

## **God Is Jealous**

December 11, 2016

### Luke 10: 25-37:

*<sup>25</sup> An expert in the Law of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question to see what he would say. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to have eternal life?"*

*<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?" <sup>27</sup> The man replied, "The Scriptures say, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.' They also say, 'Love your neighbors as much as you love yourself.'" <sup>28</sup> Jesus said, "You have given the right answer. If you do this, you will have eternal life." <sup>29</sup> But the man wanted to show that he knew what he was talking about. So he asked Jesus, "Who are my neighbors?"*

*<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied: As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> Later a temple helper came to the same place. But when he saw the man who had been beaten up, he also went by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> A man from Samaria then came traveling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him <sup>34</sup> and went over to him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return." <sup>36</sup> Then Jesus asked, "Which one of these three people was a real neighbor to the man who was beaten up by robbers?" <sup>37</sup> The teacher answered, "The one who showed pity." Jesus said, "Go and do the same!"*



The kids want so much for Christmas again this year. Why couldn't they just stay small? It was so much easier to manage the finances when a teddy bear and a few toys would be enough. Maybe a little LEGO set and a good book to read.

I hope my parents get me that new iPhone I want SO bad. I am sure Bill's parents will get one for him. Bill is so lucky. His parents always buy him whatever is on his Christmas list. I wish I had Bill's parents.

Just be thankful if you get anything for Christmas this year. You know Dad lost his job two months ago and we are barely paying the bills. We need to be thankful that we have a roof over our heads and a warm meal on the table.

I just hope to see all of the grandkids this year. It's been a few years since the whole family could get together. Everybody is so busy all the time. If they would just make the time. It would be so nice to see everybody.

There is nothing I really need for Christmas this year. Come to think of it, there is not even anything I really want for Christmas. Wouldn't it be nice to have a little snow this year? A white Christmas, wouldn't that be nice.

The greatest gift ever given? It came on a cross, on a hill, long ago. It came to all that we may have life. The second greatest gift? The love that led to that cross. It was the love of a father, willing to give his only son. It was the love of a son, willing to give everything for all the other children of the Father. For you and for me. Let us pray.

Advent moves along, Christmas is just fourteen days away. Shopping lists have been made, plans have been laid, gifts have been wrapped. We celebrate Christmas by purchasing gifts, usually for each other, and sometimes even for ourselves. But Christmas is really Jesus' birthday. If it's Jesus' birthday, shouldn't we be giving Him the gifts? What gift do you have for Jesus? Haven't gotten one yet? Don't worry, you still have time.



In our parable today, a gift was given. Who was the gift giver? What was the gift? Who received the gift?

An expert in the Law stood up to test Jesus. He wanted to know from the teacher, "What one must do to inherit eternal life?" Isn't this a question we all ask or have asked at one time or another? Jesus, in turn, asked the man what he thought. His response was pretty straight forward – love God, love neighbor. Jesus confirmed that he was correct. Love, the second greatest gift ever given.

But the man, like us, must have questioned himself, must have wondered, can I really do that? Can I love God with all of my being? Can I love my neighbors as much as I love myself? Questions we wrestle with ourselves. Questions that make us a bit uncomfortable. The first: can we love God that much? Can we love God with all of our being? No, we cannot. Yes, we can love God more today than we loved God yesterday. Yes, our love for God can grow. Yes, we can give more and more and more of ourselves to God. And we may ask, "Is it ever enough? Do I ever reach a point when I love God enough?" No, we do not. But I do not believe God expects us to reach that point either. God just expects us to keep trying, to keep growing, to keep falling more and more in love with Him. God's love for us is so great that it is okay when we fail. His love

for us is so great that his mercies never end. So we keep growing, we keep falling more and more in love with God.



But with each other, love becomes a little harder. We are not always so forgiving. We are not always so accepting. We do not always love. God is perfect, so we can strive to love God.

But with our fellow man, it is not so easy. We aggravate each other. We hurt each other. We hold onto our grudges. We say we forgive, but we do not forget. It is much harder to love neighbor than to love God. So, to limit the scope of the requirement, the expert in the law asked Jesus to define who all his neighbor was. The man was asking who all does this really include? He was asking Jesus for a list of who he did not have to love. A list of who he could exclude. A list to make life easier. Too often we want life to just be easy.



