

Parable of the Good Samaritan, Part 1

Luke 10:25-37

ABC 9/20/20

After spending 19 Sundays going through Jesus' teaching in parables, starting in Mt 13, it's been my plan to hit 2 other parables of Jesus that He taught at different times for different purposes. In God's providence, this week & next we'll be looking at perhaps his most famous parable & then we'll look at the parable of the Prodigal Son following that. The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of His most well-known parables. It's even become a term for sacrificial kindness. When people intervene to help those in crisis our culture regularly refers to them as *Good Samaritans*. Over 30 American states have good Samaritan laws, which protect people from prosecution when attempting to aid victims in such situations & unwittingly hurt or injure them.¹ The word, *Samaritan*, has become synonymous with one who offers compassion or mercy, perhaps at substantial risk to himself. Many hospitals & compassionate organizations have adopted the name *Samaritan* or *Good Samaritan*. But our familiarity with this parable may cause us to think we know it better than we really do. This parable wasn't given simply as an encouragement to help those in need. It isn't merely about showing kindness to strangers. Neither should it be interpreted allegorically, as Augustine did. For him this was a detailed story of the fall of humanity. Jerusalem stood for the heavenly city; the man who was wounded represented Adam, who fell into sin just as this man fell into the hands of robbers; the priest & the Levite who passed by stood for the Law & Prophets, who were unable to save; & the Samaritan stood for Christ, who did come & offer salvation. The inn stood for the church, where healing could occur, while oil & wine were the sacraments of baptism & the Lord's Supper. Even the innkeeper was symbolic; Augustine said he symbolized the apostle Paul!² We laugh today at how archaic this interpretation seems, not to mention that it ignores the context in Luke altogether.³ The fact is that Jesus told this story to illustrate how far we all fall short of what God's law demands. He's explaining why all our good works are never enough to gain favor with God. By doing so, He devastates the hopes of moral,

¹ Blomberg, C. (2004). [*Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation*](#) (p. 56). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

² *Adv. Haer. IV*, 36:7

³ Blomberg, C. (2004). [*Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation*](#) (p. 65). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

religious people who think they can earn eternal life by being good people. The point of the parable becomes clear when we pay attention to its context. Jesus tells this parable to a religious legalist who was trying to lessen the impact of God’s law with a hairsplitting analysis of the word **neighbor**. So while the parable does answer the question of who one’s neighbor is (Lk 10:29), it’s main purpose is to answer the question of how to inherit eternal life (Lk 10:25).

1. The Context During Jesus’ ministry in Galilee He met frequently with opposition from religious leaders & their followers. Here in Lk 10, He sends 70 of His disciples on a mission to take the gospel to the cities of Galilee. He knows they’ll meet with opposition, so He tells them: **10-12**

Jesus then continues with some words of condemnation for the specific towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida, & Capernaum (13–16). His words to those cities are some of the harshest He ever spoke. Predictably, this further angered the religious leaders. At that point, a religious legal expert asked Jesus a question about eternal life in an attempt to trap or embarrass Him.

2. The Questions A. From the Lawyer 25

The question of the law expert can be understood to mean, *How righteous must I be to enter the messianic kingdom that You’re offering? Or, What righteousness must I show in my life to show that I’m righteous enough to enter the kingdom?*⁴ Of course, this wasn’t an honest question but a stunt to try to trap Jesus. He wanted to embarrass Jesus & quibble over fine points of the law. Despite his evil motive, the 1st question he asks is a good one. It’s the greatest question ever asked or answered, & one we all need to be clear on. It was frequently on the minds of those who came to Jesus to learn from Him. It’s what Nicodemus wanted to know when he came to Jesus in Jn 3. It’s the same question the rich young ruler raised in Mt 19. Throughout His ministry, Jesus often spoke about eternal life because that was the central promise of the gospel, the very message He came to proclaim. He said things like, **whoever believes in Me should not perish, but have eternal life** (Jn 3:16). **Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water**

