

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Luke, chapter 15, is where we will start. If you don't have a Bible with you, there will be a black hardback one somewhere around you. If you're just not familiar with the Bible, we'll put page numbers up on the screen so you know exactly where to go. I want you to get there, so grab a Bible, and let's try to get there.

While you're turning there, I just want to kind of catch you up on kind of a cool piece of life at The Village right now. In 2008, we came to you and said, "We need \$4 million to buy that old Albertson's over there." We started our second capital campaign called "We need \$4 million in the next 60 days." You gave to that, and then we bought this building. We had people come in and see what exactly it would take to retrofit this building to make this building usable space for us. That price tag came in at around \$10 million.

We came back to you and said, "Okay, this is what it's going to cost. It's going to cost close to \$10 million to create a usable space in this Albertson's that ultimately can house us and care for us in the foreseeable future." From there, you gave more to that project and gave us as elders permission to borrow up to \$7 million to complete the project. At the end of 2010, we moved into this facility here in Flower Mound and borrowed \$5,022,000 in order to pay completely the project off. I'm really honestly just informing you that as of two weeks ago, that has been paid in full so we are debt-free as a church.

Now let me say just a couple of things. A special thank you to Denton and to Dallas. Really to ask you to sow into something that's so far from you in one sense is to really reveal your heart for The Village Church, that we really are one church in multiple locations. The way the funds here have kind of flown up to Denton and down to Dallas and then at times into Flower Mound has been spectacular as a leader to watch. Thank you for those of you who have given from those two campuses to ensure we knock out the debt on this campus, in particular.

Then I wanted to just encourage you in one other way. For the last couple of years, what you have done is you have set aside a part of your income as a faith promise to us. All right? By the way, you are free of those faith promises. I think three to five years was kind of what we had asked and what so many of you had committed to. What I want to kind of push your way is that over the last few years, you've taken an amount of your money, and you have sown it into what you believed and what you perceived to be of eternal value.

My encouragement is now that that commitment is up, that you not take that money that you had set aside and then begin to sow it into things that *are* temporary but rather that you would continue to find ways to utilize that amount you've set aside to see that the Word of God continues to roll out and that the kingdom of God expands in ways that maybe need resources to expand.

Ultimately I want to encourage you not to go, *Oh yeah! I'm free. Let's buy more Xbox games.* Listen, I'm not judging. I have a Xbox at my house, man. That Kinects is legit, but I'm just saying to utilize that money for eternal things rather than temporary things. I think this makes us good stewards. I think this is a smart move. Will you pray about that and consider that? If you can't, you can't, but if you *can*... I don't want to push too hard, but it appears you can because you have. Continue to sow into the kingdom.

Now I want to talk today about diversity and not necessarily racial diversity (although I am going to hang on that for just a bit), but really diversity overall. I'll tell you why. If we were to pair up in this room, it doesn't matter with whom you pair up. You can pair up with your spouse. You can pair up with your BFF. You can pair up with whomever. If we were to just pair up and we were to get a piece of paper and you were to list out on that piece of paper, "Here are the things we are alike in, and here are the things we are different in," you will have far more differences than you will have likenesses, regardless of who it is.

We are really, in one sense, very unique creatures with different likes and different shapes and different backgrounds. Here's what really the church has an opportunity to be and do. On one hand, those differences can lead to conflict and division and sorrow, so those differences have to, in some sense, be watched, and we have to be careful. There's a bit of warning that comes in regard to our differences, but those differences can also be the glory of God made manifest among a people.

Let me kind of talk to you about how that is and why that is. Then I want to show you just how ruthlessly Jesus assaults, and the gospel assaults, this kind of "better than" mentality we're all prone to. The Bible is clear that you and I from our birth, by the nature that we exist, we are at odds with our Creator. All right? Sin isn't something you walk in once you figure out the difference between right and wrong, and you choose wrong. Sin is the state of your heart that has led to your wrong actions. Are you with me?

