

The Answer to Life's Greatest Question, Part 3

Luke 10:25-29

42-143

Well again this morning we have the opportunity to return to the wonderful gospel of Luke, now becoming beloved to us because of its revelation of the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ. Chapter 10; and this would be message number three in the section we've called, "Finding Eternal Life." Luke 10 verses 25 through 29. We come to this passage again with great anticipation. It is a jewel of a text that shines especially brightly amid all the other diamonds in Luke's setting here. Let me read it to you starting in verse 25.

"And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?' And he answered and said, '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.' And He said to him, 'You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.' But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

Now, as we have already noted if you've been with us, you've heard me say it, the key to this text is the question that appears in the first verse, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This is about eternal life and that is the compelling question. What we have here is Jesus in a discussion about the most important question that can ever be asked or answered, the question about eternal life. This lawyer knew that was the most important question. He knew because he was a scribe. That's what a lawyer was in those days. He was also called a scribe. He was an expert in the Old Testament Law, the Mosaic law, and the Judaistic laws and traditions. And he knew about eternal life. He knew that when Adam sinned, he lost not just physical immortality, but he lost eternal life. That is, he lost full fellowship with God and a perfect world. And he knew that not only had Adam forfeited eternal life in the Fall, but he had caused the whole of humanity to forfeit eternal life. The Jews knew that. They knew that the law of God, which was God's holy standard for those who would possess eternal life, was beyond their keeping. It was beyond possibility to obey the law. So they too were in danger of losing eternal life. It was lost in the Fall for all humanity. It could not be regained in keeping the law perfectly because no person could keep the law.

They knew God had promised an eternal kingdom. They knew God had promised a seed who would come, a seed who would bruise the serpent's head, a seed who would be a Son to the Father, a seed who would come and take a kingdom and rule it forever and ever, an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom of righteousness, a kingdom of peace, a kingdom of infinite and eternal blessing. He knew that after life there would be the next life and that that life was an eternal life, that there was a resurrection unto life of which Daniel wrote and the psalmist wrote. And he wanted to be a possessor of that eternal life. He wanted to live in that eternal kingdom under the dominion of God's Messiah, God's anointed King. He wanted to live forever in God's presence. He wanted to be a part of paradise regained; the eternal bliss of the heavenly presence of God forever.

And so, we said that in evangelism, here we see a critical initial necessity and that is concern for eternal life. That is the matter that we're engaged in, in the proclamation of the gospel. It's about eternal life. It's not about fixing this life, it's about eternal life. And it was a gnawing question among the Jews because they knew of this promise. Consequently this question is asked numerous times on the pages of the gospel record in Matthew several times, in Mark once, in Luke once, and in John it is asked or virtually asked by a whole crowd of people, the very huge crowd that Jesus had fed there in the 6th chapter. It was on their minds.

They tried to quiet their consciences by attempting to keep the law ceremonially, to keep the law externally, to be like Paul in Philippians 3, blameless on the outside. But there was that painful reality of conscience, that painful awareness on the inside that no matter how good people looking on the outside thought they were, they knew their own hearts were not circumcised, their own hearts were not pure. They knew they were wicked and sinful. It was in their thoughts. It was in their motives. It was in their desires, their lusts, their dreams, their ambitions.

So the question was a common one. Even though superficially they thought that it was likely they were going to end up in heaven, it was likely they would be possessors of eternal life

because they were Jewish, they were circumcised, they kept the ceremonies and the traditions. Still the nagging reality of conscience was a fear that because their own hearts were so evil and they knew that because the spirit of a man knows what's in a man, they feared they didn't have eternal life. And so this lawyer articulates what was a prevailing question on the hearts of many: Are we fit for the kingdom? And that is, if you'll remember, why John the Baptist who came as the forerunner to the Messiah went out into wilderness and was preaching repentance. And if all the Jews believed that their Judaism and their circumcision and their ceremony saved them, nobody would have shown up to hear his message about repentance but the Bible says, "All Judea and all Jerusalem came to hear a man preaching about the coming of Messiah and calling for a baptism of repentance," which again illustrates that on the surface they were legalists hoping in their legalism but underneath they knew their own hearts and they knew how desperately they needed to repent. And that's why they all came, to hear the message of repentance and to be baptized by John, including rabbis, scribes, Pharisees. And you remember, John questioned the legitimacy of their desire for baptism, questioned the integrity of their hearts when he called them snakes doing nothing but running to the water to try to escape God's judgment like snakes running into the river from a brush fire.

