

A legal expert comes to test Jesus

*You may “test” someone to determine quality

*You may “test” someone to trap/trick/trip them into failure

*You may “test” someone in a way that you *both* learn together

Test question= what must I do to inherit “eternal life”?

There is heaven after you die (that is good and hopeful)

There is heaving coming to the earth right now (that’s beautiful)

Traditionally, Jews have focused upon “heaven coming to earth”

Christians have focused upon “life after death”

What if God’s desire was for us to live both now and later?

God cares about every moment of our life here on earth.

And God cares about our eternity.

And God means to invade every place and every time with love.

Jesus returns the “test question”= What do you think?

We might guess that the legal expert was trying to trip Jesus up.

And we must see that Jesus isn’t trying to return the favor.

Instead, Jesus is inviting the legal expert to grow in his heart/head.

Ben Myers, grew up in our church, now a young adult.

I learned something from him.

Ben is a scientist, a biochemist.

He quotes Bertrand Russell=

The whole problem with the world is

The fools are always so certain

And the wise people are full of doubts.

Ben, as a trained scientist, says that he doesn’t trust anyone who is

100% certain that they are always and everywhere right

And I like that

While many Christians emphasize

knowing every doctrine and truth absolutely,

when I see a Christian like that,

I become concerned,
because if you already have all the answers,
then how will you ever mature.

You are done growing.

You know it all.

The only thing that can happen is for you to go backwards.

There is no further place to go ahead.

If you are a legal expert who already knows everything, then that's it.

Notice: in the Gospels, Jesus often asks questions

rather than giving clear, direct, obvious answers.

Jesus asks= *What do you think?*

The legal expert's thinking= Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength—and, love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Wow! That is mature, that is someone who has come a long way.

It's all about loving God and loving your neighbor

Jesus= You have answered correctly.

Jesus applauds the legal expert's answer.

They are beginning to walk together.

But then...

The legal expert asks a dangerous question= Who is my neighbor?

Already, in Genesis, chapter 4, in the Bible, we see:

This is a dangerous question!

Cain had been asked by God=

Where is your brother?

Cain (who had already murdered his brother) asks=

Am I my brother's protector?

Notice= the legal expert is asking Jesus to draw the line

Who is my neighbor?

Who is in? Who is out?

How far does my love have to extend?

Surely, there must be a boundary, a border, a fence, a door, a wall
Between people who are my neighbors (who “deserve” my love)
And those who are not my “neighbors” (who don’t “deserve” my love)

In Genesis, chapter 4, when Cain made this boundary, what happened?
He assassinated his brother, Abel.

Jesus= tells a parable

Jesus could have answered the legal expert’s question
With teaching he had already given in Luke, chapter 6

Love your enemy

Bless those who curse you

Pray for the one who has hurt you

Jesus could have said:

If you are only good those who are good to you, that’s no big deal

If you only love your allies, that’s no big deal

*Hey, even terrorists get along with the people
they label as being on their side*

*There is no trophy awarded to those
whose boundaries of love extend
to the same borders
as those who are terrorists*

Jesus could have given this answer to the question
Who is the neighbor I am supposed to love?

Instead of giving a direct answer, Jesus gave a puzzle, a parable.

A Jew gets beat up on the Jericho road

(That’s a dangerous way to travel, what do you expect!)

He is stripped a

And robbed and left to rot along the side of the road.

A Levite comes by (an honored Jew with status)

But he does not stop.

Was he too busy doing something he thought was important?
What important things do we have to do
 instead of caring for those who are in trouble?
Maybe the Levite was going to the temple to do his job.
Doing your job is important
When you have a responsibility, you are supposed to come through
No excuses

Then a priest comes by (an honored Jew with status)
But he doesn't stop
Was he afraid?
Afraid this was a trap, a dangerous set-up?
Was he afraid he might become contaminated
 if he went to help this person who was not moving?
Because if he was already dead, he would become "unclean"
 and unable to serve for a period of time at the temple.
He would have a temporary loss of status
And he would not be able to fulfill his duties.

What fears are dominating our country and world right now?
What is preventing us from loving those who are different?
Spring Grove school board member, recently in the news, was right
Yes, are Muslims who are terrorists in the world
Yes, there are Muslims are a real and legitimate threat.
Yes, the world is a dangerous place
Yes, there are set-ups and plots out there.

And, Jesus is an exorcist who casts out fear
Perfect love does what? Casts out fear

Two good reasons for not stopping

1. There are important and good things we need to do
2. We are afraid

Jesus is setting up a puzzle.
When you have important things to do

When you are afraid
Maybe you don't need to love your neighbor, your fellow Jew, right?
You

Then a Samaritan comes down the road

Jews hate Samaritans
Samaritans hate Jews.
C'mon man, he is not going to stop
But then Jesus deepens the puzzle
Because the Samaritan does stop

He provides emergency medical care, ongoing medical care
He pays for food and for lodging
And he promises to fund everything until the Jew gets well.
He becomes the Jew's protector and provider.
That is a puzzle!

Might Jews see Samaritans as neighbors?
Might Samaritans see Jews as neighbors?
Jesus is giving a puzzle.
The puzzle is intended to humanize a Samaritan.
The Samaritan, upon seeing the victim on the side of the road,
 had a broken heart.
And a broken heart is an open heart.

Solving the puzzle

To love means you are going to get bruised and wounded in this world.
Jesus calls us to love
Not to be safe
Not to be comfortable
Not to hide behind our fears
We sing "this is the feast"
We honor "the Lamb who was slain"
That means that for Jesus, the cost of love was the cross
That right there is "solving the puzzle"

Jesus asks a question= who was the neighbor to the victim lying by the side of the road?

In 2016, reading this story, the answer is obvious, the Samaritan!

Notice how the legal expert answers,

*The one who showed mercy to the one
who was lying by the side of the road*

right now, we have a world where if you are in my political party, then I love you, but if you are not, then I hate you

If you are from my country, my religion, my race, then I love you, but if you are not, then I hate you, and you are not my neighbor

Yet, which one out of the three was the neighbor to the man lying by the side of the road? The Levite, a fellow Jew? The priest, a fellow Jew? The Samaritan, the enemy to the man lying by the side of the road?

The puzzle Jesus presents is expanding the boundary of who is defined as being our neighbor.

Right now, are politicians and preachers and pundits and professors expanding the boundary of who is considered a neighbor? Or, are they restricting and drawing tighter lines to eliminate people who are considered a neighbor?

Legal expert= the one who showed mercy was the neighbor

Two threads in the Bible= mercy versus sacrifice

Sacrifice= someone has to pay, blood needs to be shed, someone or something has to die, God needs compensation

Mercy= God does not need the blood of animals, God never needed to be paid, God never desired sacrifice

God desires that the wounded received medical care, lodging, food, what they need to thrive, even if they are a Jew and you are a Samaritan!

Jesus gives a command= Go, and do likewise

In heaven, in life after death, I do not imagine we will have flags and borders, defining enemies versus allies, foes versus friends

I imagine that we will be loved through our differences

Meanwhile, there is life before death. God desires heaven to come to earth through us. Go, and do likewise.

Heaven is coming to earth when we live as Samaritans who love Jews—and as Jews who love Samaritans.

That's how I put the puzzle pieces together today.

What about you?