbor." So, in

a sense, the expert in the law is asking, "OK, so what's the absolute least I have to do here?"

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. Some of the harshest hills in the entire wilderness country of Judea are found along this path. And the audience to whom Christ is telling this story would have completely understood the idea of a traveler being attacked. That particular road was notorious for the dangers it presented from robbers as there were many places for such people to hide from the unwary traveler until it was too late.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. For a Jewish audience, the priest and Levite would have been

thought to be the "heroes" in this story. But it is more likely, especially considering the point Jesus is trying to make, that they simply could not be bothered with the probable time commitment and inconvenience of helping this guy. They would prefer to keep on moving.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. Now where a Jewish audience would have seen the Pharisee and Levite as examples of God pleasing holiness, the hero of the story all of a sudden becomes someone quite different - a Samaritan! A very deep, historical hatred existed between Jews and Samaritans - illustrated by the fact that devout Jews would even go so far as to walk around the area of Samaria when traveling rather than set one foot inside their territory, even though that would greatly increase the time and energy needed for their journey. However, seeing the helplessness of the wounded man moved the Samaritan deeply and personally, enough so that his compassion overwhelmed whatever differences there might have been between them. As a result, he took care of him - tending to his wounds, moving him to safety, and providing the means by which he could be taken care of.

And then Jesus hits the man with the relevant question: ***Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?***" Jesus now returns to the original question posed to him: "Who is my neighbor?" - but with a twist: Jesus is now challenging His audience to consider whether or not they themselves are actually being a good neighbor to the people around them. The point Jesus makes is that "neighbor" is not defined by them or their culture or their history, nor is it up to others to prove themselves neighbor to him. According to Christ, everyone has a responsibility to be a neighbor. It is our starting point - to see everyone around us in that way.

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." "Neighbor" is now being redefined to mean anybody to whom we have opportunity to show love, to demonstrate kindness - regardless of the circumstances. Love does not have limits, nor is it defined by man-made, conveniently imposed boundaries. Everybody and anybody is our neighbor. That is how God defines who our neighbors are - and that becomes our standard, because that is His standard. And beyond that, the idea of "neighbor" is more clearly defined by being seen not just as an attitude but more importantly as an action - a tangible way to demonstrate the heart.

So what is kindness? Kindness is the grace that impacts the whole nature, mellowing all which would be harsh or critical in manner or attitude. It is always sweet, always mild, and reflects a heart full of graciousness. The lynchpin of the whole story is the definition of "neighbor." The expert in the law tried to narrow the definition to justify his life. Jesus instead broadened it to condemn that man's life, basically challenging him with the question: Who is NOT your neighbor - and then daring him to answer.

We live in a day and age of incredible divisiveness. But the fruit of kindness displays something entirely different to the world - a world that needs to know the life that is possible through Jesus Christ. Kindness cuts through the world's issues to reveal a heart that belongs to a kingdom not of this world. That's the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the kingdom to which we claim citizenship. Everything we do in a kind and gracious way, from the biggest effort to the tiniest little thing, can sow a seed that God's Holy Spirit can use to make someone sit up and take notice of Jesus Christ - because they saw Him in one of his kids: US.