

## Unconventional Thinking Luke 10:25 – 11:26

In the next section of Luke, from 10:25 – 11:26, are four well-known scenes: (1) the Good Samaritan, (2) the time when Mary sat and listened to Jesus while Martha prepared supper and Martha got aggravated, (3) about prayer including Luke's account of the Lord's prayer, and (4) the time when Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. Each scene has many applications and each has been the subject of many full-length sermons. But, this morning, I would like to look at what the four of them have in common: the way that Jesus, in each case, used unconventional thinking.

Most exchanges between people follow a predictable pattern in which the point of difference becomes the focus. In the history of mankind, I think we can agree that this method has not worked very well. Jesus illustrated a different method.

For example, in many churches, a significant number of the sermons or classes focus on what goes wrong, about sin. Of course, the objective is to get the audience to overcome whatever sin is being presented. But if you focus on defeating sin in your life, what are you thinking about? Sin in your life, the bad choices we face every day. If, while trying to make good choices, we are focused on bad choices, we are far more likely to choose a thinly disguised self-deception rather than overcoming sin and doing the right thing.

In each of these scenes, Jesus comes in the side door. Rather than getting His audience to focus on what is going wrong, He focused on what is going right.

Here's the first one in which Jesus uses the parable of the Good Samaritan:

*<sup>25</sup> And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" <sup>27</sup> So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" <sup>28</sup> And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." <sup>29</sup> But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup> Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" <sup>37</sup> And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

First, note the lawyer's point of view, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" As with most people, religion is understood in terms of its impact on me. So, Jesus asks him simple questions for which he has good answers. Jesus is not entrapping or sarcastic; He is just setting the stage for a meaningful exchange. Then, because the lawyer, as would any knowledgeable

Jew, quoted Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” he asked the obvious lawyer question, “Who is my neighbor?”

That is how people think. We fail to focus on the most important parts and search for the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable. Many a rabbi had taught on that passage; that was the direction they all went. Define who your neighbor is. Jesus could have followed that line of argument and most certainly concluded with an excellent spiritual point. Instead, He told a story that illustrated love, doing what is best for another regardless of the effect on me. That’s the real focus of that line in Leviticus. But, by hijacking the conversation with a side issue, the real point had been buried for generations.

The gospel is exceedingly simple, understandable by any ordinary person. God took care of our justice problem, and illustrated what life is about. God’s objective with creation is to build a big family that will last. To make that work, all the family members must have two characteristics: mutual trust (faith) and selfless concern (love). If you have those two, you are in. If you don’t, you’re out. Simple as that. The focus of that Leviticus passage is love, not neighbor. It’s about action, not definitions. Like Romans 14:23, “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” The important part to God is not the action but the attitude. If we choose by faith, by trusting God, God can work with it, even if our execution was not as good as it could have been. But, if a choice doesn’t pass through faith on the way to action, it is worthless. Defining who my neighbor is has no faith. Love chooses selflessness because God promises that it will work out.

In the next scene, Jesus again demonstrated unconventional thinking, this time in connection to appearances, societal norms, not overblown self-promotion, but in the simple choices we make to keep our lives organized. Here it is, supper at the home of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus who will become famous later as the one Jesus raised from the dead after being three days in his tomb.

*<sup>38</sup> Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. <sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” <sup>41</sup> And Jesus answered and said to her; “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. <sup>42</sup> But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”*

Image yourself in that situation. A local celebrity is coming for supper along with a sizable entourage, a celebrity who was also a friend, as we learn in other stories about this family that are in the gospel of John. Cooking was more difficult in those days with no gas or electric stoves, no microwaves. Couldn’t Mary have listened to what Jesus had to say after supper?

Jesus didn’t chastise Martha, rather, He wanted her to relax. He didn’t say her desire to get dinner on the table at the appropriate time was self-centered or unnecessary or rigid. He told her, “Don’t ruin your enjoyment of the moment.” Jesus did not want her to be irresponsible, just to see the benefit of flexibility.

Don’t we do that to ourselves? Of course, we want to be aware of other people whom we might inconvenience, not delay until everyone’s stomach is growling. But we could say, “Folks, we’re going to delay the meal for a few minutes so we all can hear what Jesus has to say.” I suspect that a number of guests would pitch in and help get dinner on the table when the time came.

Jesus did not stress over schedules, but neither did He abandon responsibility. He found a less stressful way to look at things. We could all use that. He didn't tie up every minute, but rather left time to take advantage of meaningful interactions. He had higher spiritual expectations, rather than cultural expectations. We need to be comfortable with different people having different expectations of the moment and put everyone at ease so that they can relax and appreciate the spiritual opportunities.

The next section deals with prayer. The first part is what we call the Lord's Prayer. Since you all know it well, I will skip those few verses and start reading just after.

*<sup>5</sup> And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; <sup>7</sup> and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? <sup>8</sup> I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. <sup>9</sup> "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. <sup>11</sup> If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

First, a little cultural background. There were no 24-hour super WalMarts or even convenience stores. You couldn't run out and grab something for your guests. Second, travel was hard. Arriving around midnight meant something was not right because travel at night was dangerous. Normally, you would stop before sundown and make camp. So, the travelers likely had not eaten supper. So, the only place to get something was to wake up a neighbor who might (or might not) have some leftovers from their own supper.

Also, the egg – scorpion thing, from what I was able to find, referred to a white scorpion that, when curled up, resembled an egg. In those days, free-range chickens were all they had, so an egg might be anywhere. If you were not really paying attention, you could think it was an egg until you got stung.