Nonetheless, they had a concern about eternal life. And I told you the last couple of weeks that is the essential ingredient in effective evangelism is that someone cares about eternal life. One of the evangelical leaders with whom everybody is familiar was on television this week and was asked the question about Christianity and what Christians were trying to communicate, and just answered with a basic answer that we want to show the world something that works. We don't want to show the world something that works. What does that mean? Works in this life? If you're a Buddhist, Buddhism works. If you're a Muslim, Islam works. If you're an atheist, atheism works. Once you commit yourself to the belief system, you live it out. But Christianity is not about this life, it's not about something that makes this life better, as we've been saying. It's about eternal life. The issue of Christianity is we have a faith based upon a true revelation that is going to provide for sinners eternal life instead of eternal death, eternal joy instead of eternal pain, eternal blessing instead of eternal punishment.

And so, the first point that we learn here about effective evangelism is: The person has to have a

recognition of eternal life. So if you're going to be dealing with somebody about the gospel, they have to be on the wavelength of matters that are eternal. And in the modern era, that's a challenge because materialism, humanism, atheism all come together to sort of convince people that this life is all there is, we're just protoplasm waiting to become manure. When it's over, it's over. This is all there is. You go into the box, you disintegrate. And from the time you die, you have no conscious existence whatsoever; therefore what interest do you have in the next life? What fear do you have of eternal punishment? What anticipation could you have of eternal joy if this is all there is? If we are nothing more than the top of the biological food chain, if we're nothing more than the max level of current evolution and all we are is material, then all of this means absolutely nothing. But if there is an afterlife and there is, preparing for that afterlife which lasts forever should be everyone's primary concern.

The man in the story, like all the Jews, was a believer in eternal life. All the Greeks were believers in eternal life. All the Romans were believers in eternal life. All that other materialism, humanism and atheism is a modern invention of man and it's not a rational invention. It didn't come out of his understanding of the universe, it is a moral invention, or if you like, an immoral invention. Desiring to get rid of any implications for his wretchedness, any future judgment or punishment for his sin he does away with God and therefore is free to do what he wants without consequences. It is not born of his understanding of the universe, it's irrational. It's not born of his understanding of reality. It is born of his love for sin.

So when we come to the gospel, the gospel is not offering a happy, pain-free life in this world, it's not offering successful marriages and family life and careers, etc., etc. It's talking about eternity. So, first of all, we began, didn't we, number one: a recognition of eternal life. Number two: motivation for eternal life. The man had the motivation, verse 25, he stands up, he puts Jesus to the test, testing whether Jesus' theology was accurate, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He knew the answer. We pointed that out last time. He knew the answer. He was a scribe. He was expert in the law of Judaism. He knew exactly what the answer was.

But it was a very personal question, "What shall I do? What shall I do?" And I think this is important for us so that we know the intent. I told you a couple of weeks ago that, you know, sometimes these scribes came... They were counsel to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus in some kind of a violation of the law so they could condemn Him to death and execute Him, which they eventually did. And they would use the scribes who were the experts of the law to find the violations by which they could indict Jesus. There were occasions when this question was asked with that in mind.

For example, in Matthew 22 verse 34, "When the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence," He did that frequently, "they gathered themselves together." So they had a little meeting and out of that meeting, it says, verse 35, "One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?'" Now you notice here in a different occasion, a different incident, the same issue comes up: What is the great commandment in the law? What is God's great requirement? What is it that God ultimately requires, implication, for us to be in His kingdom? To possess eternal life, of course, is implied. And Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind," and then He added, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," being the second commandment.

