

“Trifling with God”  
 Sermon for 19 April 2015  
 Matthew 5:7, Luke 10:25-37

The text (Matthew 5:7) says, **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”** In other words, in the age to come when we meet God face to face, the people who will receive mercy from him are people who have been merciful. *Is this a salvation by works? Do we earn his mercy by our mercy? No, because an “earned mercy” would be a contradiction in terms.* If mercy is earned, it is not mercy; it's a wage. Be assured, if we get anything good at the judgment, it will be mercy, 100% mercy! –John Piper

So we read: **And behold a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all you mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered right; do this, and you will live.”** If, by any chance, you wonder where I came up with the very idea of “trifling with God,” you need wonder no more. It is in the deliberate foolishness of standing up **to put him to the test**. One should have more respect than to put Jesus to the test—yet the same is done regularly in the media and the press. Those who misquote and misrepresent Jesus by referring to Him as a mere man, or who teach falsely that He somehow *became the Christ* (when the truth is the opposite: the Eternal One, even Christ, took on flesh, becoming the man Jesus within the bounds of a particular time, place and person) shows both an unfamiliarity with the truth as well as an absence of wholesome fear of God.

One of the two thieves crucified with Jesus had it right. He said, **Have you no fear of God, since you are under the same sentence (of death)? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.** (Luke 23:40-41) So much for the superficial notion that Jesus was merely “a good person.” Those who fear God know the meaning of doing *nothing wrong*—the moral perfections of Jesus, testified to by even His enemies (and validated out of His own mouth: **Why do you call Me good? Only One is good and He is God.**) *Jesus was no one to trifle with and, to this day, is still not.* Interesting point, but the more pressing one is addressed to us: Are we unwittingly perhaps, trifling with God? We should know so that we can instantly repent and consistently prove to be a good neighbor.

The foolish lawyer’s less than honest question, remember he intentionally was putting Jesus **to the test** is actually hateful. He was trying to trip Jesus up. Do we recognize the trap? First, the lawyer appears to be contrasting, or opposing Jesus and His gospel to the common understanding of the Law. **What must I do to inherit** (i.e. to earn, deserve or merit) **eternal life**? What a cheeky, insolent question! Surely, we would respond, “Nothing, sir. Eternal life is not earned as if it consisted of wages due.

Nor it is an award at the honors banquet of human performance. No one merits what is the **free gift of God**. And, we might add, putting the icing on the cake, even the Law, properly taught and understood, says so! *The gospel, which completes, rather than contradicts the Law, agrees with the revelations contained in the Old Testament.* Jesus adroitly puts the burden back on the lawyer, almost as if saying, “Come, come, sir. Surely you know better than to trifle with God:” **“What is written in the law? How do you read?”** Jesus made him reveal to all his intent and his misreading of Jesus’ teaching. It is best not to mess with the Lord who, in addition to everything else, means business.

So, why are we examining the parable of the Good Samaritan? ***We are here because we are trying to wrap our minds around what it means to be merciful.*** Do we need a lesson in how to be merciful?

Or do we face the far more challenging need to learn *not to trifle with God*. **Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.**

This **expert in the law who stood up to put Jesus to the test** asked a rather different question. He asked, **Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?** In asking this question, for the purposes for which he asked it shows, for all his learning and training, this man was not so very self-aware—*nor did he have regard for, or respect for the One he insolently addressed his question to.* ***That is trifling with God, something best not undertaken.*** Jesus responds to the man—knowing full well the treachery in his heart—with patience and kindness. It’s quite astonishing really and yet Jesus also goes on the offensive: **What is written in the Law? How do you read it?** The questioner is quickly turned into the questioned. This approach is very like the one Rockeybell urges us to take with hardline Muslims. “Let’s see what the bible has to say on that. You read it and tell me what you understand by it.” Brilliant. Then any error, or mis-construal is on his own head—for no one else interpreted for him, or misled him.

On the face of it, Jesus’ questions are obvious enough. He is asking for points of fact and the man’s opinion. Jesus is also saying: *Seriously. Do you seriously want to trifle with Me?* I infer this from the fact that the lawyer knew the answer. Remember, this was entrapment. The lawyer was probing to see what he could get against Jesus, to either discredit Him, or accuse Him. I don’t know if it was self-absorption or pride that prevented him from seeing how Jesus exposed him to the crowd. Out of his own mouth the lawyer demonstrates his treacherous intent and makes plain his towering ill-will or contempt for Jesus. Many intellectuals make the same mistake today! On the street it takes the form of open mouth and insert foot. *Trifling with God* is an expression of contempt, hostility and hatred—more of that hereafter.

Jesus responds with our main text, the parable of “The Good Samaritan.” Robberies on, or along the Jericho Road were so frequent as to be unremarkable. The road was infested with violent robbers. That fact will make my next contention more feasible. I think that this parable was an appropriation of current events, something out

of the daily news. Everyone knew about the incident, totally familiar only the names of the hapless were changed as time went on. I mean to suggest that the popular outrage was rather ho hum and philosophical: “The darn fool shouldn’t have traveled at that time of day . . . or without an armed escort.” Everyone was secretly relieved that they were not the victim. The lawyer asks, **And who is my neighbor?**

Here’s the rest of the story:

**Jesus replied, "A (certain—in the Greek) man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho [and so he was probably a Jew and thus hated by the Samaritans], and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of the three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" [The lawyer] said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."**

What we have here is “sanctified current events.” Jesus took an event in the news and used it to explain mercy, to explain how we are to respond to the pain, misery and misfortune of others. It does no one any good to evade the call to love our neighbor . . . God has promised us reward, not safety and long life. We, too, can sanctify the news. We can turn it to good, illustrative use; we could build up each others faith by thinking, “Wow, what does this tell us about God . . . about people . . . about our own hearts.” And here, in part, is what the parable tells us about our own lives. The reason the priests passed by the man could signify fear, fear of involvement and fear of danger. But the charge of playing religion cannot be lifted—their walk of faith was lacking in spiritual participation. It is as if they were religious formalists, caught up in the rituals, the minutia of religious observances, but far from the love, far from the love of God and neighbor.

