

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

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Lesson: Luke 10

All people who are saved and become angels in heaven love the Lord very much. For heaven is the Lord's, and no one could feel happy there who did not love Him. And the angels also love their neighbors as much as themselves. For they obey the Lord's commandments. And the two great commandments are "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." If we wish to be like the angels, and if we want the Lord to make us ready to go to heaven, we too must learn to obey these commandments. But who is our neighbor?

When the Lord said that we should love our neighbor, He did not mean that we should love only the people who live next door, or on the same street, or even in the same town or country. For the Lord teaches about spiritual and heavenly things. So He was talking, not just about worldly, but about spiritual neighbors. He meant that we should love our heavenly neighbors. And who are our spiritual or heavenly neighbors? How can we tell who is our neighbor, whom we must love?

Once a certain lawyer came and asked the Lord this same question. This lawyer was trying to tempt the Lord, to test Him, and to trick Him into giving a wrong answer, or perhaps an answer that the people would not like. Now the Jews at the time thought that only other Jews were their neighbors. A person who was not a Jew was considered an outsider, of no importance. They thought that they did not have to love others who did not belong to their church or country. So, perhaps the lawyer thought that he could get the Lord to say that only the Jews were his neighbors, then the Lord's work on earth would not seem as important as He said it was. Or, if He said that everyone was the neighbor, then the Jews would not like it and would accuse the Lord of breaking their laws. In any case, the lawyer was trying to trap the Lord. And he asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

But Jesus answered by telling him a story or parable. He told about a man who was going on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by thieves. These evil men took all that he had, even his clothes; they hurt him, then left him by the side of the road, where he might have died. Soon a priest happened to be walking along that same road. Priests were men who were supposed to teach about the Lord, about love, charity and kindness. You might expect them to be helping others. But, instead of helping the wounded man, the priest, when he saw him, stepped onto the other side of the road and went

on his way. Then a Levite came by, and when he had looked at the man, he too passed by on the other side. These two would not help their fellow man, who was probably even a Jew.

But then a Samaritan came by. Now the Jews hated the Samaritans. They looked down on them, despised them, and had nothing to do with them. Samaritans were outsiders; they were not Jews. Yet what did this Samaritan do? He felt sorry for the man who had been robbed. He bandaged his wounds, pouring on some of his own wine to clean the sores and then oil to make them feel better. He put him on his own donkey and brought him to a nearby inn, where he took care of him. And the next day, before he left, he gave the innkeeper enough money to take care of the man until he was better, saying, "If you spend any more than this, I will repay you when I come back."

After He had told this story, the Lord asked the lawyer, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell among thieves?" The lawyer could give only one answer. Of course it was the Samaritan. Perhaps the lawyer could not quite bring himself to say that the Samaritan was a good neighbor. But he said, "He that showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go, and do likewise."

And to all of us the Lord says, "Go, and do likewise." The neighbors we are to love are the people who, like the Samaritan, are merciful; they are the people who are trying to do what is right, good and kind. You should love all others for the good things they do. So, if you wish to obey the Lord's command to "love your neighbor," you must learn to look for what is good in others. You must learn to look for what is good in all the people you know or meet, not just your close friends or playmates. You should learn to help others to do what is right, and you should not help someone else to do what is wrong, just because he is your friend. For in that way you become *part* of the evil, and all evil is from hell. But, when you are helping others to do what is right, and when you are looking for what is good in other people, then you are helping the angels to be close to you. For everything good is from heaven because it is from the Lord. And this is why, when you truly learn to love your neighbor, you are also learning to love the Lord. And in doing this, you are learning to become an angel in heaven. *Amen.*