Here clearly this lawyer comes as an emissary of the Pharisees who want to catch Jesus in some

advocacy that violates the law, so it's not a personal question. The lawyer asks a generic question: Which is the great commandment? In that particular occasion you have an illustration of the lawyer coming as an emissary asking a theological question with the intention of indicting Jesus. "Which is the great commandment?" is an impersonal, theological question. Compare that with the question here, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And the whole picture takes on a different tone. This is not about a generic theological discussion; this is primarily about a man who wants personal information. What do I need to do to inherit? That is, by the way, a commonly used word with the future kingdom of God, 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:21 uses it, because it looks to the future kingdom. Inheritance is down the road, isn't it? It's down the road after the current life of whoever is going to pass their wealth on to you. You don't inherit it until after their life is over. And so the next life isn't inherited until after this life is over. That's why the word "inherit" is used.

Now the question indicates that he understood individual salvation and he understood human responsibility. What do I do? Which means salvation is a personal thing, even within the framework of Judaism. He knew that he had to have it personally in his own life. And he takes responsibility to do something. What must I do?

Evangelism then requires two things: a recognition of eternal life and a motivation to receive it. That is how we evangelize. You have to get to that point. We can't evangelize on a superficial level about issues in this life.

Then we, thirdly, came to, last time, a discussion of the complexion of eternal life, recognition and motivation and complexion, meaning the complex, the order, the nature, the structure. What is eternal life? What are we talking about if we're going to inherit eternal life?

Well Jesus turns the table, verse 26, and asks him a question, "What is written in the law?" You know the law. And then He says, "How does it read to you?" Or better translated: "How do you read it every day? Or, how do you recite it?" And I told you last time that out of the Torah, the five books of Moses, in which these lawyers were expert, there was one portion of Scripture, the 6th chapter of Deuteronomy verses 4 and 5 that was known as the Shema and it was believed to be the summary of the whole law. The Ten Commandments is a summary of the law, in a sense, because all of the law of God if you just took all of God's revealed law in the Pentateuch, all of that revealed law, it would either relate to men, people relating to people, or it would relate to God, people relating to God. Those are the only two categories of relationships we have. How we relate to one another and how we relate to God.

If you summed up all that law, all the law of human relations and all the law of divine relations, you could sum them up in Ten Commandments. If you obey the commandments, the first half of the Ten Commandments, how you relate to God, you obey the second half of the Ten Commandments, how you relate to men, you will therefore by obeying the summary of the law obey all the law because it's all summarized in the Ten Commandments and it's summarized even more briefly in loving God perfectly and loving your neighbor perfectly. If you loved God perfectly, you'd never violate God in any way, you'd never do anything against His will. If you loved your neighbor perfectly, you'd never violate your neighbor. So they knew that everything God said reduced down to Ten Commandments, reduced down to two commandments. He knew that. He was an expert in the law. The law was drawn out of Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." And then added to that was Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." They knew that completed the whole Law.

In fact, in Mark 12:28 to 34, Jesus had a similar conversation with a different lawyer, different scribe. And the scribe and Jesus were talking about the same thing and Jesus answered the question, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength," and the scribe said, "Right, Teacher, you have truly stated." So he knew the answer. Jesus knew he knew the answer, they all knew the answer.

So in verse 27 what does the scribe say? He answered and said, he gave the right answer, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." "With all your" is repeated four times so nobody misses the fact that He's calling for a perfect love, with nothing left out, nothing omitted, nothing diminished; comprehensive, complete, supreme, unmixed, perfect love for God with all your human faculties, and the same kind of love toward your neighbor. You want to be in God's kingdom? Jesus said, love God perfectly and love others perfectly. That's what God requires for eternal life. That love would be demonstrated by perfect, unwavering trust in God, perfect devotion to God, that is to His will and His Word, perfect fellowship with God, never ever violated, never broken, never interrupted, perfect humility before God without any taint of pride whatsoever, perfect obedience to every law that God had ever revealed, perfect, perfect hatred of sin, perfect satisfaction and delight in God's presence, perfect affection for the truth, perfect everything.