I've taught on this a cajillion times, which isn't even a number! I so consistently pound and pounce on this idea that I don't feel like I need to robustly build it out. You sin because you're a sinner. You're not a sinner because you sin. Are you tracking with me? You are brought forth in iniquity. When you were born, you were by your nature an object of God's wrath. What seems right to you is wrong. This is how you came into the world.

Since your relationship with God was fractured, that caused other fractures. Since your relationship with God is fractured...now catch this...your relationship with *you* is fractured. Because you do not have God's design and God's goal and the purpose of God to define who you are, you will set out to define yourself in other ways and with other means. When you do that, you have set yourself up, if we're going to let this thing roll all the way downhill... If, in your relationship with God, there is brokenness and then yet in your relationship with you there is brokenness, then you're absolutely going to have brokenness in...what? Your relationship with others.

It's not like relationship with God is broken, relationship with self is broken, but your relationship with others is awesome. Wrong! What ends up happening in our brokenness with God and brokenness with others is we begin to define ourselves up and against other people. Now this isn't always true, but it's almost always a definition that makes us better at the expense of others. Now there are some of you who wallow in the mud of self-pity, and you do the exact opposite. You're like, *Oh, I stink. My background is this. I've done this. Here's what I'm guilty of.*

Everybody is better than you are. There are a lot of self-destructive behaviors that come when that's where you land. You tend to destroy relationships. You tend to make decision you know are going to lead to you being hurt. You probably wallow in some depression. I want to be really straight here. Some depression is chemical and needs to be treated, and other depression is spiritual and needs to be treated at a deeper level. Most of the time, how this brokenness with God and brokenness with self works itself out is for us to build upon our perceived strengths and look at others with disdain in order to make ourselves look better, in order to make ourselves feel better about ourselves.

You can see this culturally play out in a lot of just very clear, everyday places. Let me give you the primary one we see this play out. Say you were gifted or cursed (however you want to look at it) to be given a physical body in this day and age that this day and age finds attractive. Now why did I say "this day and age"? Because Jen Wilkin, who is a covenant member of our church, teaches Women's Bible studies and also writes a fantastic blog, wrote a blog a couple of weeks ago where she had found these ads from the 1940s and 1950s targeting women. The ad was, "Want to gain 5 pounds, girls? Need to gain 10 pounds? Use our product!"

Now I was paying attention in December leading up to the New Year. Did anybody else see any of that? Girls, would you like to put on 12? Nobody saw that! Why? Because it's our culture's decision of what is beautiful has changed. Women don't want to gain weight. No woman wants to gain weight. They all want to lose weight! It doesn't even matter what they look like. I mean, I think all of us have seen just a perfectly beautiful woman complain, "Do I look fat in this?" *No, you don't! Are you serious? Are you taking crazy pills?* Right?

What that is is our culture's constant beratement on, "This is what is sexy." I mean, I'll just tell you how sick we are. If you trace it, a lot of the turn comes with Audrey Hepburn. This is the shape. This is the American woman. Do you know she was in a concentration camp in World War II and was malnourished? Were you aware of that history? So what we've done as a culture has gone, "Hey, this malnourished, big-headed woman is now what we should all look like." Listen, we sell this to our daughters, and we sell this to our women. Then we're confused that they're so self-conscious about their bodies because they're not malnourished.

You know, historically, the curvier you were, the more appealing you were. Actually a sign of wealth and health was curviness, because you could eat. If you were a rail, that was actually unattractive, and you came off as poor because you couldn't eat. Yet our culture has kind of flipped the script and said, "No, no, no. This is sexy, and this is not." I'm kind of stretching out my point here. I have two daughters. I have a passion in this area. What we end up doing is we end up looking at how we look physically, if we're fit, and then we look at people who aren't fit, and we make this kind of judgment.

