

## Heirs of Salvation

I know you've heard me say it a thousand times (if not more), but I'll say it again: **CONTEXT MATTERS**. You can't pluck things out of context, and still expect to properly understand what is being said or talked about. Pluck one paragraph, one sentence, even one word out of context, *and the entire meaning can change*. But...you already know this. You know it, not just because I've said it so many times, but because you've experienced it yourself, probably many times over. Has anyone ever taken one of your statements or ideas out of context? Has anyone ever plucked a word or phrase out of your conversation or your e-mail, and then used it to make you sound like something that even the devil would blush at? Yeah...you understand that keeping things in proper context matters.

And yet...how often do we rip today's Gospel lesson out of context? It happens. It happens all the time. Case in point: I can't tell you how often this parable is understood as Jesus is the poor guy laying in the ditch, bloodied and beaten and left for dead by evil people, and we're the Good Samaritan, who comes along and loves and serves Jesus with our gifts, our mercy, and our compassion. It's terribly ironic, but this parable often gets turned into the exact thing that Jesus was preaching against. This parable, taken and taught out of context, gets turned into a lesson on "*What I need to do in order to please God and be like the Good Samaritan.*"

Let me ask you: **WHY** did Jesus teach this parable? No one ever seems to bother with this, although Scripture tells us very plainly why Jesus taught this parable. A hotshot young lawyer; a guy who thought he knew it all regarding the Word of God, stands up to put Jesus to the test. This young guy really doesn't have an *honest* question. He just wants to show everybody else in the room how smart he is. He plays the old game that's still played in Bible studies all across the Christian world: "Stump the pastor." You know how it works. "*Pastor, I have a question....*" And then what follows isn't really a question seeking an answer, but a person seeking an opportunity to give their opinion on something. "*That's what you say, but here's how I see it. Here's how I understand it.*"

What does this arrogant know-it-all ask Jesus? "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" This guy isn't looking for an answer because he's *genuinely concerned*. No! He's looking for praise and accolades. He's looking for an "atta-boy." Jesus knows what's going on, which is why He responds with a question of His own. "*What does the Bible say? What has God already said on this?*"

This guy does answer Jesus properly, reciting God's Word. "*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.” Jesus tells him, “You’ve answered correctly. You’re right! Do this, and you will live.” But here is where the guy’s **true** intentions get smoked out. **Seeking to justify himself**, he levels another question at Jesus: “And just who is my neighbor?” Which is another way of asking, “C’mon, Jesus, there are obviously some caveats and limits to this! Loving God and loving myself...check and check. Loving my neighbor? Who exactly is this? Some people, Jesus, as you well-know are difficult to love. Some people are down-right impossible to love. Some people are just so rotten that they don’t deserve to be loved. So...who is my neighbor? Who, exactly, do I need to love? What boxes do I need to check off to ensure that I inherit eternal life?”*

It from this very **self-centered, self-serving, self-justifying** question that Jesus teaches the parable we all know so well. Context matters. That proverbial Samaritan, the wretched and deplorable enemy, hated and despised by all Jewish people, is the one that shows true love, compassion, and mercy. That hated and despised Samaritan shows what it means to truly love your neighbor.

**WHY** did the Samaritan stop and show such love and compassion and mercy to this guy? The guy in the ditch hated him! The Jews **HATED** the Samaritans. You hear it in the young lawyer’s response to Jesus. He can’t even bring himself to say admit that the Samaritan proved to be the loving neighbor. “*The one who showed him mercy.*” He can’t even say the word “Samaritan.” That’s how hated they were. **And you wanna talk about salt in the wound?** Jesus then tells this little works-righteous fool, “*Yeah...now you go and do likewise. You go and be just like the Samaritan.*” Ouch!

Why did the Samaritan stop and show such love? Why was he such a loving neighbor? It certainly wasn’t because the guy in the ditch deserved it. **He didn’t.** No one would’ve faulted the Samaritan for walking on by...or even kicking him or going through his pockets as he passed by. No one would have faulted him. **But...that’s not who the Samaritan was.** It had **nothing** to do with the guy in the ditch and whether or not he was worthy. The Samaritan showed love because that’s just who the Samaritan was. (*Side-note: Do you see how the whole ‘Jesus is the guy in the ditch, and you’re the Good Samaritan’ just doesn’t work?*)

**You’re the guy in the ditch!** Jesus, the truly Good Samaritan, came down from heaven...for you. Jesus gave up all of heaven’s majesty and glory to become utterly hated and despised by the children of Adam...for you. Jesus came to freely and fully pour out His gifts of sacrifice and life on you; on the corpse that is your sin, all so that you could have life, and have it abundantly in Him. “*Charge all their sin, all their death, all their wages to Me. I will pay it all, in full.*” And He did. It is finished, once and for all! What have you done to deserve this [the crucifix; Holy Communion]? What have you done to deserve or earn forgiveness

for even one single sin, let alone an eternity's worth of them? What have you done to *inherit* eternal life?

