

## “JUSTIFY OR SANCTIFY?”

*...our futile attempts to hide.*

- Luke 10:25-37
- by Pastor Tim Dodson
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**Luke 10:25-37** *And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your*

*reading of it?" 27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' 36 "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

Remember when you were a kid...*or maybe you have played with kids in this respect*, when you tried to literally hide in plain sight? Your imagination was such that you believed you had the power to render yourself essentially invisible and in a game of ‘hide and seek’ you would hide under the kitchen table? And thus proving that some of us still haven’t grown up, we went on now to play that game in our Christian lives. Are you hiding under the kitchen table today? Behind the living drapes with your feet showing? I’m sorry to burst your bubble, **but we can see you.**

An individual’s mind is truly a difficult thing to trump. There has been many occasions where an entire church fellowship attempted to convince a person of some fact of reality, but that same individual would have none of it. *“There WAS a second shooter on the grassy knoll, the Apollo mission was actually filmed on a Hollywood set, and the previous president bugged my office.” “I am too called to be a pastor, and I’ll show you!” “He does too love me, he IS a good man, and I am going to marry him no matter what all of you say!”* Ahhh, the list is long!

This man came to Jesus with a question. But like us so often, he also came with an agenda and apparently a Star Trek cloaking device which could render the real him spiritually invisible. But frankly, it didn’t really take God in flesh to ‘find Waldo’ in this picture. *Humanity*: we can be such pitiful creatures sometimes! I would like to believe that this man had within him, at least on some level, the desire to be a part of this strange but yet somehow wonderful group of strangers. They were kind-of-a rebellious bunch, but man they had purpose and karma, and this man Jesus...*well*, there was just something about that guy! Inexplicable yes, but the pull of Christ at times is indeed so tangible that one can almost reach out and touch it.



However, his **approach** to Jesus still gave away his heart! Jesus said once (Matthew 12:37 ESV) that "...by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Indeed. It seems that, *given time*, our words, our body language, our daily manifest living, tells a story that defies the façade that we put on in the morning before we leave the house. Take for example this man's question: He asks "What must I do to have eternal life?" Sound's kinda holy and a spiritual 'high road.' But why **that** question? Because it tells us what was happening inside this man and what his motives were. It's an interesting fact that most "seekers" don't generally come asking: "Lord, how can I serve you...how can I sacrifice in response to the cross?"... "What can I do to be a disciple?"... "Tell me, Lord, how do I live out a holy and committed life?" No, more often than not, our first question...and often our *last*, is "What must I do to have eternal life?"

And why not? People want on that 'heaven train!' But can we have it without the commitment, effort, or a pure disciplined life? Such truly is the 'brass ring.' We want to go to heaven, but we also want to live according to our own plans and agenda. And further, this man's words reflect his understanding that eternal life was something to be *purchased* or *achieved*. For his words echoed his heart as he asked Jesus, "What **must I do**..."? How many of us are looking for the answer to that question? How many of us are stumbling around from one legalistic endeavor to the next church-ified rule, trying to be good enough or sacrificial enough to earn our seat on that eternal train? If I just *do* the right thing then I will be ok. And again...I am interested really only in what I **MUST** do...what I **HAVE** to do to meet the bar.

After years of jail ministry, we have come to understand a great truth: most of the unredeemed inmates who come to our studies are firstly interested in the 'end of days' issues covered in Revelation, Daniel, and several late night B Hollywood movies. We might easily ridicule such a shallow view, but if we do we are quite often condemning ourselves as well as a lot of non-incarcerated "all-American-church-going folks" who are frankly motivated to keep their toes in the religious pool for one reason and one reason only: *they don't want to spend eternity in hell*. We too are often highly motivated to try to grasp the matters of prophecy and Christ's second coming. *You know*...so we can pull it together when things start getting nasty and His return is imminent.

