



“This is the Story...”

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Week 41: What’s Most Important

Luke 10:25-37; Mathew 22:36-40

Intro Video: <https://youtu.be/oPyfS4E1Pts>

Review the big story: God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. All of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family to be a blessing to the whole earth. Like the humans before them, the generations of this family often missed the mark, but God was faithful.

When the people became slaves in Egypt, God raised up Moses to be their leader. God delivered them from slavery. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God’s provision, living out God’s commandments, and wrestling with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the *shema*, words of love to keep with their whole beings. God brought the people into the promised land. There they continued to miss the mark, and God sent judges to guide them.

God raised up prophets, but the people demanded a king. Kings continued to miss the mark, and the kingdom divided into the north and south. God stuck with the people through leaders and prophets, and continued to call the people back to God, even as first the northern, and then the southern kingdom fell to invading powers. Some of the people were sent into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the kingdom. Through prophets and everyday people, God continued to stick with the scattered people and to reveal that God is so much bigger than they imagined. The people were finally able to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple.

As we begin the story of the New Testament, Rome is the power in charge and the people of God are waiting for a Messiah. This Messiah is announced, first with a surprising genealogy, then through an angel to Mary. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and there, Jesus was born, proclaimed by angels, visited by shepherds, blessed by Simeon and Anna, and sought by magi. When Jesus’s life was in danger, his parents fled with him to Egypt, where they remained as refugees until it was safe for them to return and settle in Nazareth. As a child in Nazareth, Jesus grew up in the wisdom of God. His cousin John went before him, preparing the way, and when Jesus was ready to begin his ministry, he came to John to be baptized and was proclaimed by God. Jesus called a community of people to follow him.

Then Jesus began to teach and heal and show people God’s way of love. He preached fulfillment of the scriptures, walked on water, fed people, and welcomed children.

- **Key verses:** Luke 10:27; Luke 10:36-37

Tell the story: Jesus said the most important thing is to love God and love your neighbor. When asked who the neighbor is, Jesus answered with a story about a man who got hurt and was helped by a surprising person.

- Read Luke 10:24-37; Matthew 22:36-40
- Read page 223 in the *Shine On* story Bible.

Prime the pump:

- **Things to notice:**

- Do these words about loving God ring a bell? They should! Think back to the Shema. Jesus is also quoting Leviticus 19:18.
- Notice the characters in the story. What roles might they have had in society? Would they have been expected to behave as they did?
- Notice the lawyer's response to Jesus' question in 10:37. He can't even bring himself to say "Samaritan."

- **Background information:**

- In Matthew 22:40, Jesus seems to be saying that all scripture can be interpreted through the lens of love for God and neighbor, not that all other laws should be disregarded.
- Jesus often responded and taught in parables. A parable is, quite simply, a story that teaches us about something else. It's kind of like boiling a complex concept down to its essence and describing it with a story. Jesus uses a lot of stock characters from Hebrew midrash in his parables, so the listeners would have quickly recognized them.
- Jesus seems to interpret the word "neighbor" in the standard Jewish way of the times. (Levine, Amy-Jill and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds, 2017. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament, 2nd Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, pg 645-650.) A neighbor is someone we are in some kind of relationship/encounter with. He's not saying anything radical here; it's more of a reminder of what the listeners *should* already know.
- Samaritans were people of a specific geographical area, and were kind of a subgroup of Jews. They had their own systems and even scripture. They were on the margins of the group Jesus was speaking to in this story, looked down on and avoided.
- Levites were the tribe that was in charge of the temple equipment (see Numbers 1:50).
- Two denarii would have been about enough money for two months' lodging at an inn.

- **Conversation starters:**

- The question the lawyer asked was, "Who is my neighbor?" But is that really the question Jesus answered with his story? In his article "The Concept of Neighbor in Jewish and Christian Ethics," Michael Fagenblat proposes that rather than answering the question, Jesus illustrates *how to love*. (Levine, Amy-Jill and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds, 2017. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament, 2nd Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, pg 649.) Read the passage again. Do you agree?