Since this series of stories follows the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus taught them when they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray," it seems reasonable that this paragraph is further teaching about prayer. Be persistent. Be confident that God is a good Father, not a practical joker or just plain cruel.

Just like in our day, prayer for many good people has been reduced to a practice without real meaning or confident expectations. Do I really need to be persistent? Didn't God hear me the first time? From the several teachings about persistence in prayer (e.g., Luke 18:1 – 8, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2), it seems that God wants us to demonstrate that we trust Him by asking again and again. Examples in the stories about Elijah, Daniel, and Hannah, the mother of Samuel let us know that the audience in this scene should have understood this concept.

The end of this teaching by Jesus, "How much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him," may seem a little out of place, since the giving of the Spirit seems to be a New Testament idea. But, the concept that the Spirit would accompany the

institution of the eternal kingdom was well known, having been included in the Messianic predictions of the prophets (Joel 2:28, Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 39:29). Peter even quoted one of them in Acts 2 to a Jewish audience with the expectation that they already knew that.

So, how is this unconventional thinking, and how does it help us avoid stale and ineffective religiosity? Rather than making our requests be the most important way we relate to God, focus on the character of the One to whom we are addressing the requests. If the nature of God is our focus, the requests are a done deal. We won't be wrestling with whether we think this prayer will accomplish anything, we will be re-emphasizing to ourselves just how much this Father wants to help. We won't fall into the description found in James 4:2 – 3, "You do not have because you do not ask."

And that asking for the Spirit thing is vitally important. The indwelling Spirit who is given to all the faithful is the engine that powers our transformation into the character of Jesus. If we don't ask, it won't happen.

And, the fourth and last scene in this series, Jesus addresses another facet of unconventional thinking, logic. Very often, and especially in politics, questions are asked, and the one who is expected to answer is expected to address that question. The problem is that the question itself is based on at least one flawed assumption, so no accurate answer is possible. Jesus faced that repeatedly. His unconventional method was to use logic, to reveal the illogic of the question. Here's this example starting in verse 14.

*14 And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. 15 But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." 16 Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. 17 But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. 19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20 But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. 22 But when one stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. 23 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. 24 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' 25 And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. 26 Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."*

What if Jesus were to respond with, "No, I do not cast out demons by the power of the Evil One." That would not solve anything. The argument becomes claim versus claim, but no proof or resolution. So, Jesus used logic. Jesus responded, "(1) Would Satan cast out his own guys? And (2), if I do cast out demons by the power of Satan, how do your guys do it? And there were Jewish exorcists, for example, mentioned in Acts 19:13 – 16. And, (3) don't you remember Zechariah 13:2 where it says that demons will be removed at the time of the Messiah? Shouldn't that tell you something?"

Jesus was unconventional in that He met illogical questions with logic, exposing that what the nay-sayers just said did not make any sense.

Since we don't go around casting out demons, what can we learn from this? That opposition to the gospel is always logically flawed. Rather than just debating my claims versus my opponent's claims which just lets each side claim victory based on what they want to believe, I need to find the logical flaws and expose them.

Have you ever been in a discussion that pitted science versus the Bible? First, as a scientist, I have never found anything in science that contradicted the Bible, only pseudo-scientific claims that lacked proper factual basis. All of us would do well to learn what those logical flaws are so we can show people just how simple logic can be. There are numerous books on various subjects like the flaws in evolution and the age of the earth, the historical accuracy of the Old Testament, the evidence that the Scriptures we have come to us exactly as the original authors wrote them, except in Greek and Hebrew.. I would be glad to answer specific questions.

A significant number of people avoid Christianity because of bad experiences in their pasts, like hypocritical people who judged them rather than helping them overcome themselves. They encountered a lack of kindness or patience or love. Unfortunately, their experiences are generally true. What can we do about that? We can say, "I'm sorry that you had that experience. Please don't judge all followers of Jesus based on some self-centered loudmouths."

As the influence of Islam grows, more and more people have had to come to a decision about how they should react to it. Is it just another pathway to God? Does it matter? Don't they claim to be one of the Abrahamic religions, so we all worship the same God? Again, you need facts, not slogans. Islam has had 1400 years to develop its claims, and some really smart people put them together. We need to know what they are selling based on facts, based on the Quran itself, not on what someone tells you. And, by the way, the God of the Bible bears no resemblance to the Allah in the Quran. Again, I would be happy to answer specific questions.

The point is, differences in opinions usually are addressed through my opinion versus your opinion. That method does not work. Jesus demonstrated in His dealings with the various sects of the Jews that the way we should go about it is with logic. Find the irrational assumption on which their claims are based, then expose them. It's a lot harder than just repeating what you know to be true, because the opponent has no reason to believe you. Instead, show that the other person's idea is tragically flawed, like Jesus did.

All through Jesus' time on earth, He stepped out of the way we usually make decisions and used what I am calling "unconventional thinking," like the lawyer who wanted to justify himself, so he centered his defense on the definition of neighbor, when the real point was about the demands of acting out our love; like Martha who was so caught up on a good thing, getting dinner on the table that she overlooked how that very normal cultural concern was preventing her from hearing what Jesus had to say; like focusing prayer on requests rather than on the nature of God; like giving away the high ground by not seeing the bad assumptions behind challenges to the evidence for the gospel.

In reading through the gospels, we need to pick up on how Jesus thought, because Jesus is God, so Jesus' methods of thinking are God's methods of thinking. His thinking is unconventional only because the vast majority of the people on earth have decided to go with self-deception rather than reality.