Well guess what gang? His return *IS* already imminent. There are no more events that must pass on the prophetic calendar prior to His return...they all have been fulfilled. He's next. And if you think you will wait until it all "hits the fan", then you must not be aware of Matthew 24: 37-39 "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

So our words betray us. What we speak gives us away. Just as they did for this guy who came to Jesus.

Jesus...ever patient, personal and intimate...meets this man where he is. He did not speak in terms of calculus and neurobiology! He instead firstly gets the man to express *his* understanding as to the way to heaven. Jesus often asked questions Himself when in such meetings! He was always *interactive* in His evangelism. And this man actually had the right answer! He wasn't just off the boat...he had a handle on some of this church stuff! He answered Jesus saying "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" **Indeed!** No clearer or more succinct description of a dynamic life in Christ exists. This **IS** the Christian life lived out! I mean...there it was! The key to life! "Do this and you will live..."

Wow...if only that would have been the end of this account before us, it all would have looked a lot different at the end, and this man would have went down in history as a different fella than the one we know him as today. But the man knew that even though his statement may have been the truth, he also knew that he wasn't there, so he needed to find a way to fudge the figures a bit...a short cut...a get-out-of-jail-free card...a way to hedge his bet. The passage says he wanted to 'justify' himself. He was trying to hide in plain sight.

“Sanctification” is the perhaps the best one word title of the description the man gave, and that Jesus confirmed. Classic definition is rendered “*The setting aside of some one or some thing for the exclusive fulltime use by a singular purpose, pursuit, or person.*” It means one is *all in*. Nothing held back. Nothing reserved. Nothing hidden. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification...*” 1 Thessalonians 5:23 “*Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

But to ‘justify’ is to give reason why that isn’t me but yet I still deserve the blue ribbon. For many of us the act of ‘justifying’ ourselves is the ‘dance of our lives.’ Always an excuse. Always a reason. Always a self-issued free pass.

All the while...*like this guy*, we know the truth! We know what we are supposed to be...We know what is supposed to be happening. And it’s not a matter of being too tough or legalistic upon ourselves when I say “we know.” It’s rather about not stepping up but still looking for a way to still be square with the house. It’s about living a fantasy. With my ‘cloak of invisibility’ I don’t have to BE in reality, I just have to APPEAR so.

So Jesus tells the man a story: There was a guy who was making a journey. During his travel some thieves came along and robbed him and beat him up in the process. As he lay a long side the road, a priest...*a religious guy*, came by...but he did nothing except move away from the man. Religion is often guilty of this. Left to its natural evolution, religion becomes inward- looking, self-focused, pious, ritualistic, and legalistic. The net result? Religion goes out of its way to avoid touching a tainted world.

A little later, a Levite came by ...Levites are also like priests...with high religious and political position and clout. There was a world that embraced the religious rules. The never ending ‘do’s and don’ts’ of religion. Not just the demands of God, but the extra additional aspects that man put on in an effort to hedge their bet and pridefully ‘one-up’ the next guy. But such ‘rule following’ without a heart of holiness is a mere “Band-Aid” for a hemorrhaging world. A finger in a leaking dike or duct tape coving an earthquake fissure. Rules and regulations have never, and will never, stop man from the subtle and steady slide to inward rot and decay. Thus the Levite also ignored the injured man.

Then, along came the Samaritan. Now Samaritans were generally dealt with in disdain by Jews. They were ‘mutts.’ Mixed blood...mixed ethnicity. Jews didn’t like them, and they didn’t like Jews. Yet these man...despite the culture around him, stepped up to the plate when he came upon this guy...who was no doubt a Jew. He bandaged his wounds, patched him up, set him on his own donkey, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. He then paid money in advance for the inn keeper to take care of the guys needs and offered to pay more when he came back by if what he paid was not enough to take care of the guy. This Samaritan lacked the pedigree and was void of the religious status. But he *moved* in his love. He *sacrificed*.

