

The Good Samaritan

“Behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

—Luke 10:25

MANY OF THE RICH TREASURES of truth revealed by Jesus were set forth by him in response to questions asked by the religious leaders of his day. An example of this is the parable of the good Samaritan. This para-

ble was prompted by the question contained in our opening scripture, asked by “a certain lawyer” of the Jews, probably a Levite. Here the temptation, spoken of in our text, was to induce Jesus to say something that could be misconstrued as being against the Law given to Israel by Moses.

Jesus, however, turned the question back to the lawyer, asking him what the Law said. (Luke 10:26) The lawyer was well acquainted with the Law, and he quoted Moses’ own summation of it: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” (vs. 27; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18) Jesus replied to the

lawyer, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”—Luke 10:28; Lev. 18:5

Jesus knew that God had promised to anyone who could keep this commandment of the Law inviolate, “thou shalt live.” By answering the lawyer’s question in this way, the religious rulers could not accuse him of setting aside the teachings of Moses. Jesus knew, of course, that the lawyer could not actually gain eternal life by his efforts to keep the Law. This was not the fault of the Law, but was due to the imperfection of the people, resulting from original Adamic sin. As Paul explained, the Law was designed to give life, but failed only because of the inability of fallen humans to measure up to its requirements.—Rom. 7:10-14

SIMILAR QUESTION FROM A YOUNG RULER

Jesus, who was able to read the hearts of his opponents, knew that the lawyer was not sincerely inquiring about the way leading to life. Had he been, doubtless the Master would have directed his mind beyond the Law as a source of life. He did do this in the case of the rich young ruler, who asked him essentially the same question as did the lawyer. (Matt. 19:16-26; Luke 18:18-30) In answer to the young man’s question, Jesus said, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”

Then the young man asked, “Which?” Jesus quoted some of the Ten Commandments, and also the one, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” The young man claimed that he had been keeping these commandments. Evidently, he had been sincerely trying. Mark’s account informs us that Jesus loved this young man, and replying to him said, “One

thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”—Mark 10:21

Because this young man was earnestly seeking the way of life, Jesus introduced him to the only way that would be open during the Gospel Age. It was to be a costly, narrow, and difficult way. It was a way to life that, first of all, would lead into death, as symbolized by the cross. The young man, having great possessions, did not find it in his heart to make the great sacrifice outlined by the Master, so with some regret “he went away sorrowful.” (Matt. 19:22) However, Jesus did present the opportunity to him, and even emphasized the heavenly nature of the life the young man would receive if he accepted the Master’s invitation and proved faithful unto death. “Thou shalt have treasure in heaven,” Jesus said.—vs. 21

Going back now to the account of the lawyer and his question as to how he might inherit eternal life, he could find no fault with the reply Jesus gave. After all, Jesus had referred him back to the Law, and he was of the group which professed great loyalty to the Law. Wishing, however, to perhaps justify himself in the sight of his friends, he asked Jesus for a clarification of the commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” He asked, “Who is my neighbour?”—Luke 10:29

THE PARABLE GIVEN

It was in response to this question that Jesus related the parable of the good Samaritan. In this parable, a “certain man” traveling from Jerusalem

to Jericho “fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.” (Luke 10:30) Then a “certain priest,” traveling the same route, noticed the robbed and wounded man. Instead of stopping to assist the unfortunate one, however, the priest “passed by on the other side.” “Likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.”—vss. 31,32

Here were two people who, according to their standing as religious servants, should have shown compassion for the robbed and beaten man, regardless of who he may have been, but they did not. They “passed by on the other side,” as though to ease their conscience by not getting too close a look at the suffering man, and that he might suppose they had not seen him or heard his cries for help.