Is that possible? Of course it's not possible. "By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified." It's impossible. And yet the Old Testament reinforces the standard. "Delight yourself in the Lord." "Delight yourself in the Lord," that's the requirement. This is what God commands. Love Him perfectly. Love others consummately with the same kind of love that you love yourself. That is to say, give to people the same kind of attention you give yourself. Nobody does that and yet that's the standard Jesus established.

An interesting approach to evangelism, frankly; I mean, most of us would never have answered the question that way. If somebody came to you and said, "What do I do to inherit eternal life?" we would jump immediately to, "Oh, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," wouldn't we? I mean, we wouldn't get into this kind of a discussion. But before a person can receive eternal life on God's terms, they have to understand their true condition because you can't receive eternal life apart from repentance. And you can't repent truly and genuinely until you know of what you must repent. And it's not necessarily possible for you to go back through your whole life and try to think of everything you've ever done that should be repented of, but it's a pretty simple thing to say, "I do not love God the way I ought to love God and I do not love others the way I ought to love others. I fall short. My love for God is...is woefully failing and inadequate. My love for others is the same. And therefore I have fallen short of the divine standard." That's not difficult to understand, right? So it's not a matter of sorting through somebody's life and trying to balance off the good with the bad. You know, people think, "Well, you know, I'm a good person, I do more good than I do bad and I think God's going to let me in heaven because I'm basically a good person and, you know, I try to take care of my little space in the world and, you know, pick up trash and take care of my kids and be nice to my wife and give to charity and whatever, whatever, whatever." It's not about that. That's what some theologians call "bad good." It might be on the surface good, on the earthly surface good, but underlying motivation isn't divine.

The bottom line is you're going to hell forever if you don't love God perfectly and love your neighbor the way you love yourself and no one can do that. No one can do that. Verse 28 then, Jesus said to him, "You've answered correctly." You are responsible now because you knew the answer. And then

Jesus quoted Leviticus 18:5, "Do this and you will live." That is what the law says: "Do this and you will live." In Leviticus 18:4, "You are to perform My judgments, keep My statutes, live in accord with them." Verse 5, "You shall keep My statutes and My judgments by which a man may live if he does them." You want to live? Keep My laws.

Well I don't know if I can keep all Your laws? Okay, just keep the summation of the law. Love Me perfectly and then you won't ever violate the part of the Law that relates to Me, and love your neighbor perfectly and you won't ever violate the Law that relates to him. So perfect love fulfills the Law, isn't that Romans 13? Isn't that what Paul said? Paul understood that perfectly well. "Do this and you will live," Leviticus 18:5. That's not an isolated verse. As I was thinking about that this week I kind of tracked my way through the Old Testament. Listen to Deuteronomy 6:25, "And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment." You want righteousness for you? Then obey all the commandments.

Over in the wonderful book of Nehemiah and the 9th chapter and the 29th verse, "Admonish them, they were admonished in order to turn them back to Thy law, yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Thy commandments but sinned against Thine ordinances," listen to this line, "by which if a man observes them, he shall live." And that's just three samples of several places in the Old Testament. You want to live? Keep the law. You want to keep the law? Simplest way to keep the Law without having to worry about every little commandment is to love God perfectly and love your neighbor perfectly, and if you've done that, you'll live. That's where you want to take the sinner. You want to take the sinner to a point where he has absolutely no escape. He can't weigh off his good stuff with his bad stuff. He can't weigh off some kind of relativism, measuring himself against somebody else. He can't say, "Well I really haven't committed the big things, I never murdered anybody," etc., etc. Maybe he never committed adultery or whatever.

The problem is you aren't loved God perfectly always, nor have you loved your neighbor the way you have loved yourself. And so, Paul records the final indictment. "All have sinned and fall (what?) short of the glory of God." All have sinned. Galatians 3 puts it another way, but it's basically the same indictment, "As many as of are the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them.'" So that's where you want to get the sinner. You don't love God perfectly and that's obvious because you don't perfectly obey His revelation and you don't love others perfectly, and that's obvious because you are selfish.