⁴ Pentecost, J. D. (1998). [The parables of Jesus: lessons in life from the Master Teacher](#) (p. 68). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

springing up to eternal life (Jn 4:13-14). He who hears My word, & believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, & does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life (Jn 5:24). I am the resurrection & the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, & everyone who lives & believes in Me will never die (Jn 11:25-26). Most Jews of that day had been taught that their lineage, ceremonies, & traditions were what qualified them for God's eternal kingdom. But clearly there was a nagging sense of doubt & guilt in many hearts, because people constantly raised this question with Jesus. They feared that in spite of all their ethnic & religious qualifications, they were only maintaining a front. They knew they weren't worthy to be a part of that kingdom. So they would ask, *What must we do to inherit eternal life?*

B. Jesus' Questions Jesus answered the religious law expert's question with a question of His own.

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He asks, *How do you read the Law? What does it say?* Jesus points him back to Scripture because that's God's word to mankind in which He reveals Himself. In reply, the lawyer quotes from Dt 6:4-5 & added part of Lev 19:18 as well. **27**

That was a perfect summary of the law's demands. It's the same answer Jesus gave in Mt 22:37-40 when He was asked, **Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?** (36). In that context Jesus said Dt 6:5 (love God with all your heart) is the 1st & greatest commandment & Lev 19:18 (love your neighbor as yourself) ranks 2nd. Then He added, **On these 2 commandments depend the whole Law & the Prophets** (40). Of course, the 10 Commandments are divided into those same 2 categories. #s 1-4 tell us what is required in loving God & honoring Him properly. #s 5-10 outline what love for one's neighbor looks like. So the entire law is summarized in those 2 commands. The lawyer here was right: love God with all your heart & love your neighbor as yourself. If he did those things perfectly all the time, never failing once in either of them, he'd have eternal life. So Jesus said to the lawyer, **28**

You want eternal life? Obey the law perfectly. Love God & your neighbor perfectly & you'll have it. He's not telling him the gospel, but what the law requires. & yet, scripture says, **by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin** (Rom

3:20). Knowing we are sinners deserving God's just wrath is necessary before the gospel can be received. Jesus' reply, at 1st glance, seems to contradict the heart of the gospel. As Paul put it, **a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus. . . we are justified by faith in Christ & not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified** (Gal 2:16). What's going on here? Why didn't Jesus give him the gospel rather than point back to the law? Jesus was holding the mirror of the law up to him to demonstrate how it condemned him. If the lawyer were honest, he would've acknowledged he didn't love God nor his neighbors as he should. This man, steeped in the study of God's law, should have been broken by its message. He should've been convicted of his sin. He should've been repentant, contrite, & humble. His follow-up question ought to have been, *I know from experience I can't keep even the most basic commands of the law. I don't love God as I should & I don't love my neighbor as myself. What hope do I have? Where can I find redemption?* But instead, **wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, '& who is my neighbor?'** (29). He passes over loving God because he believed he loved God as was commanded. After all, he was Jew, wasn't he? Like the Pharisees, he **trusted in himself that he was righteous, & viewed others with contempt** (Lk 18:9). Jesus constantly condemned this attitude. He told them, **You, guys like this lawyer & the Pharisees, are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts** (Lk 16:15). In the words of Paul, **not knowing about God's righteousness & seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God** (Rom 10:3). This legalistic lawyer was trying to make himself look good in his own sight & in others' eyes, regardless of what God thought of him. So instead of asking the question Jesus' reply ought to have brought from him, he asked, **Who is my neighbor?** (29). He skipped right over the part about loving God with all his heart, soul, mind, & strength. Instead, he wants to discuss a technical point about the identity of one's neighbor. The Jews had limited the definition to only fellow Jews & even that had limits. Whenever you ask, *Who do I have to love?* you're really saying, *Tell me who I don't have to love.* To ask, *Whose neighbor am I?* is to focus on what I owe to the suffering people all around me. This lawyer wanted a loophole, a legal limit on who he had to love.⁵