There's this preconceived notion that, *We take care of ourselves, and we eat right, and we work right. Because we're like this, then other people must be lazy. They don't watch they eat.* So what do we want to do? We want to feel better about ourselves. It plays out in diet, and it plays out in the physical form. We'll use hard work and money earned to do the same thing. *I went to school. I studied hard. I worked hard. I got this job. I slaved away at this job, and I got this amount of income. So, if other people don't make the kind of income I make, if other people need help where I don't need help, obviously they have not worked as hard as I have worked. They have not put in the time I have put in. They have not put in the effort I have put in.*

Do you see what we're doing? We're elevating ourselves. Really the heart behind all of that is, *I am better than you are. I'm better than you in this area. I'm better than you in this area. I'm better than you in this area.* Look right at me. No one needs to be taught how to do that. You do that from day one. Watch kids. Kids do it! Kids begin to clue in really early. *Look, I have nicer clothes than you have. I'm better at sports than you are. I'm taller. I'm stronger. My family has more stuff. We go on cooler trips.* Kids dial into this very quickly. It's intrinsic and part of our sinful, fallen hearts.

Now Jesus and the gospel are going to invade this "better than" mentality with a bit of ruthlessness, with a heart set to destroy it. I want to show you where our differences, yes, can cause division and can be an issue we need to be careful of, but I also want to show you how our differences can be made visible the glory of God in some really spectacular ways. So go to Luke 15. I believe you should already be there. Luke 15. We'll pick it up in verse 1. At some point in my life, I have to stop doing 15-minute intros.

**"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him [him being Jesus]."** Now I want to just stop there because I have to describe this so you can kind of feel the weight of it. A tax collector in the first century is a man who has purchased the right from Rome to raise taxes from the Jews to fund an occupying army that was more brutal than we can imagine.

The only way I can try to unpack this for you in a way you could morally grasp it would be for us to imagine the United States of America is invaded by an occupying force. They conquer our government, and they set up outposts in our major cities and suburbs. That occupying force has no regard for law, no regard for human life. They rape our women and our daughters. They take what they want. They are brutal. They murder.

There are no checks and balances, and we are enslaved to them. Your neighbor, Bill, took what money he had, and he gave it to them for the right to raise money from you, to take money from you, to pay for the food, training, and shelter of this occupying force. Now are you going to have Bill over for roast? Are you a big fan of Bill? Well, that's what's going on with these tax collectors. And they're drawing near to hear Jesus.

The other group that's in this crowd is the sinners. We have to kind of think in first century ways here because a sinner isn't just, "You're a sinner; I'm a sinner. We're all sinners." As far as this text goes, a sinner is a class of people marked by either disease or irreputable profession. So you have cripples in the crowd. You have prostitutes. You have slave traders. This is kind of a dark joint. But they're not the only ones who are there. Let's look at who else is there. **"And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"** Catch this crowd. This crowd is spectacular.

You have tax collectors and sinners, but you also have Pharisees and scribes. So in one gathering before Jesus Christ, you have strippers and pornographers and self-righteous church kids. You have them both sitting under the gospel. Now let me tell you why I think this is so important. If we are going to be a place that makes disciples through gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, gospel-centered service, and gospel-centered multiplication, we have to be a people who understand church is going to be messy, because here's what you have coming.

One of the things I love about this church is the fact that we're all over the grid on where God gets us. There have been people who get in the water and say, "Man, I was a witch," people who get in the water who say, "Listen, I was involved in swinging before my marriage blew up," "Listen, I've been addicted to heroin," "I've been involved in such deplorable things, I'm surprised you would have me here." Then we have people who got in the water who were like, "Look, I was born in church. Literally my mom had me in

church. I have been in church my whole life. I have 13 ichthuses on the back of my car. I have Christian tee shirts. I've only cussed in words I've invented. They're not legitimate cuss words. They're Christian cuss words."

In the middle of all of that (now follow me), they realize they knew *about* Jesus but didn't know Jesus. To them, Jesus was an idea and not a relationship. The gospel invaded their self-righteousness and rescued them. See, Jesus is communicating in Luke 15, and we know this because in the parable of the prodigal son that follows this, he entreats the older brother to come inside. What you see happening in this text is this invitation for all to come and sit under the banner of grace.