Many folks will write a check but they will pass on getting their hands dirty. Some will give you their time and muscle, but never will a penny depart their fingers. Some will help you as long as it fits their schedule and doesn’t compromise their vacation time. Some will participate as long as it’s convenient, personal rewarding and expedient. But don’t count on them...don’t expect them to commit to anything long term. They have plans after all. This Samaritan helped in **every** way. He stepped up **all the way**. He was ‘in for a penny and in for a pound.’ He was vested and he was committed. And it was THAT issue that separated him from the rest. Not religious status or training or rule following...

This account...this storied example before us, was given by Jesus himself concerning a crucial question that was not just imminently critical to our lives but to our very eternities. We can play games with words and dance around the vernacular and attempt to duck personal responsibility and play around with replacing faith with religion...love with rules. But Jesus sees your heart. And frankly, *so do we*.

The Samaritan would have easily and quickly saw through the pious self-righteousness of the priest and the Levite. For he immediately rejected a faith without practice...an adherence to the letter while neglecting the Spirit. I doubt however that if having been given the opportunity, the Samaritan would have wasted a moment scolding the priest and chastising the Levite. He just lived out the right life instead of beating up on the wrong. But don't think for a minute that he would have been blind. Truth...*real truth*, opens a person's eyes. Real light...the 'light of life' illuminates not just the path before us, but the world around us...and that means everyone in it too.

The Samaritan did not attempt to be the judge, and Jesus did not instruct him to. However, Jesus made that call. He asked the lawyer to speak it...to verbalize the truth...to come out from under the kitchen table and out from behind the living room curtains and speak the truth..."*So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."*

Jesus did not praise the lawyer for this profound statement or congratulate him on this spiritual verdict. He did not comfort him in his stated beliefs or 'high five' him for the right answer. Because none of that *mattered*. What mattered was this: "*Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.*" That's what mattered. Go live it. Not just in his head and heart, but a love that was in his hands.

We have always been a community that is deeply focused upon the issue of discipleship. While such is a noble pursuit, it can have one very dangerous drawback. And that is, it can have the inadvertent effect of giving an individual that 'cloak of invisibility'...or at least the perception that he has one. Because I follow the rules...show up when I need to and physically serve and monetarily give, I can be apt to think that I'm ok...I'm 'good to go.' Or at least I can think that everyone else thinks so. I can believe that no one sees me for what I really am. But the truth is, those with true 'spiritual eyes' DO see you, and more importantly, *Jesus sees you.*

Just like with this lawyer, Jesus sees you and sees the REAL you. Our program of discipleship can provide a façade of righteousness, when what Jesus wants from us is LOVE. And real love always and forever demands sacrifice and transparency. The fact is, the whole principle is quite simple: *the more you love Jesus, the more you will clearly and purposely live for Him and live out for Him.*

This Samaritan was a man of sacrifice! He gave of his money, time, effort, and most of all, he gave himself! He loved when it was most inconvenient, uncomfortable, and potentially even dangerous, and he compromised his own plans to see it through. Men like this are rare indeed. Jesus led the lawyer to the water, but it was up to him to drink. I know this path, for I as a pastor do the same. But once you are in the mode of "He's preachin' at me," instead of, "He's preachin' **to** me," it's effectively over for you. Because now your eyes and ears are shut to God's message, and there is nothing left to do but allow your rebellion to run its course in your life. I pray you survive it.

So what happened next? What happened to this man? We don't know. His future was in his hands to choose, just as it is for all of us. He either came out from under the kitchen table...from behind the living room curtain and lived now in an adult public arena, or he continued to live under the ruse that he was invisible. That no one...including Christ can really see who he was...can really see who WE are. Perhaps he kept trying to follow the rules without following the sanctified life of love and sacrifice. Without full commitment. Without passion. Without eternal life. But now...after Jesus, he knew the truth: Jesus saw him hiding.

**And sees you too...**