

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Will you turn to Luke 10 please. We'll read Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan.

It is normal for me to pray regularly while I prepare to teach you, that I will understand the Scripture and will teach you what the Holy Spirit wants me to say.

But this parable was not so much like that. What this story teaches is pretty clear, we should treat everyone like the Samaritan treated the victim in the story. I mostly prayed that God in his kindness would make me more like that Samaritan. This story disturbs me in a few different ways, but the worst is that I know I am more like the priest and the Levite, than the Samaritan.

²⁵ *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* ²⁶ *"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"* ²⁷ *He answered, "'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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"* ²⁸ *"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

How exactly the question tested Jesus is not clear. He probably thought Jesus did not pay enough attention to the Law of Moses. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, which strict keepers of the law did not do. And otherwise, Jesus on the whole did not teach the law very much.

In that case Jesus as usual avoided the trap. The expert did not mention the Law, he mentioned inheriting eternal life. Jesus brought up the Law. What is written, said Jesus, how to you read the Law? So the law expert could *not* fault Jesus as ignoring the law. Nor did Jesus fault the expert.

The man answered well, according to the Gospels. Jesus considered these the two greatest commands. Had this Scripture expert heard Jesus say this at another time? Had he learned this another way? We don't know, but Jesus liked his answer: Love God will all you have, and your neighbour as yourself. "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."

Perhaps Jesus' answer bothers us a little. Jesus did not say anything about following him. Could the law really be enough? Jesus was hard to predict on these things. Later in Luke, the rich young ruler wanted eternal life, and Jesus told him to sell all and give it to the poor and come follow him. I don't like *that* answer about eternal life *either!*

We need to agree that Jesus often does not fit easily into evangelical theology. He's awkward. Let's not try too hard to make him fit. The Gospel of Luke understands that Jesus meant it just as he said it. If the man would do those things, he would live.

But this fits better with Paul than we might think. In Acts 20 Paul says this about to summarize his missionary work: *I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus.* Paul was summarizing his gospel preaching.

Paul's message had two parts, "repentance toward God," deciding to live in God's ways, and "faith toward our Lord Jesus." Repentance and faith, those two were the core of Paul's gospel.

In the NT, these are often mentioned together, but often just one or the other. When faith is mentioned but not repentance, I don't feel stress, that's fine, we're saved by faith. But when repentance is mentioned without faith, I begin to wonder, it seems too much about good works. But on the whole the Scripture is clear, there must be faith and repentance, these are inseparable.

Luke 10 is one of those texts that just speaks about repentance, about living in God's ways. And Jesus often taught like that. So we are best to assume Jesus meant just what he said.

Our Scripture today is about doing, not about believing. "What must I do?" "Do this and you will live." The priest and Levite walk by. Why? Does not matter why. They walked past, that's what they did, and the Samaritan stopped to help. At the end, Jesus says, "Go and do likewise."

²⁹ *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

³⁰ *In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

³⁶ *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

³⁷ *The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

At its most basic level, this is a story about practical compassion. Why the priest and Levite went by does not matter. Did they think they would be defiled if the victim was dead? Jewish law was clear that burying a neglected body was a higher priority than keeping ritual purity.

By Jewish law they should have stopped if they thought he was dead, to bury him, and they should have stopped if they thought he still lived, to help him. Perhaps they were afraid the robbers would come back and do the same to them. In Jesus' story, it does not matter.

The Samaritan man stopped, gave basic first aid, bandaged wounds. Presumably wine on an open wound would disinfect it, and oil would soothe. He put the man on his own donkey, carried him to an inn, spent some of his own money, offered to spend more if needed.

I don't know how heroic this is. He did spend some time, and he spent some money, and put himself in some danger. But by the time he left the inn the next morning, the Samaritan's life had returned to normal. Greater acts of compassion happen regularly by people in this church.

The Samaritan's compassion produced immediate practical help to a total stranger. Our Lord teaches that this is how people live when they are inheriting eternal life from God.

Paul says this in Galatians 6: *As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially the family of believers.* The parable of the good Samaritan puts strength and weight on those opening words: *As we have opportunity, let us do good to all.* Opportunity – the Samaritan goes down the road, he's alone, there is the victim, a man half dead, also alone, just the two of them there.

That's called "opportunity." It is not planned, it is not scheduled, the Samaritan did not make it his mission to go up and down the road and take care of needy travelers. He's on a trip, it is business or it is personal, it is *not* to help the needy. But, there in front of him, lies a desperate man, and the Samaritan shows what kind of person he is. As did the priest and Levite.

We have a media problem that Jesus did not have. In a different way, we DO need to ask, who is my neighbour? The number and variety of needy people that we are exposed to is far beyond response. We cannot begin to help all the needs we hear about.

The number of valid compassionate organizations that want *my* money so *they* can help needy people is also beyond. Our church mail box is full of these appeals. Emails too. It tends to make one indifferent and hardened to the whole compassion business, and of course that is not good.

In fall, we the elders put together a sheet of guidelines for KCC giving. KCC cannot help very many, and we can't offer much help to even those. So we have some guidelines about KCC priorities, which always lead to difficult decisions to ignore some needs.

But the story of the good Samaritan resolves this. The Samaritan is not responding to a secondhand appeal. No one else urged him. He sees a person, right there in front of him. No one else around. On the spot, the Samaritan does what he can with what he has. He has with him a bit of wine, a bit of oil, a donkey, and some money. He uses what he has to help the victim. The next day he carries on his way. *As we have opportunity, let us do good to all.*

He could not do it all, he did need some help from the innkeeper. But the Samaritan hired the innkeeper, paid him to do what the Samaritan could not do himself. *As we have opportunity.*

What is the Significance of the Hero being Samaritan?