Microsong: "What's Most Important"

(Listen: <https://youtu.be/yKH0NZM3dRk>)

What's most important? Which way to endless life? Love God with all your heart, and with all your mind. Your strength and your being, and love your neighbor as you love yourself. But who is my neighbor? You are a neighbor when you treat other humans with compassion and mercy whoever they are, whoever they are.

Sing the big song: (Listen: <https://youtu.be/glwynqMJBJU>)

This is the story of how it all began. God made matter, and chaos shattered.
Eve and Adam, they tried to hide. The world got violent and God replied with a mark and a flood and a rainbow sign, God's love written on skin and sky,
And then God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, oh ohhhh
A mother and her favorite son wrestle for the blessing, another son becomes a slave, the land is saved from famine.
God's family grows. Egypt oppresses. They groan to God and God sends Moses.
Ten strange signs say "Please release them!" By the sea God saves them. Oh ohhh.
The people complain and God rains bread. Daily food and ten new rules.
Five sisters come and ask for land. God says "Yes, amend the law!"
Moses says, "In your new life across the Jordan, love God with your whole heart and with all your being, and your strength, now listen: God is One, only God! God is One, only God!"
Cross over Jordan, stories and stones. Circuits and shouts and the walls come down.
God sends judges like Deborah and the land has rest.
Ruth's worth more than seven sons; Redeem the lost with steadfast love.
Corruption in the temple then God sends Samuel.
God gives them a prophet, they ask for a king. Does God need a temple? A wise king forgets. And when a bully rules the land, the nation tears apart and loses David's heart...
A widow's gift and a prophet's cry. God brings life in desperate times.
Josiah reads this misplaced scroll. He turns to God wholeheartedly like David did. In his time.
God gives Jeremiah a picture of God's ruined family...
Is there any hope left, is there any hope left, is there any hope left for you, Jerusalem?
Any hope? Any hope left? Is there any hope left for you?
By the streams of Babylon, how can we sing when you are gone, Jerusalem...
I'm in a valley of human bones. These bones are Israel, God's breath is hope.
Haman plans death for Esther's exiles. She risks her life so they might survive.
Finally God's family rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem. God plunges them into a sea of joy and celebration of Only God. God is One, Only God.
Comfort to Jerusalem, your warfare finally ceases.
Matthew lists these generations, Abraham to Jesus
The angel says, "You'll have a son and God will give him David's throne." Mary says, "God looked at me, now I'm the luckiest person around.
Mary, now pregnant fiancé, makes a grueling journey.
She has her baby, shepherds see angels declaring God's glory and peace among people.
The Spirit sends shepherds and elders and prophets to tell those who wait their Messiah has come.
Herod gets nervous, the Magi find Jesus. They hide their discovery and hurry back home...
Once again an angel comes to Joseph -- so they make good their escape, oooh.
Jesus in the temple, astonishing the crowd. Jesus with his parents. Jesus growing up.
Down by the Jordan with the prophet John, Jesus asks to be baptized. And the skies are opened. A dove descends. A voice from heaven says, "This is my son, the son I love. I'm pleased with him."
Jesus calls disciples to be with him in the work he's doing. Ohhh ooohh.
Jesus teaches the disciples, "This is life inside the blessing: You're blessed, you who are empty. You're blessed all you who mourn. You're blessed, you who ache for God, whose inner life is pure. This is life inside the blessing."
Jesus walks on the water. Peter tries and begins to sink. Jesus grabs his hand and the wind dies down.
Jesus sees the crowds with compassion. So he teaches them for days and days. The people are hungry. There's baskets left over and no one left out.
People bring their children to Jesus. Jesus blesses them and says, "You must accept God's good government like a little child would or you won't get in at all." Ohhhh ohhh
What's most important? Love God with everything and love your neighbor, whoever that may be.
God loves every one of us, it's true. And God loves the universe.

Go do your household project!