⁵ Ray Pritchard, <http://keepbelieving.com/sermon/the-lawyer-who-wanted-a-loophole-christ-speaks-to-the-problem-of-religious-hypocrisy/>

As Jesus said, the traditional rabbinical & popular interpretation of Lev 19:18, **Love your neighbor as yourself**, is **You shall love your neighbor & hate your enemy** (Mt 5:43). That takes all the force out of the command. Why? Because if you're free to hate your enemy, you're relieved from the duty of loving anyone whom you decide to regard as an enemy, you have no legal or moral obligation to love anyone you don't really want to love. It's obvious where this man was going. He wanted to entangle Jesus in a debate about who a neighbor is & isn't. He figured he could **justify himself** if he could make a convincing defense of the traditional notion that one's enemy is not one's neighbor. At this point, Jesus could have dismissed him & gone on with His teaching. But Jesus shows gentle compassion to this stubborn, self-righteous man. He's modeling for us the same principle He's about to illustrate with a parable. It's a principle He both taught & lived: **love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you** (Mt 5:44). Even though this lawyer managed to ignore Jesus' attempt to convict him of his sin, even though the man's motive was to try to elevate himself while putting Jesus down, Jesus replies to him with tenderhearted, longsuffering kindness. It's not the rebuke the man deserves. Instead Jesus tells him a story & it's one of His most powerful parables. It would certainly have been enough to shatter the pride of any sensitive seeker of divine truth. It's a crushing story that produces immense conviction, both then & now. But this isn't simply a lesson on how to help the less fortunate, although it has implications for that. This isn't a lesson for children about how to share their toys & be kind to the new kid in class. This is a story told to a religious nonbeliever, a self-righteous man, as an evangelistic effort to bring him to see his sinfulness & his need for God's mercy. It was Jesus' appeal to a doomed, but deeply religious, soul. Jesus was urging the man to wake up & see how lost he really was.

3. The Parable 30-35

Again, the fact that Jesus continued to answer this man was an act of grace. Jesus' reply stands out for its warmhearted, gracious, & loving restraint. As in most of Jesus' stories & parables, He has one simple point to make. There are lots of details & plenty of secondary implications, but what's important here is the central lesson. The story begins with a journey on a dangerous road. It's the road **from Jerusalem to Jericho** (30). The road is real. The lawyer & anyone listening were

familiar with it. Some of you have travelled it. From Jerusalem (2,474 ft) to Jericho (-864 ft) is 3,300-foot drop in elevation across 16 miles of winding road, crossing rough terrain. In places, a steep cliff borders the road. Much of the route is lined with caves & boulders, which offered hideouts for robbers. In Jesus' story, the predictable happens. A man traveling alone on that road is jumped by a band of brutal thieves. They didn't just rob him; they stripped him naked. They didn't just take his money; they took everything he had. Then they beat him & left him for dead. He was in critical condition, a dying man on a desert road. It wasn't a good place to be. At this point in the story, Jesus introduces a bit of hope. **31a**

A. The Priest This appears to be good news. Here comes a servant of God, one who offers sacrifices for people in the temple, a spiritual man who should be the epitome of compassion (Heb 5:2). A priest would be familiar with the Mosaic law. He would know God says, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself** (Lev 19:18). He would know that vs 33-34 of the same chapter develop the principle of neighborly love by applying it to strangers in particular. **When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, & you shall love him as yourself.** A priest would know Micah 6:8: **what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, & to walk humbly with your God.** He'd be aware that **he who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself & not be answered** (Prov 21:13). The principle spelled out in J's 2:13 was woven into the OT as well: **judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy.** The priest would be familiar with Ex 23:4-5:

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying *helpless* under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release *it* with him.