Let me tell you why in church this can lead to division, and problems with this can lead to glory. If you have a man or woman who has walked in the darkness of licentiousness, drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, addiction, betrayal, and they receive the grace and mercy of Christ and enter into the body of Christ, and then you have a brother or a sister who has followed all the rules their whole life... They've never even touched a sip of alcohol (demon juice), barely watches... Then they come under the grace and mercy of God. These two are going to mingle in a home group.

That could get awkward, huh? I mean, think about the conversations they're having. Think about how difficult it is for them to relate. "Well, you know, my daddy got us up every Sunday morning and got us dressed and took us to church. Then we did this thing as a family on Sunday afternoons where we got together." This one says, "You know, I was actually sexually abused by my father. I haven't spoken to my mother in decades."

"So what did you guys do for Christmas?" You have this collision of worlds. Here's what can happen. On this side, you can have division. You can have the one who has sinned in self-righteousness puff themselves up at the expense of the one who has sinned in licentiousness. Then all of a sudden you become the coach: "What you need to do is this, this, this, this." Yeah, because your self-righteousness has gotten *you* so far. Or what can happen is both can marvel in and glory in the forgiving, saving work of Jesus Christ in that while one was a legalist and one wallowed in licentiousness, both of them offended God, and he rescued them both.

Look right at me. You obeying all the rules does not make you less of a blasphemer and makes you no less wicked than the one who has broken all the rules. You just have a different idol. You have to get over you. Now the glory of God is seen when those two mingle in such a way where they both celebrate the forgiveness made available to both of them in Jesus Christ. Then they serve one another and walk with one another, free of judgment, worshiping the same Jesus.

Okay, let me show you another place where we have the opportunity to really see. Go to James, chapter 2. We have the opportunity to really see the glory of Jesus and his gospel made manifest among us. James, chapter 2, starting in verse 1.

**"My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' while you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there,' or, 'Sit down at my feet,' have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?"**

So just as the gospel is going to break down this barrier of our pasts and our past struggles and how deeply sinful we got either in legalism or licentiousness that's going to form one community around the forgiving, saving work of Jesus Christ, the gospel also wants to attack the division that can occur around socio-economic status between the rich and the poor that there will be no partiality in the kingdom of God between those who make much and those who make little. For how could there be?

Let me try to explain it like this. At the end of this campaign that helped us get rid of the debt, there are men and women, families, who gave into this hope of ours to pay this whole thing off quickly at the tune of \$30 or \$40 a month. They gave it, and it hurt. Like, there were things in their family it cost them to do that. I don't know what your background is. When I made Lauren, I was making \$12,000 a year. Here's what I'll tell you about that.

When you're making \$12,000 a year, you better not drink a whole Coke by yourself because first of all, it's not even Coke; it's Sam's Choice. Coke was like for our anniversary. There would be like marital conflict around, "You drank that whole can by yourself? You are so selfish! I've been at work all day, and you drank the Coke?" It's funny that for most of us, we don't think that way because we've been so blessed, but some people gave at a level and at a pace that wasn't a lot of cash to most of us, but it hurt. It was sacrificial in its nature.

Then I'll be straight. Some people gave. Man, I don't look at numbers and names outside of our elder board. Our elder board had better be generously giving to the church or they don't need to be elders. Outside of that, I don't ever look at our giving, for fear of my own heart and trust in my heart. I don't know how I'll respond and how I can be obedient to this. So I don't look, but here's what I can tell you. Some people gave hundreds of thousands. It didn't affect them at all. Nothing in their life had to change.

It wasn't sacrificial. It was generous but not sacrificial. So if you take a guy who is giving hundreds of thousands or millions and you honor him for giving in a way that honestly was not sacrificial and do nothing to honor the guy who gave \$30 a month but it was unbelievably sacrificial, have you not sinned against the man? Have you not belittled, when all is said and done, the generosity of Jesus and his free grace to all of us regardless of capital?