God wants a full-throated, full-throttled, red-blooded, full-bodied and radical love from us toward our neighbor—a passionate love that is complete and deep, not wide and shallow! He wants the same intensity of love for one another. And we, we are so easily distracted, so easily satisfied with stuff, fluff and nonsense. We tend to expend

ourselves on the ephemera<sup>1</sup>. **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.** That is what Jesus means when He says to the Lawyer, **“Go thou and do likewise.”**

What has happened this week as I labored on the sermon is that I worked hard on this parable mostly unaware of how it was working on me! It was a little like working with molten iron without protective coverings and gloves. I want to say that this is a very disturbing parable. I want to show you some of my burns.

Firstly, you may have heard of a sermon by Jonathan Edward’s entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” The message is terribly true. Edwards has who we are right. We are sinners and God responds to us and our sinning with wrath. The title declares who we are and who God is. This parable is not an idle tale about a traveling salesman who runs into a gang, gets stripped and beaten and is left to die. These thugs are trifling with God and are therefore are under His wrath.

Secondly, why do people do such wicked things? They do them because sinning comes naturally to a sinner. Human beings are morally corrupt. They act out on the evil that they have stored up in their hearts; they devise wicked and hurtful things and execute them.

God hates sin due to His perfect righteousness. And God also hates sinners who have, by their actions, and attitudes, openly declared their enmity towards God. Sin is hostility, contempt and rebellion (**which is like unto witchcraft-1 Samuel 15:23<sup>2</sup> KJV**). It is frightfully important to remember that *it is sinners whom God casts into hell*. Not Sin! And that their lot there is eternal torment. But, pastor, haven’t we heard “love the sinner, hate the sin?” That is a real declension from biblical truth. Jonathan Edwards had it right, we are “Sinners in the hands of an angry God.” The point is not to evade the whole truth, we are not to side-step the whole counsel of God.

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<sup>1</sup> noun, plural ephemera

[ih-fem-er-uh] (Show IPA), ephemerons.

1.anything short-lived or ephemeral.

2.ephemera, items designed to be useful or important for only a short time, especially pamphlets, notices, tickets, etc.

#### Origin Expand

1570-80; < Greek ephéméron short-lived insect, noun use of neuter of ephémeros; see ephemeral

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title = {Dictionary.com Unabridged},month = {Apr},day = {13},year = {2015},

url = {http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ephemera}),

<sup>2</sup> **For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.**

While I was pondering the Jewish man, a victim of robbers and violence, the news story broke about a recent gang rape on Panama City Beach in the midst of a drunken orgy. The incapacitated girl was violated in public, in plain view in front of dozens of other partiers. The three men who committed this crime may not have known it, but they were *trifling with God*—putting themselves under His wrath in an unspeakable way. She was stripped and violated. The man on Jericho Road, also a public place, was stripped, beaten and left for dead. Two religious professionals, a local priest and a temple priest, when they saw him, **passed by on the other side**. *They trifled with God very much as did the thieves . . . and as did the bystanders to this girl's ordeal*. Was there no one there to intervene, and show mercy? No Samaritan? Which triflers stand at the head of your list of those under God's wrath? Would it be the bar and dive owners, the alcohol merchants who capitalize on the lawless event? What about the drunken debauched crowd? Or, worse, the pundits who express “indirect approval” by mocking the shock, or horrified outrage of others? Could it even be the reporter whose best shot was “*Wow! This is really dangerous.*” **Not depraved, wrong, evil, disgusting, reprobate and wickedly sinful?** Or, would you choose the three depraved men who perpetrated the degrading, immoral act? Or, perhaps, the murderous Islamic terrorists who daily add to their blood-guiltiness in the Near East?

Again, who do you think heads the list of those under God's wrath? Is it the band of thieves who stripped, beat and left for dead a certain Jewish man? Or, how about the two religious professionals who played it safe and, rather than risk involvement, passed by on the other side? Or how about the insolent lawyer who sought **to put Jesus to the test** with his treacherous questions . . . and followed that up with attempting to justify himself with the saucy question, “**And who is my neighbor?**” The unhappy answer is: all of the above. As it is written, **<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.** **<sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (Romans 1: 18-19) ESV** All who trifle with God come under His wrath and God is committed to avenging Himself upon all rebels, all His enemies. It is written in other places: **There is none righteous, no not one . . . for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.**

God loves righteousness, the good, pure and holy and it is because He loves these things that He hates their perversion, inversion and distortion and hates those who do such things. The good news is that in spite of this state of war, declared by us, against our holy, pure, righteous and loving God, **that while we were yet sinners**, Christ, knowing full well *who we are*, and *what our predicament is*, came anyway—to take upon Himself the wrath that was *deservedly* upon us! The love God that rescues us comes in spite of our *trifling* ways; merciful grace comes because He loves us and not the other way around.

**Amen**