We see this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. What was important to the priest and the temple helper? The man of God passes by on the other side of the road. So too does the

temple helper. They both have places to be, people to make sacrifices for, people to pray for, a mighty God to serve! They simply do not have to time to stop and to offer assistance to this man on the side of the road. This is not easy. That day, this is not a gift they have time to give. And then the Samaritan comes along. He felt sorry for the man. He stopped and helped the man. He cared for the man. Jesus then asks, "*Which one of the three people was a real neighbor to the man who was beaten up by robbers?*" Again, the man of the Law answers correctly, "*The one who showed pity.*" Jesus' response is both simple and convicting. Jesus says, "*Go and do the same!*"



In this parable, who was the gift giver? What was the gift? Who received the gift? Who could have given the gift and chose not to? What would have happened to the man if the Samaritan chose not to give the gift? What would have we done in the same situation?



What do the answers to these questions reveal about the priorities of the three men in our parable? What does our answer to what we would have done if we walked along that road reveal about us and our own priorities?

We all hope that we would respond like the Samaritan instead of like the priest and temple helper. The Samaritan practiced loving God and neighbor. It was the Samaritan's natural response to the man in need. In this parable, loving God and neighbor was the priority. For each of us, our relationship with God should also be our first priority. It is not always. God is jealous for our love.

Think for a moment about your wish list this Christmas. What is it you are really hoping for? Look honestly at what you wish for. Those desires of our hearts, those things we long for, often reveal what our true priorities are. Is your list long? Does your list have that new phone or gadget on it? Does the list create stress and worry for those in your life? Or is your list short and for things like family and time together? Reflect on your list and think about this question:



"What would it mean to have a kingdom-centered Christmas list?" What would be on your list if God was at the center of your list? What would your list look like if it better reflected your love for God and neighbor?



We began today by thinking about whose birthday Christmas really is. I asked if you had gotten Jesus a gift yet. What gift do you think Jesus wants from you this Christmas? We know the answer to that question, don't we? The best gift we can

ever give Jesus is ourselves. But it is hard to give ourselves fully to Jesus.

There is fear and doubt and a sense of losing control. We like to be in control.

Where Jesus would lead us if we gave all of ourselves to Him is beyond our best imagination. We are simply called to trust and to follow God's lead. But we do

not know where we will be led or what we will be called upon to do for our God.

Therefore, it is hard to fully give ourselves to God. But we know this is what our

journey of faith leads to. God knows too. This is why God is jealous for our

love. God knows the plans He has for us, plans for our good. God so wants us

to live fully in His will. But we are hesitant. We are fearful. We hold onto the

control. This is why we ask questions like, "Who is my neighbor?"

God is jealous for our love. God wants our love more than anything else in the entire world. So, what distracts you from entering a fully committed relationship

with Jesus? If you are like me, there are a few things on the list. So to begin

thinking about this question of how can we better love Jesus with our whole self

— with heart, soul, strength, and mind - I suggest that we each identify one

thing that we can give up, one thing that we can cede or give to God this year.

To help us frame that thought, please direct your attention to the screens.

[Play video.]

It is sometimes hard to look past our own wants. It is sometimes hard to think of other before self. We also have things we cling to. What is that 'something' in your life that you refuse to give up, but know you should? Are you using it to play tug-of-war with God? Do you give it to God in your morning prayer, only to snatch it back during the day? God is jealous. God wants all of our hearts and all of our lives.

Last week we talked about how our relationship with God through Jesus Christ can be life-changing. The change may begin quickly; it can come in bursts. But more often than not, it is slow, it is one step at a time, and it is hard. It is also a lifelong process. To fully love God and neighbor requires discipline and patience and perseverance. But over time, we will notice change in our lives. We can be patient with ourselves, knowing that God loves us very much.

Instead of *celebrating* Christmas, do you go *through* Christmas, do you *survive* Christmas? Are you frantic? Do you lack a God focus? Maybe busyness is your "thing". If so, this holiday, what activity can you stop doing? What would it mean for you to go through Advent putting Jesus first? How would life be different? How might it affect your family, neighborhood, community, or even the world? What one small step can you take to put Jesus first in your life this Advent season?

God is jealous for our love. All of these are good questions to wrestle with as we move through this Advent season. Let us pray.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

1. Does your Christmas list reflect a God-centered life or a self-centered life?
2. What is it that you need to give up to God this week to allow yourself to draw closer to being fully committed to your relationship with God?
3. Who is the hardest person or group of people for you to be a neighbor to? Pray for God to change your heart to love this neighbor.
4. What can you do to *celebrate* Christmas this year instead of simply going *through* Christmas and going through all the motions?