Now our Lord here is not telling this man how to get saved, He's saying this is how you would have to be to be saved by the law. Keep it or die. And the wages of sin is death. Not just physical death but spiritual death and eternal death. So when we evangelize people we... We're confronting them with the true complexion of eternal life, the true order of eternal life. It belongs to those who love God perfectly. By the way, when we all get to heaven, guess what? We'll all love God this way and we'll all love each other this way. That's what perfection will be. So if you want one defining attitude that will prevail in heaven, it is perfect love going all the time in every direction producing perfect joy.

I suppose you could say, and I love to link these two words, that heaven can be described that way, perfect love and perfect joy. So this is where you put the sinner. You back him into an impossible corner, impossible. And he says, "Well, I...I love God." Well, the Bible says if you love Me, you keep My commandments. Have you kept them all, all the time, never violating any? If you've broken one, you're under a curse. Keep the law or die. This is where you take the sinner. And then at that point

what you want the sinner to do is to say, "I can't do that. I don't do that. I can't do that. I know I can't do that. I'm not capable of doing that. No one is capable of doing that." That's when you get them in to the book of Romans. And so what should come out of a sinner's heart is "I can't do that, I can't love like that, it's impossible, I cannot do that." And you want to excite his accusing conscience saying, "Obviously you don't love God, you're selfish toward God, you have offended God, you have violated God, you have disobeyed God, your heart is full of wickedness and corruption and evil things and obviously you don't love your neighbor the same way you love yourself. You take advantage of your neighbor, you're unkind, you're ungracious, etc., etc., you're self-centered." And you want that sinner to feel inflamed on the inside by the guilt of his violation of this surpassing requirement. You want him to see his ugly lovelessness, his selfish indulgence. You want his heart exposed. You want at that point the sinner to be shattered and broken into a contrite, trembling soul, shaking under the realization that he falls short. You want the sinner at that point to know that because you have broken God's law of not loving Him perfectly, and loving your neighbor the way you love yourself, you are under the curse of God, you are headed for eternal hell. And then the sinner is left with one option, you choose heaven or hell. You choose the fiery judgment of God, or you choose deliverance from it.

You would hope that the sinner at this point would cry out for mercy, like Luke 18, beat on his breast, "God, be merciful to me a sinner," that he would come with a broken and contrite heart. That he would come like Peter, "Depart from me, oh Lord, for I am a sinful man." That he would cry for mercy, Psalm 103. That he would bless the Lord from his soul because of God's mercy and because God had removed his sins as far as the east is from the west, buried in the depths of the sea and never remembers them again. You would hope that the sinner would say, "Oh, God, I've fallen short. Oh, God, I don't deserve it. I plead with You to be merciful." And this scribe, this lawyer knew that God was a forgiving God who would literally go out and buy back a sinner out of the slave market, that He was a pardoning God. He knew that He showed mercy to thousands and thousands, as Exodus describes it. This was the time for him to cry out for mercy and forgiveness which God would give him. And, of course, we know how God could render that to them because God would punish his sins on Christ at the cross, just months from here. But already He could apply the death of Christ to this man before He ever died because He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. And the death of Christ had already been applied to the sins of all in the past, way back to Adam who had believed.

That leaves us with one point to close. The last feature in this look at Jesus' approach to evangelism: recognition of eternal life, motivation for eternal life, understanding the complex of ideas of eternal life, finally, the acceptance, or let's say the acquisition of eternal life. This is where you want to bring the sinner, to reach out and take what is offered.

Verse 29, this is really sad. "But wishing to justify himself," you can stop right there. This is a problem. This is a big problem. What I would like to have read is, "And he, wishing to humble himself," "And he falling on his face cried out for mercy," "And he grieved over his own sin," "And he, broken and contrite." That's not what it says.

Backed into the corner, his wretched pride and self-righteousness in which he was so skilled took over, and wishing to justify himself he failed to deny himself. You would have hoped that he would have said, "I deny everything that I've claimed in the past, I'm not a righteous man. On the surface I've been law-abiding, on the surface I've done all the Jewish stuff (like Paul), but I now deny myself, I refuse to associate any longer with the person I am and I cry for mercy." He didn't say that. It just

says, "But wishing to justify himself." He knew he didn't love God perfectly. He knew it. He knew he didn't love his neighbor like that. He knew he needed to admit it. He knew he needed to repent. He knew he needed mercy from a pardoning God who shows mercy to thousands. He knew he needed to hear from God who is marked by loving-kindness, in the Old Testament, the God who forgives, the God who removes sin, the God who buries sin, the God who forgets sin, the God who doesn't hold iniquity against the one who repents. He knew he needed that. He should have been like the publican in Luke 18 and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," but he was like the Pharisee who proudly boasted about his righteousness.

