

Love and Eternal Life Luke 10:25-37

One of the subjects the Bible talks about a lot is the topic of salvation. It's obviously extremely important and the central message of the Bible. Humans are sinners, separated from a holy God, helpless to save ourselves, and the central message of the Bible is how God reconciles lost humanity to himself. It's extremely important at a personal level because we're talking about the difference between heaven and hell for ourselves and for the ones we love.

But as important as it is, salvation is often confusing, misunderstood, and disagreed upon, especially when it comes to faith and works. Different passages of Scripture seem to be contradictory. And people have huge arguments over how a person is saved. Many have actually suffered and died because of it. Wars have been fought over it. Churches have been split.

After centuries of these kinds of divisions we find ourselves here at East Lincoln – we are part of an evangelical tradition, so we strongly emphasize salvation by grace through faith alone and not by works. But other churches are very different. Some put a strong emphasis on baptism and confirmation as necessary for salvation. Some insist on observing Sacraments. Some lean heavily on the sign of speaking in tongues. Some go the other direction and are so adamant that salvation is entirely by grace through faith alone that they argue that works have nothing to do with it. As long as you believe it doesn't matter how you live your life when it comes to salvation.

We might have all these traditions in our backgrounds, yet here we are together this Sunday morning. And our text for today addresses these things. My hope is that we will come away with a clearer understanding of salvation, especially the relationship between faith and works.

We are in Luke 10 which contains a few stories about Jesus' ministry in the time between the feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication – a period of about 2½ months in the fall and early winter of Jesus' last year of ministry. Luke is the only one who records these things. Jesus and his disciples were doing ministry in the towns and villages of Judea, which is the region around Jerusalem. We saw two weeks ago that Jesus sent 72 disciples out in these places to prepare the people for his coming. They returned with joy and told Jesus about all that had

happened and today we pick up from there. Luke records a well-known conversation that Jesus had with a lawyer who was trying to test him.

Read Luke 10:25.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

This is the most important question any of us can ask. Deep inside we know that God is real. Sin is real. Hell is real. But salvation is real as well. Heaven is real – eternal life. And because of that, this is the most important question of our lives.

How would you answer that question? What are you relying on for eternal life? What are you relying on to be saved from God's wrath and condemnation for your sin? Is it faith? Believing in Jesus? Is it that you prayed the sinners prayer when you were 6 years old or asked Jesus into your heart? Or maybe you're relying on your baptism and confirmation? Attendance at church? Obedience to God's commands? Speaking in tongues?

What do we need to do to inherit eternal life? That's the question this lawyer is asking.

Now, this lawyer was an expert in the law – that's what lawyers are – and in that context, the law was the first five books of the Bible – the Pentateuch. This contained the law of Moses and the covenant God made with Israel. So the man asking this question was an expert in this, which is why instead of answering his question, Jesus turned it around and asked him.

Read Luke 10:26.

He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

What does the Bible say? Let's see what this biblical expert is going to say.

Read Luke 10:27.

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."

This is a quote from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 and was his summary of what he saw in the Bible after years of study and devotion to it. This is the same answer Jesus gave later on when a different lawyer asked him what the greatest commandment was. But, is this lawyer right? Is that how he could inherit eternal life?

If you're coming from a strong evangelical perspective, you would probably have some problems with this, because he doesn't say anything about faith. We believe salvation is by grace through faith alone – not by works – even the good work of love. Faith is what unites us with Christ and everything he's accomplished for us in his life, death, and resurrection. Christ alone lived a perfect life of obedience. Christ alone was able to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. And Christ alone can give us eternal life because he was raised from the dead and lives today. And there's one thing that unites us with him and gives us access to all he is and all he's done for us, and that's faith.

John 3:16 says: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* Ephesians 2:8-9 says: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* Romans 3:28 says, *"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."* John 1:12 says: *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* And when someone asked Paul and Silas the exact same question, here's what we're told in Acts 16:30-31: *"Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

So even though the lawyer was a biblical expert and had a good answer, he had missed the critical element of faith. His answer therefore had to be wrong. It's not love, it's faith. Here's how Jesus responded.

Read Luke 10:28.