Jewish rabbis used stories like this to teach, only in those stories the *victim* would be a Samaritan. The priest and the Levite would walk by, but an ordinary devout Jew would have compassion on the disgusting beaten Samaritan, and stop and help.

We sometimes act as if that's how Jesus told the story too. Then it is a story about loving our enemies. (Jesus covered that earlier, Luke 6:27f). Even though our enemies are hated Samaritans, we should be good to them. As Jesus tells the story, though, the hated Samaritan is good to a needy Jew. What does *that* mean?

The law expert asked Jesus, *and who is my neighbour?* The law expert wants some people to be outside that. No other reason for the question. "Those people," whoever they are, the law expert wants eternal life without having to love "those people."

The story of the good Samaritan is certainly about race and about prejudice. The Samaritans were Israelites who had intermarried with Gentiles, and worshipped the God of Israel but not in the way the Scriptures taught. Their worship was twisted. Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "you Samaritans don't know what you worship, salvation is from the Jews."

Just a little bit before our story in Luke 10, near the end of Luke 9, Jesus and his disciples wanted to go into a Samaritan village to get supplies. But the Samaritans saw that Jesus was heading toward Jerusalem, and would not help the disciples.

James and John kindly offered to clear up the problem: "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?" Jesus scolded them for this, and they all went to a different village. Samaritans and Jews enjoyed strong mutual hatred for each other.

By making the hero a Samaritan, Jesus is calling for kindness to our enemies, as he has said before, but he's doing more. He's saying, "some of your enemies, some of those people you don't want to love, they obey God where you fail God. And you don't want to love them?"

Where I grew up it, "those people" were east Indians, and First Nations people, and Jehovah's witnesses. Around here it is sometimes German Mennonites that move here from South America. In the bigger scale, there is wide energy against Muslims from the middle east.

This parable is not just telling us to be good to them. It says that, but there's more. Jesus says to us what he says to the law expert: "Some of your enemies, those people you don't want to love, they honour and obey God where you fail God. And *you* don't want to love *them*?"

I am going to read you a paragraph from 2 Chronicles 28. There is a story there about people from Samaria doing for Israelites just about exactly what Samaritan in the parable did.

Israel was a divided nation at this time, and the capital city of the separated tribes was Samaria. That group of tribes beat the Jews in battle, and took home many Jews as prisoners of war.

¹⁰ *[The Israelite prophet Oded said to the Samaritans:] You intend to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sins against the Lord your God? ¹¹ Now listen to me! Send back your fellow Israelites you have taken as prisoners, for the Lord's fierce anger rests on you. ... ¹⁴ So the [Samaritan] soldiers gave up the [Jewish] prisoners [of war] and [Jewish] plunder in the presence of the officials and all the assembly.*

¹⁵ *The [Samaritan] men designated by name took the [Jewish] prisoners [of war], and from the plunder they clothed all who were naked. They provided them with clothes and sandals, food and drink, and healing balm. All those who were weak they put on donkeys. So they took them back to their fellow Israelites at Jericho, the City of Palms, and returned to Samaria. (2 Chronicles 28)*

The parable Jesus told to the law expert in some ways just retells this story. The Samaritans in the past had done just what this good Samaritan did, and the law expert certainly knows that story from 2 Chronicles 28.

The law expert does not want to love the Samaritans as he loves himself, but the Samaritans in the past have loved his ancestors just like that. Jews were beaten and needy and naked, and in response to God they did to real Jews just what the Samaritan in the parable did. Jesus knows the law expert will get this, and he did.

In John 4, the story of the Samaritan woman makes the same point of openness to God. She's a woman, and with a questionable moral past, and she's a Samaritan, and according to Jesus the Samaritans don't know who they worship, salvation is from the Jews.

And yet, in John 3, Jesus tried to explain eternal life to Nicodemus, an honourable man, a teacher of Israel. But Nicodemus did not get it. Then John 4, Jesus tried to explain eternal life to the Samaritan woman, and she got it, and she brought her whole village to Jesus.

“Some of your enemies, those people you don't want to love, they honour and obey God where you fail God. And you don't want to love them.”

The Romans were a brutal pagan army occupying Judea and Galilee. How could the Jews not hate those soldiers? Who can blame them? Yet the Gospels and Acts have striking stories of Roman centurions who showed faith in Jesus, and who worshipped the God of Israel.

There are people in every race who are genuine enemies of God and of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every race, including ours. And there are people in every race who have soft hearts toward God, and they act in ways that show this, sometimes ways in which we fail.

Jesus changed the question

The man asked Jesus, “who is my neighbour?” Luke explains that he wanted to justify himself. I always want to justify myself. Apparently that’s not good.

Nevertheless: the man asked, “and who is my neighbour?” That’s in v29. In v36 Jesus repeated the question, but not quite. “Which of the three travelers was a neighbour to the man who was robbed?” The question “who is my neighbour” is the wrong question.

It is never the right question. Every human in our neighbour. The man should have asked, “Will you show me how to love my neighbour?” That is the question Jesus answered with his story.

To summarize: This is a story about action. “What should I do?” “Do this and you will live.” And at the end, “Go and do the same.”

Paul says, *As we have opportunity, let us do good to all. When we get the chance, let us do good to all.* This parable shows us more clearly what those words mean.

And remember that this is a story about inheriting eternal life. People who are inheriting eternal life think this way and act this way. Amen.

May the Lord make our love increase and overflow, for each other and for everyone else. May he strengthen our hearts. 1 Thess 3:12.