So on one hand, you have this possibility for division. Let me tell you how the division works. If a poor man comes to a rich man and says, "Hey, man, I feel like your life in a lot of ways isn't measuring up to the standard of the Word in these areas. I think you should pray about that and consider that." It's a wicked, wealthy man to go, "What do you know? I mean, you're broke. Who are you to lecture me? You don't know anything about my life. You don't know anything about me." Right? That would be a way that this could lead to division.

It can also lead to division the exact opposite way for a wealthy man to engage a poor man and go, "Hey, here's what the Word of God says. Here's where you're kind of living in rebellion to that. Here are some things I think that might help." The poor man goes, "Oh, you think because you're rich you can tell me what to do?" There's a pride that can occur in both that's foolish and unhelpful. The glory of God is seen when money isn't an issue at all, because we all stand on the same ground...sinners in need of a Savior, sinners in need of grace.

There are few places in our culture that the morally impure and the morally upright and the poor and the wealthy engage in a level of intimacy where they do life and they're friends, and the glory of the church of Jesus Christ is found when those relationships occur. Now nowhere historically has this "better than" mentality fleshed itself out in cultures and countries like it has and like it still does around the issue of skin color and race, around ethnicity. I know some of you are like, *I think we're just past that, Matt. I think it's 2012, and I think we're somewhat past that.*

I want you to look right at me. There is no doubt that over the last 20 years, we have in our political correctness removed some things from our language, but hear me. Political correctness might suppress your mouth, but it does nothing to your heart. It actually causes you to be almost unable to identify what's in your heart because you know the right answer. Nothing is more dangerous than knowing the right answer and numbing your heart and suppressing your heart to a level where you know the right answer but don't have the right heart.

Do I believe we watch our mouths more? Yes. Do I believe we understand saying certain things culturally has repercussions now that might not have been present 30 years ago, 40 years ago? Yes. But have our

hearts fundamentally changed? Not a lot of us. I think some of us are still holding onto some deplorable, wicked theology from a few generations ago. More on that in just a bit.

Jesus is going to so aggressively assault the idea of being ethno-centric, all right, that the Jews are going to, on more than one occasion, try to kill him for it. So let's check it out. Go to Luke, chapter 4, Jesus' first sermon. We're going to pick it up in verse 17. Jesus is back in his hometown of Nazareth. He is in the synagogue, and he is about to teach. His first sermon here. Lights out. Verse 17, **"And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written..."**

Now you should recognize this text because during Advent we read it as a messianic prophecy. **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"**

Now I just want to stop there. Jesus just rolled open Isaiah, read a text about the Messiah coming, rolled it up, handed it to the attendant, and said, "That's me. I'm the Messiah." Now, he is from Nazareth. He is not new. He is not out of nowhere for them. This isn't like our day and age where you... How many of you were born outside of Texas? I was born outside of Texas. Okay. This isn't the day where you are identified by what your father does. No one goes, "This is Matt Chandler, son of the truck driver, son of the petty officer."

No one has ever introduced me like that. Do you know why? Because we moved a bunch since then. The world used to be built... I mean, there were no strangers. If there was a stranger, you knew there was a stranger. You just had *your* village. You had *your* city. People were defined by what they did. They know Jesus, saw him grow up, knew his daddy, knew his mama, knew this family. He just rolled open the scroll, read Isaiah, and said, "I'm the Messiah."

You'd think it would enrage the Jews in the synagogue, but look what happens. Verse 22: **"And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth."** Listen to this. **"And they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'"** Now that's not, "Oh you can't be the Messiah; you're Joseph's boy." Really there's a marveling going on at Jesus' ability to handle the text and to teach. Their eyes are fixed on him. They are marveling at what he says. They know it's the carpenter's boy. They know he is not formally educated, and yet he is handling the prophets and the law in such a way that they're marveling at it knowing he hasn't been educated.

He hasn't followed a rabbi. He is just kind of coming out of nowhere and is bringing the heat. So they're literally going, *Maybe this is the Messiah, Joseph's boy from Nazareth. Maybe! Remember the promise?* I can only imagine what they were talking about because in a chapter or two over in Isaiah, there's this promise that Nazareth will see the light, Capernaum will see the light. So there's this talk, *Hey, this might be the Messiah.* Then it's just going to go really bad really quickly.

