

DCCCP 7/31/22 Do Unto Others, Love Your Neighbor

Have you ever played the word game when you're on a long drive? We define the word game in our family as someone starts with a word, something they see on the road and the next person has to find something they see on the road that starts with the last letter of the word seen by the first person. Debby seems to always get me stuck with an E and then I can only think of the word estuary. I don't know why. I'm just terrible at that game.

So, I made up another game. We called the synonym game but it really should be called the "something like the other thing" game. It starts with any word you want to try.

Let's say the word spark. The next person has to come up with another way of thinking about the word spark so let's say... idea. Then I have to come up with another way of thinking of the word idea and I say the word brilliant. Well, it can be a little complicated but it keeps me awake on the road.

Thankfully we're not talking about something complicated today. We are actually talking about two biblical phrases, two biblical ideas that are really synonyms of each other.

In Luke 6:31, Jesus tells us to "Do to others as you would have them do to you." And in Mark 12: 31 Jesus tells us that the second most important commandment, after loving God, is to Love your neighbor as yourself.

The common points in these two commands are you and others, you and your neighbor. They really are synonyms of each other.

Do to others as you would have them do to you, love your neighbor as yourself.

Often, caring for others, like scripture commands, is a little like my synonym game. Jesus tells us to do these things as his followers, as an act of spiritual worship. But there is a lot of human support in the world done in the service of human connection and taking care of basic human needs. No thought of God's care and mercy. Both types of service seem the same and they are alike but they are not synonyms of each other. Serving humankind is an act service but not an act of worship. They can be seen as parables of each other.

In our scripture today, Jesus is speaking to a crowd of thousands. Earlier in Luke 12 it says: Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples. But then he starts speaking to that huge crowd, apparently in response to a heckler.

And that guy sounds like a heckler, doesn't he? You could almost hear him getting riled up. "Hey - Do us a little magic there Jesus and get my brother to split the inheritance with me while you are at it! Jesus pays him little attention. Instead, the parable deals with the tendency toward greed on all of our parts. Jesus instead addresses the greed that keeps us from being rich toward God and rich toward others.

What this parable is not saying is that we should fail to strive to excel in our work and our lives and achieve success in the process.

Jesus is not against wealth but as he said, your life is not about the abundance of your possessions. There is nothing wrong with having possessions but just make sure those possessions don't have you. The issue is focus in life that's the problem. Pursue God in life and don't define your life by how much stuff you have, define it instead by how much God you have in your life.¹

Jesus never answers the heckler with his parable. He answers humanity instead. He answers the question posed in Luke 9:25 when he says: For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

The man with the crops and barns doesn't have an inventory problem as much as he has an idol problem; which is a soul problem.

He has an I, me, mine problem as this is all about him. He has a very human problem that needs more focus on God, you, and theirs.

God gives him his life, his prosperous land, his bountiful crops. Yet, he ignores the hand of the creator in his life, in his fortune, and eventually in his death. In fact, he sees his abundance as a dilemma instead of a blessing. There's no consideration for giving to others less fortunate or supporting the needs of the neighbor in need. Instead, says Jesus, apparently, we need more space for more stuff.

¹Clarence Haynes, *What Can We Learn from the Parable of the Rich Fool?*, <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-can-we-learn-from-the-parable-of-the-rich-fool.html> accessed 7/27/22

The concept here is of the human race - with race being a verb instead of a noun – like it's all about getting to the finish line rich and carrying more than we can carry, yet leaving behind what's important.

We were never made to live our lives at 1000 mph; accumulating everything there is to accumulate and failing to see that life actually has purpose defined by our maker. God's ready for us to live that way, and ready to shower blessings on us as we live.

Mal 3: 10 says - Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

A number of people asked me about our adventure in Maine with the youth mission Work Camp 2 weeks ago. Debby and I were up there for 10 days, 8 of which were with the camp staff.

The trip was organized by Group Mission Trips out of Colorado. Ours was one of 22 camps like it all across the country this Summer, the largest being about 450 campers in Erie Pennsylvania. Ours was 254 campers in Dexter Maine.

By the numbers, we had 40 teams of teens and adults deployed across 26 worksites, homes of people in need. The camp did about 7000 hours of work valued at about \$140,000 to the community. And I can guarantee you that every camper there spent money in the community buying pizza and soda and coffee and candy, lots of candy across the week.

Adding 250 people to that small town for a week must have been quite a happy shock.