"But wishing to justify himself" literally in the Greek means desiring to proclaim himself righteous, desiring to proclaim himself righteous. And this was a public event. Remember now, he stood up in an environment where Jesus was very likely teaching. He stood up and in the middle of everything that was going on with the people sitting around, this man was not about to confess the reality of his wretched heart. He wanted to maintain the deception. So he rejected the pangs of conscience that prompted the question. He disdains the conviction of sin which he feels on the inside. And he seeks to publicly reaffirm his achievement as righteous.

This is a problem. This is a big problem, big problem for the Jews. Let me show you why this was going on here. Go to Romans 10 for a moment and we'll come back to this, Romans 10, very definitive scripture. Here in Romans 10 Paul starts out, "Brethren, my heart's desire, my prayer to God for them," that is, for Israel, he's been talking about them in chapter 9, "my prayer to God for them," for Israel, "is for their salvation." How sad is that? He was praying for the salvation of the Jews. Why would he pray for their salvation? Because they weren't saved; Jews weren't saved then, they aren't now. Back in chapter 2 of Romans, verse 17, "If you bear the name Jew and rely upon the law and boast in God and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the law and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth..." That was them. You have the name Jew, you rely on the law, you boast in God, you know His will, you approve the essentials of the law, you're instructed out of the law, you're confident that you can guide others because you know the law, you're a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, you literally have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and the truth. Then verse 23 he says, "You who boast in the law through your breaking the law, do you dishonor God?" Oh yes you do, "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," because of you. And down in verse 28 he says, "He's not a Jew who is one outwardly." Verse 29: "He's a Jew who is one inwardly."

So go back to chapter 10. That... That was where their pride was. But they weren't saved. They were blaspheming God. Why? Verse 2, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge." No one was more concerned about God than the Jews. No one was more concerned about the God of Israel than the Jews. No one was more concerned with religious truth than the Jews. The leading rabbis, often scribes themselves, were the possessors and they were the protectors, they were the purveyors of religious truth, they held power over all the people because of their knowledge of the law of God and their Judaistic tradition. Jerusalem itself was the center of religious study. The rabbis and the scribes were there, they were so highly trained and highly skilled they knew so much more than the people, that they were highly revered. In fact, their teaching is rarely ever questioned in Jewish history. You just don't question the teaching of a rabbi no matter how bad it is, no matter how off it is, no matter how unscriptural it is. They were not only regarded as the experts in interpreting the law but they were actually thought to have mystical

powers of spiritual discernment that could see the secret things that weren't even on the page and their word became absolute law. That's why the Jewish tradition replaced the actual law of God because they gave to the...to the rabbis the same authority they gave to God because they thought God gave them secret insight.

Lawyers were called scribes, sometimes called rabbis, sometimes called masters, sometimes called fathers, as in Matthew 23. They had a dominating influence over the Jews, zealous scribes really. Zealous lawyers started the rebellion in 66 A.D. That finally led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Historians ascribe that to the zealous scribes. They were so zealous for the law they couldn't tolerate the presence of the Roman occupation. They started the rebellion that led to the terrible destruction of 70 A.D. Whenever there was a banquet, whenever there was a feast, the lawyers and the scribes wanted the chief seats. Remember Matthew 23? And in the synagogues they would sit in an elevated place and they sat...There's a big cupboard...if you've ever been in a synagogue...I've been in a number of them in Israel...orthodox synagogue...There's a big box, a big armoire, a cabinet, and inside are the scrolls of the Scripture, the law of God. And the rabbis, or the scribes, all sit with their backs to that box. They sit with their backs to the cabinet containing the Old Testament scroll and that is symbolic of the fact that the Old Testament comes through them to the people. They are the only true and authorized interpreters of the Old Testament. So they sit with their back to the box and the face to the people, the law comes through them. Their tombs...scribes' tombs were so revered with awe and superstition that after their death their memories were embellished with bizarre legends.

