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Sermon: October 4, 2009  
Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

“KINGDOM LOVE” (PART 2) ~ LUKE 10:25-37

☐ {Lk 10:27} “**Love the Lord your God with**” your whole being, and “**Love your neighbor as yourself.**” {Mt 22:40} “**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**”

☼ To the degree that we love, we embody and serve the kingdom of God. To the extent we do not love, BECC neither represents nor furthers God’s kingdom.

Can I get a witness? Will someone say, “Amen!”?

☹ Yet we often misunderstand kingdom love. Even when we “get it,” we are frequently ambivalent about it.

Aren’t we tempted to temper the love command as it applies to our neighbors? Don’t we try to narrow its scope and look for exceptions? Don’t we find ourselves saying, “Yeah, but...”?

☐ Please turn with me to the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-35.

☞ Imagine you are the priest.

❓ Why don’t you stop? Why don’t you help?

Like nearly half of all first century Jewish priests you live in Jericho. Today, you are on your way home from Jerusalem. The road covers 17 steep, twisting miles. There are no trees for shade, no streams to drink from, and the area is infested with bandits.

You round a corner and stumble upon a man on the road. He is half naked, covered with cuts, bruises and blood. His wounds are swarming with flies.

Take a closer look. What do you see?

❶ You see a stranger.

Is he good to his wife, or does he beat her? Is he a hard worker, or is he lazy? Is he an innocent victim, or is he a thug whose fellow bandits have turned on him? How can you know?

You see the man as a stranger.

❷ You see a problem.

You have been on duty at the temple for seven days and have not seen your wife and kids in that time. If you stop you might not make it home before dark. Your family will be worried.

■<sup>1</sup> Is this stranger dead or alive? The law stipulates that {Nu 19:11-12} “**Whoever touches a human corpse [is] unclean for seven days. They must purify themselves with**” holy water “**on the third day and the seventh day**” after contact. Those who {Nu 19:13} “**fail to purify themselves ... defile**” the temple!

That water is kept in Jerusalem, so touching a dead man will result in two 34 mile round trips in the next seven days. Helping this stranger will significantly complicate life for you and your family.

You see the man as a problem.

❸ You see a threat.

What if you stop and the bandits come back? What if he is bait to lure in some naïve do-gooder? You could be next! Helping this stranger might be dangerous.

You see the man as a threat.

■<sup>2</sup> The words of Leviticus 19:18 flash through your mind: “**love your neighbor as yourself.**”

What to do? You decide that God wants you to feel sorry for the man and say a prayer. You do so, quickly, and pass {Lk 10:31} **“by on the other side.”**

I cannot guarantee that is what our imaginary priest thought. But sometimes when I look at a person I see a stranger, a problem, or a threat. I suspect that when I do, I am not too different from that priest.

☞ Let’s go back to the parable. This time, imagine you are the Samaritan.

④ Your sinful inclination is to perceive the man as a stranger, a problem and a threat, just like the priest. But there is more: the kingdom of the world has also taught you to see him as your enemy. After all...

⊖ The Jewish rabbis say that anyone who {m. Sebi’it 8:10} **“eats the bread of the Samaritans is like one that eats the flesh of swine”**;

⊖ The Jewish authorities do not allow you to enter the inner courts of the temple {m. Seqalim 1:5}; and,

⊖ When a Jew is convicted of murdering another Jew, the Jewish court sentences him to death. But when a Jew murders a Samaritan like you, the court spares his life {b. Sanhedrin 57a}.

Your family and community have taught you to fear and hate Jews. Now one of them lies bleeding at your feet.

What to do?

■<sup>2</sup> The words of Leviticus 19:18 flash across your mind: **“love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Maybe you *feel* pity for the man. Maybe not. As for your actions, you *take* pity on the man. You treat his wounds, transport him to an inn, and tend to him. The next day you pay the innkeeper to care for him until you return.

? What explains these different responses?

The priest lives by kingdom of the world love.

The Samaritan lives by kingdom of God love.

⊙<sup>1</sup> Kingdom of the world love is exclusive.

It is reserved for people who share our ideals, goals or experiences. In normal conditions it allows us to coexist with outsiders; but in times of crisis, when our status or resources are threatened, it compels us to stand with “our own” against them.

⊙<sup>\*</sup> Kingdom of God love (αγαπε) is inclusive.

Αγαπε is given freely to all. It empowers us, not just to get along with strangers and people outside our group, but to be compassionate – dare I say, loyal – to them.

⊙<sup>2</sup> Kingdom of the world love is self-centered.

It asks, “How will this benefit me and mine? What’s in it for us?” This can motivate behavior that appears to be selfless but is really designed to meet our desire to feel good, to look good, to be rewarded, or to build alliances; remove those incentives, and it dries up.

⊙<sup>\*</sup> Kingdom of God love is other-centered.

Αγαπε asks, “How will this affect others? What’s in it for them?” Not that we think less of ourselves; rather, we spend less time thinking of our wants, our needs, our agendas, and more time thinking of others.

⊙<sup>3</sup> Kingdom of the world love is defensive.

It puts a premium on security. It extends itself *if* it believes that it is safe to do so. If caring for others

endangers our dreams or our money (much less our existence), we are out of there.

⊛<sup>3</sup> Kingdom of God love is courageous.

Αγαπε equips us to knowingly risk our plans, our possessions, and our bodies for the good of others as we love and follow Jesus.

⊙<sup>4</sup> Kingdom of the world love is merit-based.

It hinges on the worthiness of the potential recipient. It causes us to ask, “Do they deserve my care? Are they worthy of my compassion?” and then we respond accordingly.

⊛<sup>4</sup> Kingdom of God love is grace-based.

Αγαπε hinges on God’s worthiness. Because He is worthy, we withhold from others the just penalty for their offenses. Because He is worthy, we bless them with kindnesses they have not earned.

⊙<sup>5</sup> Kingdom of the world love asks, “**Who is my neighbor?**” That is what the religious expert wants to know in Luke 10:29. Christ ignores his question.

⊛<sup>5</sup> Kingdom of God love asks, “How can I be a neighbor?” After the Parable Jesus asks the expert, {Lk 10:36} “**Which of these...was a neighbor...?**”

The Lord’s question indicates that αγαπε does not allow me to define who is (or who is not) my neighbor; it compels me to *be* a neighbor. In God’s kingdom there are no boundaries on mercy and kindness.

Kingdom of God love is inclusive, other-centered, courageous, and grace-based. It asks, “How can I be a neighbor?”

Our desire to temper God’s Word, our need to narrow its scope, our need to find exceptions, all our “Yeah, buts!” reveal just how much we have bought into the kingdom of the world.

“This is foolish idealism”; It’s not worth the price;” “They don’t deserve it!” I am tired of listening to all that garbage, to those voices that speak against kingdom love. I do not want to be the priest in this parable. I don’t to be the Levite. I want to be the Good Samaritan. Is anyone with me?

□ “**“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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”**

⊛ To the degree that we love, we embody and serve the kingdom of God. To the extent we do not love, BECC neither represents nor furthers God’s kingdom.