We also had 11 periods of devotion through the week, looking into God's Word and reflecting on the theme Go Serve. We also joined in 11 services of song and praise and worship across the week. The camp went to bed at 11 o'clock at night and got up at 6:45 every morning.

It was exhausting and it was exhilarating.

As people, we look at parables like the parable of the barns backward. Even though we know it's a story we still first look for its literal truth, like it just happened. And, camp is like a parable to those who attend; it does something to the people who participate that it doesn't directly say in the advertising:

What we expect in a Christian service camp is clear: Gain experience serving those in need, gain spiritual enlightenment, and worship God, meet new people and have fun. Serve, worship, have fun. That's camp.

Get so much more:

What it doesn't say is that it really means learning and experiencing a commitment to service, commitment to God, doing it all with people who are just like you from all across the country, and having life changing experiences you talk about for the rest of your life.

So, I have 2 short stories from camp. 2 Homeowners in need of support. One was a woman who seemed to have means and had a very nice home. It didn't need a lot of repairs and we had to spend time with the kids getting them to understand that need is not always obvious.

The second is of a man clearly destitute and in need. A man with a single-wide trailer on its last legs, stuff everywhere, no electrical supply, no running water, just a trailer. Anyone could see the horrible living situation in that place.

Both of these situations were like a parable. The lessons seemed straightforward but the take away of the experience was certainly not as expected. We will come back to that.

What are our lives supposed to look like as followers of God?

What does it really mean to love your neighbor as yourself, to do unto others, to be, as Jesus says, rich toward God?

Let's put our 2 synonym verses in their context.

In Luke 6 Jesus said: 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great,

and you will be children of the Most-High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

And in Mark 12 Jesus was asked: “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’”

So, there is more to this than just helping someone in need, it is about loving others in a way more than those who don't know God love; it is about loving the Lord your God with heart, soul, mind, and strength and then loving neighbor. It's a God-thing.

As a God-thing, none of this makes any sense or has any value from a spiritual perspective without the experience of a transformed heart, a heart transformed by the Lord Jesus. Without this transformation it all just turns into a couple more things on a list of things we need to do - that we can never full accomplish ever. Jeremiah: I will write my law upon their hearts, a transformed heart.

This is all really a story about the basics. Living a human life should be living a life with love for others. If you are not sure this is true, you are missing the point of this sermon and this book.

The parable in Luke says that it's not about accumulating for the sake of accumulating. We should be good at the basics, very, very good. As my football coach used to say, we should major in the minors, and then all those big idea things become really obvious. Like what God calls the Greatest commandments and what we call the Golden rule. That's a great start.

But then, to stick with a football metaphor, the teaching from Colossians is like advancing the ball. In our experience of salvation with Christ, in our baptism, in our membership with the Christian family, we are made different. Our lives are stories of change and growth, in who we are and who we are to become.

At camp, the woman with the nice home, as it turns out, had a debilitating illness that would likely take her life in the next couple of years. She could not do anything to improve her lot in life or her house. She said in effect: “I will die in this house with whatever you do here.” The kids grew to love her deeply and everyone’s life was changed in the experience. Her life was an unexpected parable of need.

In the case of the man with the rundown trailer, he said matter-of-factly: I just want to get the job done so I can take it with me. He really just wanted a deck and ramp put on his place to improve his value and to have those kids build him a new barn. We ended up pulling the materials off of that job and building a beautiful ramp for a woman in need 10 miles away. His life was an unexpected parable of excess.

And as different people, set apart from the world, when faced with life we are told to set our minds above, to think as Christ would think in everything we do and not to focus on earthly things, like building bigger barns. We are actually, quite literally, taking off our old self and putting on a new image and experience of life in Christ. It’s more than just putting on a new jacket, it’s putting on a new skin. It’s also clear in reading Colossians today that this new life as a Christian it’s not merely a matter of putting away our vices and picking up new virtues.

None of this happens in an instant with us because, when part of our soul is looking for God another part of our soul is running away from God.

The new in us, even with the help of a good God, happens over time, like from one Sunday to the next, from one quilt to the next, from one relay for life to the next, or from one work camp to then next.

It’s never just an improvement in our life from day one.² Yet, if we are patient with Jesus, Christ will be patient with us and change us, one parable at a time.³

May the Lord be so gracious.

Amen

² Marion Soards, Exegetical Perspective, 309

³ David Gray, Pastoral Perspective, 306.