But in spite of all this reference they were given, they didn't interpret the law, and Matthew...accurately, and Matthew 15 says they substituted the traditions of men for the law of God. And verse 2 says they have a zeal for God, but with all that information it's not according to knowledge. They don't have the true knowledge of God. They're lost. They're lost. Why? What prevented them from getting the *epignōsis*, the deep knowledge, the true knowledge? Here's why, verse 3, very key, "For not knowing about God's righteousness..." Boy, what a telling statement that is.

You say, "Well how could they be ignorant of God's righteousness? How could they be ignorant of God's righteousness when they had the Old Testament?"

Here's what that means. They seriously underestimated God's righteousness. They seriously considered God less holy than He is. They thought God was more tolerant of sin than He was. They came to believe that God would allow hypocrisy, so they were ignorant of God's righteousness. Simply think of it this way: They thought God was less holy than He is.

And then it says, "Not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." If they had subjected themselves to the righteousness of God, what would have happened? They would have fallen on their face, beat on their breast and cried for mercy because the righteousness of God is articulated in the law, summarized in the Ten Commandments and summarized again in the law to love God and one's neighbor perfectly. If they really, really subjected themselves to the righteousness of God revealed in His law, they would have cried out for mercy. They did not do that but rather thought to establish their own. So they seriously underestimated God's righteousness and overestimated their own righteousness. They thought God was less holy than He was and they were more holy than they were and therefore they could meet God's demand on their own terms.

If you want to understand Judaism, that's it. That's it. God was less holy than He was, in their minds, and they were more holy than they were, in their minds. They lowered the law and elevated themselves. They lowered the standard and raised their own ability to maintain it. And they therefore could please God by their own efforts. They should have been driven to their knees. They should have been driven to reject their own self-righteousness. They should have seen it, as Paul did, manure in Philippians 3.

The same is true today. You're going to get the sinner against the wall. You're going to pin the sinner against the wall about eternal life. You're going to convince the sinner that he doesn't love God perfectly and love his neighbor perfectly. And the sinner is going to have a battle on the inside and the only way he can escape the dilemma is to make God less holy than He is, make himself more righteous than he is and think he's OK. The natural sinner hates a God who is absolutely holy and hates to admit that he is absolutely sinful.

So, what does he do? Lower God and elevate himself. Verse 4, Romans 10: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." All you have to do is realize that when the Law has indicted you and you have accepted that indictment, received Christ, put your faith in Him, and that's the end of the law. That's the goal.

What is the goal? I thought the goal of the Law was to get people to heaven by obedience. No, the goal of the Law is to get you to the point where you know you can't keep it and the law then, Paul says in Galatians, is our schoolmaster to bring us to whom? To Christ. The law indicts you. The Law brings you before the court, renders you absolutely guilty, asks you to cry out for mercy. The judge provides the mercy because Christ has paid for the sin. That's the gospel. Christ is the goal of the law.

You say, "Well didn't the law pass away?" No, the law still has a function. The law of God has not changed. The holy standards of God have not changed. They're still there to drive the sinner to the end of himself. And when he's at the end of himself, and when he knows he can't keep the law, and he sees Christ like Paul did in Philippians 3, and he saw that there would be a righteousness of God granted to him, not a righteousness of his own which he couldn't achieve, he considered all the other things manure and embraced Christ. The word "end" there really means the goal. The objective is to bring you to Christ to believe in Him.

Verse 5: "For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness." OK? You're going to go on the law, then you will have to live by that righteousness. And what does that righteousness require for life, eternal life? "Do this and you will live." Break any of it and you will die. You want to live on Moses' terms, perfect, perfect keeping of the Law. Leviticus 18:5, "Do this and you will live." But, verse 6: "The righteousness based on faith." That's Christ, that's what we want.