The parable continues by saying there was “a certain Samaritan” who, “as he journeyed,” also came across the man who had been robbed and nearly killed. The Israelites despised the Samaritans, who, so far as they were concerned, were not God’s people at all. This made the lesson of the parable all the more pointed to Israel’s religious leaders, to whom it was first addressed, for this despised Samaritan did show compassion for the man lying almost dead by the roadside. He bound up the man’s wounds, “pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” He even arranged for the innkeeper to continue caring for the man, promising to pay any balance of the bill when he returned that way.—vss. 33-35

A TRUE NEIGHBOR

After relating the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer which one of these three men was “neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves.” There was only one answer the lawyer could give, which was that the man who showed mercy was the real neighbor. Then Jesus said to the lawyer, “Go, and do thou likewise.” In other words, Jesus told the lawyer that if he manifested the same spirit of compassion and helpfulness toward those in need, as the Samaritan did, he would be fulfilling the commandment to love his neighbor as himself.—vss. 36,37

When the lawyer quoted the Law correctly, Jesus said to him, “This do, and thou shalt live.” Jesus did not imply by his response that the lawyer could gain eternal life apart from the provisions of the ransom. It was simply that Jesus did not consider it the due time to explain that feature of God’s plan to this man, who he knew was merely seeking to find something against him.

FAITH AND WORKS REQUIRED

No one can gain life, either in this age or in the age to come, apart from faith in the shed blood of the Redeemer. Additionally, however, as James wrote, “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17,20,26) This means that one’s life—their words and actions—must be brought into conformity with faith in the ransom to fully prove obedience to divine law. As we have seen, in the present age it is God’s will that believers lay down their lives in sacrifice, following in the footsteps of Jesus. It is thus that they demonstrate faith—by their conduct associated with a life of sacrifice.

The great principles of the Law given by Moses are binding upon these, but in addition Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you." (John 13:34; 15:12,17) Jesus' love for his disciples, and indeed for the whole world, led him to lay down his life in sacrifice on their behalf, and his faithful followers are "planted together in the likeness of his death." (Rom. 6:5) It is thus that they demonstrate their wholehearted love for the Heavenly Father, and for the Lord Jesus.

As we have noted, when Jesus invited the rich young ruler to give up all that he had in sacrifice, he said he would receive "treasure in heaven." The "calling" of the present age is a heavenly one. (Heb. 3:1) Those who meet the conditions of this call by being faithful unto death will attain "glory and honour and immortality." (Rom. 2:7) They will be made like Jesus and share with him the place which he went away to prepare following his First Advent.—John 14:1-3; I John 3:1-3

During the next age—the period in which will be the "restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21)—those who attain eternal life will also need to accept the provision of life made for them through the redemptive work of Christ. They, too, will have to conform to the laws of God as they will be expressed through the agencies of the Messianic kingdom. As we see then, God's law, in principle, never changes. During the coming kingdom it will be essential for all who attain life eternal to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and also to love their neighbors as themselves, even as set forth by Moses.

ANOTHER ILLUSTRATION

A further illustration of these principles is brought to our attention in the parable of the sheep and the goats. (Matt. 25:31-46) The “sheep” in this parable represent those who will gain eternal life during the kingdom period, or judgment “day.” (Acts 17:31) To these, Jesus (represented by the “King” of the parable) said, “I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”—Matt. 25:35,36

Note the similarity of these good deeds mentioned by Jesus to those performed by the good Samaritan. It is clear that these “sheep” of the parable had imbibed the true spirit of divine law. They had seen opportunities for helping those in need, and they grasped those opportunities. They had done this so wholeheartedly, and it was so much a part of their nature to act in this manner, that they were not even aware that they had done anything different or extraordinary.

In the parable, the “sheep,” the “righteous,” replied to the King, “When saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?” The King’s reply was, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”—vss. 37-40

The “least” of the King’s [Jesus’] brethren are those of the kingdom period who will believe, obey,

and attain to eternal life as humans. The parable thus clearly indicates that the righteous of that time will be those who become filled with the spirit of the divine law and delight in extending a helping hand to those of their fellow-man, their “brethren,” in need. Thus they will be in heart harmony with the work of the Lord being accomplished at that time, which will be the writing of the divine law in the hearts of the people.—Jer. 31:31-34

ALL WILL BECOME NEIGHBORS

All of this is implied in Jesus’ statement to the lawyer to the effect that if he kept God’s Law as it had been summed up by the great lawgiver, Moses, he would have eternal life. Jesus did not then explain that a truly favorable opportunity to do this would not be offered until the kingdom, the period of the “restitution of all things.” The lawyer was not then ready to receive further truths than what Jesus imparted to him. We can now, however, rejoice to realize that all will be given an opportunity, and all the needed assistance, when the due time comes, to practice the divine law of love. All who will live forever on the earth will become true neighbors to one another—good Samaritans—in a worldwide paradise. ■