Recognized within the context of Christ's all-redeeming sacrifice, that young lawyer's question seems downright stupid, doesn't it? "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" **Answer: Be born!** "Inheritance" is the language of heir and family. *Properly understood*, you don't merit or earn inheritance. You inherit something because you are an heir. You are family. ***How many people here can take credit for their conception and birth?*** You had **NOTHING** to do with that! I don't care how important you think you are. You didn't choose your parents. You didn't choose the time and place you were born. You didn't choose any of the circumstances. You contributed **NOTHING**. You are simply the blessed result.

And so it is with eternal life. What have you ever done to inherit eternal life? **NOTHING!** ***Jesus did it all!*** By virtue of God's grace; by virtue of the working of God's Holy Spirit in His means of grace—His Word and His sacrament of Holy Baptism—you were called and chosen, adopted and "re-born" as a child of God; an heir of the heavenly King and His kingdom. As Jesus words it in John 3 (in the Greek), you were born, ***not "again," but "from above."*** God gave birth to you, through water and the Word. It is by Him and through Him that you are an heir of salvation.

Now, this salvation reality should mean something to you. This is where the whole "you go and do likewise" does ***rightly*** come into play. Again, though, this can only be ***properly*** understood when it's **understood within the context of the cross of Jesus Christ.** Are there people who are difficult to love? Are there people who do deserve a good punch in the throat? Maybe that's too harsh for some of you. For the kinder, gentler ones who think you've already got all this love and mercy stuff down: Are there people that you would walk by, ignore, or pretend not to see? Are there people you that you think are undeserving of your grace, compassion, and love? Absolutely!

Just think of all the death row converts we hear about...and let out a snort of ***derision and disapproval.*** Jeffrey Dahmer...in heaven?! John Wayne Gacy or the Son of Sam...forgiven, redeemed, and in heaven? Absolutely not! That's not fair! That's not right! Look at all that they've done! But it gets even worse than that. We get bent out of shape and withhold love and goodness and mercy from people because ***they didn't give us a thank you note***...you know...a receipt for our "selfless goodness." We withhold love and goodness and mercy from people because we only see a business transaction, and not a neighbor in need. "*What's in it for me? What am I going to get in return? How will this profit me?*" If we're not going to come out on top or come out ahead, we often keep on walking. We come very close to calling down the fires of heaven on people (or at least pretending like we don't see them) simply because we don't like them. We

disapprove. We don't like the way they dress. We don't like their tattoos. We don't like that they don't like and enjoy the exact same things we do. Sometimes (and this is tough to admit), we don't like people because they're **EXACTLY** like us. Sometimes we withhold grace, love, and compassion from people *simply because we don't think they deserve it*. In our eyes and by our reckoning, **they haven't done enough...you know, like us.**

Folks: They deserve the very same temporal and eternal punishment that you do! Jesus Christ died and rose for them...*no different than He did for you*. This is what John gets at in his first epistle. "*We love because He first loved us.*" This [*the crucifix*] is WHY we love! ***This is HOW we love.*** We're only able to love and show compassion and grace and mercy and peace to others *because* Christ showed it to us first...in spite of us. This is why we show compassion and forgiveness and mercy to each and every person. They're ALL our neighbors! They're ALL people God the Father sent His only-begotten Son to die for. They're ALL people that Christ died and rose again for. ***They're ALL just like you, in need of the grace, compassion, mercy, love, forgiveness, and peace that can come ONLY from and through Christ Jesus.***

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: **YOU** are an heir of everlasting salvation, this is present-tense truth. This is eternal-sense truth. It's **not** true because of who you are or what you do or don't do. It's **not** true because your mom or your little clique of friends or the tax-deductible giving statement assures you that you're a good person. ***None of that matters. None of that saves you.*** You are a redeemed heir of everlasting salvation ALL because of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for you and for all people...***all your neighbors.***

Undeserved and unconditional ***compassion, mercy, and love***, in Christ and because of Christ; in thankful response to Christ...**all within the context of Christ**: This was the Good Samaritan's reality. Now, you go and do likewise, not in order to become a child of God, but out of the joy that you are a child of God.

**AMEN**