And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

That's confusing... "You're correct; go and love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself, and you will live. You will inherit eternal life. You will be saved." How can that be? What about faith? Isn't

this salvation by works? This seems to contradict what we believe and what the Bible says. How are we supposed to understand Jesus' answer here?

Well the conversation continued and gives us some clues that will help us understand these things. The lawyer heard Jesus affirm his answer and rather than just walking away, he followed it up with another question.

Read Luke 10:29-37

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ 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. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

The first and second most religious people in their society – the priest and Levite – veered to the other side of the road. They didn't want to have contact with a dead body, probably because they didn't want to become ceremonially unclean. They believed in God and were religious, but they didn't love their neighbor. And the implication in this context is that they would not inherit eternal life.

But the Samaritan, who was an outcast in their society, hated by Jews and assumed to be a pagan who would never inherit eternal life, he was the one who actually loved his neighbor and the implication is that he would inherit eternal life. So the ones who didn't show love to their neighbor would not inherit eternal life even though they believed in God, but the one who actually loved, would, even though he was a Samaritan outcast. Jesus said his love proved he was a neighbor to the man in need, which, based on the earlier part of the conversation, proved that he loved his neighbor and would inherit eternal life. His love was proof. So in Jesus mind it wasn't love that saved him, but it was love that proved

that he would be saved. That gives us a clue as to what Jesus was thinking that can help us understand these things.

We see this same idea in other passages written by men who knew Jesus' teaching and doctrine and new why Jesus would say what he did to the lawyer. The first is John, the beloved disciple. John wrote a few letters, and in his first letter he addresses this issue very thoroughly.

Read 1 John 3:9-10.

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

John is talking about what happens to a person when they are born of God, or born again. We know that a person has to be born again to enter the Kingdom of heaven. John wrote about that when he recorded a conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus. In these verses, John is saying that it's clear who has been born of God – they won't continue to live in sin. He's not saying they will never sin again, but they won't continue to have a sinful lifestyle – they can't. Why? Because God's seed abides in them – that's the Holy Spirit.

When a person is born again the Holy Spirit takes up residence in their heart and they are fundamentally different. Their spiritual DNA has changed and they cannot continue in a lifestyle of sin. The Holy Spirit inside of them brings conviction and repentance. It isn't instant, overnight perfection – but it's the beginning of a lifelong process of transformation. And notice what John pinpoints at the end of verse 10... he specifically mentions love – the one who does not love his brother is not of God.

A few verses later, in 1 John 3:14, it says this: *"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death."* So again he specifically mentions love and that if we love the brothers we can know that we have passed out of death into life – sounds very much like what Jesus was saying to the lawyer. Love proves life.

John repeats this idea a few verses later. I John 3:16-18 says, *“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”* Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan ties in exactly with this. The priest and Levite and perhaps the lawyer could say that they loved their neighbor, but if they didn't stop to help their neighbor on the side of the road, they don't really have love. God's love is not abiding in them which means God's seed, or Spirit is not abiding in them, which means they are not born of God or born again, and they will not inherit eternal life. Love or the lack thereof is the proof of these things. (cf. 1 John 4:7-21).

So that's all about love, but how does faith fit into this? To understand this, I want to look at what James wrote. James was the brother of Jesus, and he addresses the relationship between faith and works, including love, in a letter he wrote. Read James 2:14-26: *“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”*

As evangelicals we rightly believe that you can't be saved by works without faith, but you also can't be saved by faith without works. When Paul wrote to a church that was relying too much on works and the ritual of circumcision, he said this in

Galatians 5:6: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” Faith doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It always works itself out through love. The same Spirit that produces faith also produces love and good works – that’s God’s seed abiding in us. So if there is true, saving faith that has been born of God’s Spirit, there will also be love and good works.

So when Jesus told the lawyer, “Yes, if you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and if you love your neighbor as yourself, you will inherit eternal life,” he wasn't preaching heresy or a different gospel. He was preaching these things. He was telling him that if he truly loved God and loved his neighbor, it would prove that he had been born of God and that his faith was real.

And for you and I, when we ask ourselves: What must I do to inherit eternal life? We must take all of these things into account and not just look at whether or not we have faith. Yes, we must have faith, but we must also have love. These don’t save us – only Christ saves – because even if we have faith and love, they will be weak and imperfect, but they are evidence that Christ is alive in us and that we have eternal life.