So if a person found his enemy's donkey in a ditch, he was obliged to rescue it & had the even greater duty to help a man in critical condition. But that flash of hope in the story was short-lived. When the priest saw the injured man, **he passed by on the other side** (31). The Greek signifies the priest deliberately moved to the other side of the road. He went out of his way to avoid the injured traveler, purposely ignoring the man in need. The priest obviously had no compassion for people in distress. Jesus turned the lawyer's question on its head. The question he asked was, **Who is my**

neighbor? But that's not the right question. Jesus is showing him that compassion isn't confined. It isn't seeking for definitions of what neighbors are qualified to deserve help. The duties of the 2nd great commandment aren't defined by the question of who our neighbor is. In fact, the opposite is true: genuine love compels us to be neighborly even to strangers & aliens. We're to be neighborly to anyone who is suffering that God brings to us & we have the means to help. The full meaning of the 2nd great commandment includes the principle Jesus made clear when He said, *We must love even our enemies* (Mt 5:44). They are our neighbors, too, & therefore we're obligated to do good to them & pray for them. This priest represents anyone with full knowledge of the Scriptures & a familiarity with the duties of the law, who is expected to help, but doesn't.

B. The Levite The next vs introduces a Levite. **32**

All priests were from the tribe of Levi. But those who served as priests were descendants of Aaron (one of the sons of Levi). The term *Levite* referred to descendants of Levi who weren't also descended from Aaron. They served in secondary roles in the temple. They were assistants, temple police, & those who worked behind-the-scenes maintaining the temple grounds. But their lives were devoted to religious service, so they were, like the priests, expected to know the Scriptures. When this Levite came upon the injured man, he did the same thing the priest had done. As soon as he saw him lying there, he moved to the opposite side of the road. Here was another man devoid of compassion & without lovingkindness. These 2 religious men, a priest & a Levite, represented that society's most esteemed & religious figures. But they didn't really know God. Neither was truly fit for heaven & were therefore objects of God's wrath (Eph 2:2, 5:6; Col 3:6). They didn't truly love God, because if you love God, you keep His commandments. They also didn't love their neighbors, because when they faced a real & urgent need & had an opportunity to demonstrate love, they refused. They are illustrations of religious hypocrites, outwardly observing the law as they defined it & devoting their lives to the service of the temple but lacking any real obedience to God. Of course, it's right to condemn the indifference of these men & look upon their actions with scorn. But in doing so, we condemn ourselves as well. Their attitude is precisely what we see in human nature today, even within, especially within our own hearts. We think, *I don't*

want to get involved. I don't know what this man, or the people who beat him up, might do to me. I'm busy. I have things to do. If I help any plans for the day are shot! We must admit that we too are guilty of this kind of indifference, insensitivity, & careless disregard of people in need. Even if we don't turn away every time we see someone in need, we all fail in this duty enough to stand guilty before the law with its demand for utter perfection. Jesus makes that point unmistakable by introducing us to the Good Samaritan.

C. The Samaritan comes as an unexpected twist in Jesus' story. In the Jewish mind there was no such thing as a *good Samaritan*. The terms didn't belong together at all. Sometime after the priest & Levite had passed by, the Samaritan arrived. **33**

Unlike the professional clergymen, the Samaritan **felt compassion** when he saw the bloodied body of the traveler who was, most likely, a Jewish man. That would be understood by Jesus' listeners, because the setting of the story is in Israel, on a desert road heading out of Jerusalem. Gentiles rarely traveled there, much less Samaritans. In the minds of Jesus' original audience, a Samaritan would be the least likely source of help for a Jewish traveler in distress on the Jericho road. Jews despised Samaritans & vice versa. Mutual hostility divided these peoples for centuries. Jewish people considered the Samaritans ethnically & religiously unclean, & the Samaritans reciprocated that & resented & despised their Jewish cousins. The Samaritans were descendants of Israelites who'd intermarried with pagans after the Assyrians forced most of the population of Israel's Northern Kingdom into exile in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:6). When the Assyrians conquered Israel's Northern Kingdom, they carried away much of the population into captivity & purposely populated the land with pagans from other Gentile lands (24–25). Some Israelite stragglers remained or returned to the land after most of their brethren were taken away & these Israelites mixed with & married the pagan settlers. They kept some traditions that were rooted in OT but blended enough pagan beliefs into the mix that Samaritan worship ultimately became different from either Judaism or paganism. Jews saw Samaritans as corrupt, unclean, & treasonous to the God of Scripture. They regarded the Samaritans as apostates who were guilty of idolatry. As far as the Jews were concerned, the Samaritans' very existence was evil (1 Kgs 14:16; 2 Kgs 17:22). The Samaritans