Verse 23: **"And he said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.' And he said, 'Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.'"** That's a strange statement, because he is accepted in his hometown. "I'm the Messiah." "He might just be the Messiah." That's what we just read. Then now he is quoting a prophecy, "Basically this is what you're going to say to me. This is what is coming."

Then he goes, "Hey, a prophet is not going to be accepted in his hometown." Then look at what he says next. **"But in truth, I tell you..."** So he basically said, "Okay, let me speak some truth to you now. Let me show you what I mean." Let's look at what he says here. **"But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."**

Now I'll just stop and try to tell you exactly what he said. He is appealing to their past, a history they know, and he is pointing out that God-saving work is not just for Israel but rather for the whole world. The Jews in the first century in this text have such a pride that they are God's chosen people, that they are the ethnic race by which all other races should be measured, that they are the example of what you *should* be and had a great deal of disdain for other races and other countries and nations.

Jesus just reminded them, "Hey, in a couple of significant moments in your history, God saved, and he didn't save an Israelite. He saved someone who wasn't an Israelite." He is reminding them, "My plan of redemption goes well beyond the Jews." Look at their response. **"When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff."**

Now obviously I've had sermons go badly before. I've had people emailing in some atrociously hateful things. I have never had an entire room fill with wrath and try to murder me. I don't know if I'm just not preaching directly enough, but at this point, 37 years, it hasn't happened yet. Now Jesus touches on a spot

here that they're just unwilling to hear. "You are not a better race. You are not more gifted. Yes, the law was given. Yes, Abraham is the father. Yes, the prophets came to you, but all along, God's plan wasn't to save you but to call from every tribe, every tongue, and every nation unto himself for the glory of his name worshipers who will love and revere him in spirit and in truth."

No one did the Jews hate more than the Samaritans. To give you a piece of history, when Israel went into exile into Babylon, some of the Jews intermarried with Babylonians and had little beautiful Babylonian babies. All right? Half-Babylonian, half-Jewish babies. These became the Samaritans. The pureblooded Israelites hated them for it. Now this is sounding a little bit World War II-ish, isn't it? "We're the purebloods. You're a half-breed." Because of their half-breedness, they wouldn't even let them worship in the temple or the synagogues.

So if you remember the discussion, if you have a background in church and understand and know your Bible, when Jesus is having a conversation with the woman at the well, do you remember what the conversation was? "Well, the Jews say we're to worship on this mountain, but our fathers say we worship on this mountain. When the Messiah comes, he'll clear it up." Do you remember Jesus' response? "Yeah, I'm the Messiah. I'm clearing it up. It's on neither. It's in your heart and in your head. It's in spirit and in truth the true worshipers will worship."

The Jews despised the Samaritans. There are some kinds of historical texts (not biblical) that show us there were certain prayers that were voiced in the synagogue asking God not to grant forgiveness to the Samaritans. Now how much do you hate a people if you're asking God not only to destroy them but also to not forgive them of their sins? I mean, that's a type of ethno-centrality that is unbelievably wicked. Jesus, longing to destroy this, is almost always going to make the Samaritan the hero in the story. So let's look at it.

Flip over just a couple of pages to Luke, chapter 10. Again, if you have background in church or know your Bible, this will be a familiar passage. **"And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test..."** You lawyers! **"...saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" He said to him..."** Now keep in mind, this is a lawyer asking questions of Jesus, who is a carpenter's son, an uneducated carpenter's son.

So look at Jesus' question back. **"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 your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.'** And he said to him, **'You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.'**

Now the next line shows us what actually just happened above. **"But he [the lawyer], desiring to justify himself..."** Okay, so the lawyer is embarrassed at what just happened. Have you ever asked a question and then got the answer and felt like a moron? It happens to me all the time. Maybe I'm all alone here. I was trying to print something, so I hit the button. I was like, "Hey, my printer is not working."

