



July 10th

THE NEW SHOFAR

You never touch the ocean of God's love as much as when you forgive your enemies

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We can know the truth of our relationship with God only by the way we speak and act and by the way we ponder life *in our hearts* where God speaks. This is also the only way others can know of our relationship with God. It is by the way God finds His way out from our hearts and into our words. What we do and say to others and what we say about others is the only reliable way of ascertaining whether or not it is truly God who is directing our hearts. The moment we build limitations into love, apply conditions or exclude anyone at all we have isolated ourselves from God and no longer share in His divine blessings.

The Question by the lawyer

The question by the lawyer in our Gospel appears to be far from innocent. He would have known the answer to the question he asks as he was a trained expert in the Law of Moses. Every Jew would have known that one's neighbour was a fellow Jew. The Gentiles were pagans, the enemy of Israel and were not to be trusted. They would have included the Samaritans in this outlook or perhaps even considered them worse than unbelievers.

Importantly, his answer to Jesus is perfect. Every aspect of our lives needs to be tuned to loving and obeying God. We are to go about our daily activities with God in our hearts and as we have already seen, having God in our hearts will mean we manifest God in our thoughts, words and deeds. Note too the way none of the Deuteronomic laws speak of limits on this whole-of-life obedience. It is not a love for some but not others. It is a universal command.

We should remember too the absolute nature of this unconditional love required of believers...*'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.* This love is not something to be turned on and off according to our own preferences. It is with all my strength, mind, heart and soul. All of me. Nothing less is acceptable to God. Our hands, our feet, our mouths are the only hands, feet and mouths God has in this world. Our loving is a mission of ministry.

The priest and the Levite

With these two characters we have the fullness of our human connection with God – the sacrificial life in the Temple and the Torah, the Law. They represent the Judaism of the time of Jesus. They were coming from Jerusalem, presumably from the performance of their duties in the Holy City and the Temple. On that notoriously dangerous road they met with disaster, a catastrophe all too common at the time. Most Jewish readers hearing the parable would have presumed they had been attacked by Samaritans as they were the biggest threat to travellers.

For Jesus, it is important to stress how each of these travellers first *saw the man*. Their decisions were informed by their observations. They could not claim they had not seen him. They saw. They then moved to the others side of the road. They then passed by. They did not have the luxury of being able to say they presumed he was only drunk, or asleep, or the victim of some minor mishap. He had been *beaten, stripped and left half dead*. He needed assistance. All of this had passed through their minds before they made their decision and moved on with their journeys. In their self-righteousness, they considered themselves to be liberated from fulfilling the tough demands of the law.

The Samaritan

Into the story comes the Samaritan. He too saw the man in the gutter and his first reaction was *to be moved with compassion*. Instead of passing by, he went up to the man and carried out a succession of actions illustrating the depth of his compassion and unconditional love. Nothing was too much for him and he even promised to return to the inn and check up on the man's return to health. Whatever of the cost, he would ensure this strange Jew was cared for.

At the opening of the parable Jesus does not give any information about the man who was assaulted. He was simply *a man*. A universal figure representing every man and women in creation. His unfortunate circumstances signifying those moments in our lives and in the lives of others that leave us feeling beaten, vulnerable and rejected by those more fortunate. Imagine his feelings in seeing the priest and Levite look at him and then walk on. Abandon him.

We are both the man in the ditch and the Samaritan

We are absorbed into both of these men because we are both in need of love and responsible for giving love. This parable comes as a scathing condemnation of those who “pass on by” when love is demanded. They want to pick and choose who is worthy of their love but Christ will have nothing of such unworthy loving. The only way to be a faithful Christian is to live and love as the Samaritan lived and loved.