built a temple of their own, with counterfeit priests & unlawful sacrifices. By the Jews' thinking, they were worse than pagans because they'd polluted the one true religion. The Samaritans' hatred for the Jews was at least equal to that. In 137 BC, John Hyrcanus I, later a Jewish high priest & ruler, defeated the Samaritan nation.⁶ The Jews demolished the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. & although that temple was never rebuilt, the Samaritans insisted that Gerizim was the only legitimate place of worship (Jn 4:20). In Jesus' time, animosity between Jews & Samaritans was fierce. The depth of the Jews' contempt for their wayward cousins is seen not only in how they avoided traveling through Samaria, but perhaps even more in how they spoke about the Samaritans. At one point some frustrated Jewish leaders, losing a public debate with Jesus but trying to discredit Him, spat out the worst insult they could imagine: **Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan & have a demon?** (Jn 8:48). See what they thought of Samaritans? Comparing them with demons. Jews & Samaritans could be compared today to the hatred between liberals & conservatives politically. For a Jew to call another Jew a Samaritan would be like you calling me an arsonist, terrorist, or scum of society.

So here is a Samaritan man, whom the typical Jewish religious leader would assume is the blood enemy of the injured traveler. This is Hatfield & McCoy stuff. If the priest & Levi turned their backs, what will this Samaritan do when he sees a helpless Jew out in the middle of nowhere? Kill him & mutilate his corpse? Nope. **When he saw him, he felt compassion** (33). What is compassion? When Noah Webster published *An American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828, he began his definition of compassion this way: *A suffering with another; painful sympathy...*⁷ Did you catch that? *Painful sympathy*. I like that, but I find it challenging. & **compassion** is more than a feeling. It's not just an emotion. It's more than feeling sorry for people in difficulties. Biblical **compassion** means you see the problem, you're moved by the need, you go to where the problem is, & you get your hands dirty trying to help someone get their problems solved & brought to a better place. The question isn't, *Who is my neighbor?* But rather, *Whose neighbor will I choose to be to those God*

⁶ www.britannica.com/biography/John-Hyrcanus-I

⁷ <https://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/word/compassion>

brings across my path today? The burden is always on me, not on those in need. What was Jesus saying? It was a preliminary answer to the original question. It was a tough reply with a subtle rebuke aimed at the lawyer who'd raised the question. Status as religious leaders did nothing to make the priest & Levite fit for the kingdom. **Pure & undefiled religion before our God** doesn't consist in birthrights & bloodlines or rituals & verbal confessions of faith (Jn 1:27). Pure religion is something else entirely. The Samaritan now takes center stage & notice how this man loves his *neighbor*. **He saw him** (33). Nothing remarkable there. The priest & the Levite got that far, but they showed no love. This man, a heretic & outcast, was moved by compassion. Something in his heart went out to the man. He saw & embraced the urgent need to rescue & give aid to the man. He bore the injured man's burden as if it were his own. **34**

He came to him. That's the polar opposite of what the priest & Levite did. He **bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil & wine** (34). Remember that everything of value had been taken from the injured man. So whatever the Samaritan used to help him came from his own belongings. The Samaritan was using his own provisions. The expression used tells us he wasn't stingy with the wine & oil. Jesus is purposely stressing the lavishness of the Samaritan's generosity. Then Jesus says, **he put him on his own beast**, probably a donkey or a mule (34). So the Samaritan walks, with the injured man riding. What Jesus aims to underscore here is this isn't minimal care. No, the Samaritan was making an extraordinary sacrifice for someone he didn't even know, an enemy at that. He **brought him to an inn & took care of him** (34). He didn't leave him alone there but stayed with him. He rented a bed, got the man settled, & then stayed with him to help nurse him back to health. He continued to treat his wounds, providing food, sleep, comfort, water, & whatever care the injured man needed. He stayed with him through the night, because vs 35 says, **35**.