"Is there paper in it?"

"I got it." I just felt like an idiot. Check the paper, all right? Reboot. Figure it out. Troubleshoot yourself before...

This is a lawyer asking a Rabbi what the law says, and Jesus asks, "Well, what does the law say?" He says, "This is what the law says." Jesus goes, "That's right!" He did it publically, so he feels a bit foolish. He is trying to justify himself. He should have just let it alone. **"But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, 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.'"**

Now his choice of characters in this in this parable is *lights out*, because this isn't just everyday Jew. This is priest. This is super-Jew! "This is the best of the best of the best from among our people. This isn't a cobbler. This isn't a carpenter. This is a *priest*, the one who made intercession between us and God, the one who went into the synagogue, the one who taught us the Scriptures. A priest walked by and passed alongside." Then he doesn't let up. He goes with the Levitical tribe next.

**"So likewise a Levite [the tribe from which the priests come], when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."** So you have two very high-ups in Jewish society, pureblooded priests of the tribe of Levi who do nothing but walk past this man beaten and left fully naked and half-dead. Look at verse 33. **"But a Samaritan..."** "Oh no! He cannot be... The Samaritan is probably going to kill him, just go ahead and murder him off, because that's what Samaritans do, you know? They can't be trusted."

**"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii..."**

So this is a Samaritan who is not poor and broke. This is a Samaritan who is rolling! He has his own animal. That's his own ride. He has cash. He has oil and wine with him to take care of this brother.

He is willing to give up out of, really the blessings God bestowed upon him, willing to give out of it to someone who is in need, who apparently, coming from Jerusalem to Jericho, would have been a Jew, a man who has despised him and hated 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 these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"**

Verse 37: **"He said, 'the one who showed him mercy.'"** "Okay, there are three characters. There's a priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. Which one?" "The last one." He wouldn't even say it. He doesn't say, "The Samaritan did." "The last guy. The one who showed mercy." Then Jesus ends this with, **"You go, and do likewise."** So like this, throughout the New Testament, Jesus is really going to deconstruct this idea that you are "better than" because you were born.

Let me explain why I know for a fact that we're not fully past it. Some of it is wicked, and some of it's not. I mean, some of you are bigots, and some of you just are uninformed or misinformed. Several years ago after a service, I was sitting on the front row. This was back at the H.V. building. A guy walked up to me after church, and he said, "Hey, Matt, I really love it here." By the way, if you see me around, and you're like, *I don't want to talk to him because I know he is just going to be like, "What can I use here as a sermon illustration?"* I've always asked permission when I use stories of people. Some people have said *no*; some people have said *yes*. I always want to honor this. I have permission to tell this story.

This man sat next to me and said, "Hey, I love The Village, love the music, love the teaching, but I'm just not sure what to tell my kids about all the interracial couples here."

"Okay, so what do you mean?"

"Well, in the Old Testament, doesn't he tell the nation of Israel, of which we are now the church, his covenant people, to come out from them and be separate?"

Now he doesn't mean to be a bigot. He was just taught poorly. So we had this great conversation of, "Hey, no. No." In fact, that had far more to do with what was being worshiped than the color of skin. In fact, one of the ways God shows himself to be spectacularly glorious is in the diversity of colors that have historically led to genocide and wars and death and destruction and injustice coming together and worshipping together as brothers and sisters by creating, when all is said and done, a new family that's not defined by those things but is rather defined by Christ.

So we had a great talk that morning right there on the front row that really God loves all the ethnicities. Then when they come together and they intermarry and then they have babies who are this kind of brand new color, I mean, you have just kind of this out-flowing of God's grace and creativity made manifest in how God's people find the common ground of the cross and not their color.

Listen to me. There are pieces of every culture that are redeemable and pieces of every culture that are sinful and need to be addressed. What happens in the cross of Jesus Christ is cultures are cleansed of their iniquity and are celebrated in their diversity. So on one hand, race has all the potential to be divisive and to create mistrust and to just create a lot of really nasty things, but on the other hand, it has this really spectacular shot at making God be seen more clearly than he currently is.