Drop down to verses 9 and 10 quickly. How do you receive the righteousness based on faith? "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved, for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." How do you get saved? Not by your works but by realizing you can't come by law, but realizing that the law of God has brought you to Christ, you see Christ, you

believe in Christ, you confess Jesus as Lord, you believe that God raised Him from the dead which means you believe in His sacrificial death and resurrection, and by that you receive the righteousness of God and salvation. And verse 12 says it doesn't matter whether you are a Jew or a Greek, it doesn't matter what your religious background has been.

Well, as you can see, this is the background. Go back and we'll close in Luke. This is the background of what was in this guy's mind. He was used to the standard of Romans 10. He was used to the standard of righteousness by the law. And he wanted the people to think that he had achieved it. So proud, wishing to justify himself, desiring to proclaim himself righteous, he said to Jesus, and I'm sure with cynicism: Well, how is my neighbor? Who is my neighbor? Very much like the question of the rich young ruler of Matthew 19. "I've checked my life and I...I... What am I lacking? What am I lacking? All the laws I've kept from a child. What am I lacking?" And this guy says, "Well, you know, maybe... Maybe You could expand my definition of neighbor," which is to say, "As far as I know, I love God perfectly and I love my neighbor perfectly, unless maybe You've got a better definition of neighbor." Which poses the question: What was his view of neighbor? Oh well. His view of neighbor: another Jew if he was that magnanimous, and maybe, maybe only another scribe. Was He implying something like, you're not telling me I'm supposed to love an enemy, are you? You're not telling me I'm supposed to love a Gentile, are you? You're not telling me I'm supposed to love a liberal Sadducee, are you?

You know, he says to Jesus, "You know, I guess I do love God perfectly and love my neighbor perfectly, unless I somehow don't have the definition of neighbor right."

You know what's startling to me is that he jumped across the loving God part completely. He just leapfrogged that. Did his little inventory, well, got nothing to talk about loving God, since that's clear. I certainly do that. That was sort of easy for him to escape because that's something he couldn't see, but how you treat other people is visible. He just does not admit that he doesn't love God perfectly.

What keeps people from being saved? I've said this so many times in so many passages, what keeps people from being saved when they understand the gospel is the issue of whether or not they will admit their wretchedness. Please, folks, it's not about whether people want a better marriage, a better life, a better this, a better that, happier things here, da-da-da. What it's about is eternal life and it is about accepting the indictment of Scripture that you are headed for eternal hell because you do not love God and love others perfectly, which demonstrates that you are a sinner and that violates the perfect law of God. You can't keep it, you better cry for mercy. And if you're going to try to sustain your own sense of self-righteousness, you cut yourself off from salvation. That's the issue. That's why they tried to kill Jesus in Luke 4 when at the synagogue He said to those people in the synagogue, "You are the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed, and if you don't see yourself as poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed and cry out for mercy to God, you will not believe and receive the gospel." And they took Him out after one sermon in His hometown, tried to throw Him off a cliff and execute Him, not because they didn't want eternal life, but because they hated the indictment that He had rendered upon their true spiritual condition. But that's where you have to go.

He's no different than the rich young ruler. I...I...I love God perfectly. Well we could maybe talk about...I think I love my neighbor perfectly, but maybe you can define neighbor differently. I mean, this is sickening, isn't it? What horrendous self-righteousness. All he would have had to done was cry for mercy. God would have on the spot forgiven him, Jesus would have embraced him, eternal life would have been granted to him. What about his sin? Oh, that was about to be paid for by Christ, but

God would already apply that payment to him because, as I said, He was the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. The only way for a sinner to escape is to lower the righteousness of God, raise his own righteousness and then live in that deception. He had the opportunity to come to the acquisition of the eternal life he sought. His self-love, his pride, his religious self-righteousness, as far as we know, damned the man.

By the way, Jesus answers the question, "Who is my neighbor?" And we're going to see the answer to that in the great story of the Good Samaritan, but not this morning.

Father, this is so helpful for us. This is so clear and instructive. We thank You for it. Confirm its truths to our hearts and use us mightily in this evangelism effort. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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