Two denarii was 2 full days' wages. Again, this was remarkable charity, especially considering the men were strangers & racial enemies of one another. Yet the Samaritan gave up his own clothes, his supplies, his time, a night's sleep, & a significant sum of cash. He even promised to pay more if necessary. He was concerned about the needs of his neighbor & left a blank check for him. The Samaritan had never met the other man. He didn't know how the traveler got in the condition he

found him in, & in Jesus' telling of the story, he didn't even stop to investigate or ask the man what happened & how he came to be in this condition. For all he knew, this man could have started the fight & deserved what he got. His heart was so full of love that when someone came across his path with a desperate need he was able to meet, he did everything he could possibly do. There was never a question or hesitation. In other words, the Samaritan never stopped to ask what the lawyer had asked, **who is my neighbor?** (29). The far more important question is, *Whose neighbor am I?* & the answer is anyone in need. *How neighborly am I to those around me?* Jesus changes the question from, *What kind of person is my neighbor?* to *What kind of person am I?* He changes it from, *What kinds of people are worthy of my love?* to *How can I become the kind of person whose compassion disregards status of race, politics, economy, or anything else?*⁸ Let's be honest with ourselves. If we encountered a scenario like this in real life, most of us would probably think the Samaritan's generosity toward this stranger seems excessive. Did you ever set aside everything to help a total stranger in a desperate situation? More to the point, have you ever done that for someone who was your enemy? Have you singlehandedly provided everything he needed? Tended his wounds, fed him, stayed with him through a long night of pain, paid his bills, provided him with room, board, & medical care, & then leave him with a blank check to pay everything he might need? Probably not. But, there is someone you've done all those things for: yourself. That's precisely how we look after our own needs, isn't it? *Give me whatever I need. Call the best doctor. Get me to the best medical facility. Arrange the best care I can get. Take care of me as long as I need it. Pamper me.* We might get closest to true self-sacrifice with a family member or a very close friend. But who would do this for a stranger let alone an enemy? This kind of thing is simply not done. But that is required if we truly love our neighbor as ourselves. No doubt you've done something wonderfully generous at some point in your life but do you truly love strangers like this all the time? Of course not. Jesus is describing a rare love that has no limits. Keep in mind that this is a reply to the lawyer's original question in vs 25: **What shall I do to inherit eternal life?** The answer goes like this: What does the law say? **27-28**

⁸ John Piper, www.desiringgod.org/messages/love-your-unborn-neighbor

Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan in order to show what an impossibly high standard the law sets for us. It's a rebuke not just to the lawyer, but to all of us. If we always truly loved our neighbors the way we love & care for ourselves, the Samaritan's generosity wouldn't seem so remarkable. At the end of the story, Jesus turned the lawyer's own question right back to him: **36** With the powerful lesson of this story still hanging in the air, the lawyer had only one possible reply: **The one who showed mercy toward him** (37). Notice, he wouldn't even say the word *Samaritan*. Jesus' reply ought to have provoked deep conviction & a humble confession of the man's own inability: **Go & do the same** (37). In other words, keep the law perfectly in regard to God & your neighbor & you'll have eternal life. The problem is that's not possible. We're going to end there before we focus on the secondary point of this parable next week. Think about whether you love God & your neighbor as required by God's law. *Do I love God & my neighbor perfectly, every moment of every day? & always with the right motives?* Obviously, the answer is no. No one can earn salvation. No one can be saved & inherit eternal life by keeping the law. So how can we inherit eternal life? By placing our faith in the only One who did perfectly keep the law, Jesus Christ Himself. That's where everyone of us must start. Is my faith in Christ & His sacrifice in my place & in Him alone? Once that question is answered correctly we must ask, *How can I love my neighbor as God commands? & what does that look like?* Think & pray about that as that's what we'll focus on next week. PRAY