I'm of the opinion there shouldn't be black churches and white churches. There shouldn't be Hispanic congregations and Anglo congregations. There should be the church. Don't rally around our color. Regardless of color, we rally around the blood of Jesus. Now let me tell you where in this place I think we are. In that first kind of bit of diversity, I think we do really well in that there's a lot of people here who were saved by Jesus from church. There are a lot of people here saved out of drugs, witchcraft, and promiscuity.

So on that first mingling where we have an opportunity to make much of Jesus, we're doing pretty well, although I think there are times people get their feelings hurt or people get confused. Church is going to be messy. You have to prepare yourself for that. You have to learn to be gracious, regardless of which way that grace is flowing. On the diversity of poor and rich, I don't think we do well. Let me stress what I'm saying here.

I think we do well *servicing* the poor. I don't think we do well *welcoming* the poor into community with us and to walk among us. So yes, let us serve you. Yes, let us help you, but there's not enough of, "Come in here with us. Come join our home group. Come have dinner at our house. Let's let our kids play together." There's not enough of that. I think, although we are growing in ethnic diversity, we could do a lot better at it. For too many of us, I think our default, *Well, this area is primarily white.*

A couple of things. I'll give you that it is a primarily white area, but that's not to say there aren't thousands upon thousands upon thousands of African Americans and Hispanics. Our church desperately needs to grow to reflect our community far more. Now how does that happen? Because this is a legitimate conversation. I'm not for affirmative action. Are you with me? I'm not for you going, *Oh, a black guy!* "Say, bro, how you doin', man? Where you go to church?" Don't do that. Please don't do that. *Is that a Hispanic guy in Starbucks?* No. Here's what we need to do, okay? First, we need to pray. We need to pray God would increase the diversity of our fellowship in every way possible for the glory of his name.

Second, we need to search our hearts because look at me. Some of you are bigots. Some of you judge harshly those who are poor. You judge harshly those of other skin colors. You judge harshly those who don't look like you. It is evil and wicked. Some of you feel as though your race is cooler. You are a fool. You need to search your own heart, not your mouth, because it costs too much in our culture to open your mouth like that. Your heart is a different animal. You need to search your heart.

Then the third thing is we need to strive to be gracious and welcoming to the irreligious and the religious. We pray. We seek. Our hearts are transformed. Then our friendships aren't built around things they shouldn't be built around, but they're actually built around a heart of Jesus who loves and pursues and saves among all the nations. In fact, do you remember what James said? It was given unto the poor to have a great faith in God. I mean, think about it. God has given a gift to the poor. Some of you are like, *That's why I don't give to them.* No, that's not how it works.

My heart for us and the thing we're going to pray about Wednesday at our campuses is that Jesus might be exalted and glorified all the more, and the diversity of men and women who call The Village Church their home and celebrate the cross of Christ is what binds us together as family, and that you wouldn't just serve the poor. You wouldn't just know a guy, but that you would walk intimately with people who don't look like you, aren't at the same place you are, have not been blessed in the same ways, and that we would walk together in such a way that shows Jesus transcends all those walls of hostility the world has built up. It's a big prayer. It will take time, perseverance, and the good fight. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, search our hearts. God, where we have pockets in our souls of "better than," forgive us. I praise you that what makes us all family is that we are all born the same way, in a broken relationship with you that created in our hearts a broken relationship with ourselves that has unfortunately, Jesus, bled out on our relationships and interactions with others in the world. I pray you would redeem and reconcile. I pray you would break down walls of hostility.

Where we, in this room, feel "better than" because of money or lack of money, where we feel "better than" because of color, we feel "better than" because of physical shape or genetic gifting or hard work, God, I just pray you would break down that pride and we would walk in love, grace, and mercy towards all men and that we would extend to all men what you have extended to us in Christ. We love you. Help, Jesus. This is a big prayer this week. It's for your beautiful name, amen.

Love you guys.