

# The Good Samaritan

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## Luke 10:25-37

<sup>25</sup> And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" <sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." <sup>29</sup> But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, <sup>34</sup> and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?" <sup>37</sup> And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

Luke 10 is the only place in Scripture where this parable is mentioned. And yet the story of the Good Samaritan is one of the most widely known stories in the Bible and may be the most popular of all of Jesus' parables. It is so popular that even people who have never opened a Bible can tell you what it means to be a Good Samaritan. Many hospitals and relief organizations have borrowed that name from this parable.

But is the common understanding of the meaning of this parable the correct one? Does Jesus tell the story of the Good Samaritan to exhort us to be "Good Samaritans"? Is the proper way to love your neighbor at the heart of this parable? How do you know? Do your presuppositions about this passage preclude you from coming to a proper understanding of this passage?

When wanting to discover the proper meaning of a text, in this case a parable, what's the first thing you should do? Remember, if you don't have the proper meaning of God's Word, you don't have God's Word. The first thing you should always do is look at the context.

## Original Question

<sup>25</sup> *And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

This question is the context of the parable. The scribes, or lawyers, were the experts in the law. Jesus' dialog with the lawyer begins with the lawyer asking Jesus a question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This first verse gives us some valuable insight into the condition of this man who comes to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For other times this question was posed to Jesus see: Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-27. For other times Jesus was tested with questions see: Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:13-37.

Luke specifically tells us that the lawyer is asking the question, not for his personal benefit as if he is looking to learn from Jesus, but to test Jesus, to see how He will answer. He wanted to trap Jesus and expose him as a phony. So if this is a test, then we know the lawyer is assuming he already knows the answer to this question.

The lawyer's second assumption is found in the wording of the question. He asks, "What shall I **do** to inherit eternal life?" He is assuming that he can do something that will merit eternal life.

Jesus understood the man was asking Him a question he thought he already knew the answer to. So Jesus, knowing the thoughts and intentions of men's hearts, asks the lawyer, an expert in the law, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"

## Answer

*<sup>27</sup> 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." <sup>28</sup> And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."*

The lawyer answers Jesus by directly quoting the Old Testament law. The second part of the man's answer comes from Leviticus 19.

### **Leviticus 19:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. <sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

The first part of the man's answer comes from Deuteronomy 6.

### **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

<sup>4</sup> "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The Israelites did this. They recited the summary of the law (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) twice a day. They knew it well.

Jesus likewise responds by quoting the Old Testament law. Jesus' response comes from Leviticus 18.

### **Leviticus 18:5**

<sup>5</sup> So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.

## Lawyer's Second Question

<sup>29</sup> *But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Here Luke gives us a little more insight into what the lawyer was thinking. He wanted to justify himself before Jesus and his hearers. So, the lawyer responds by asking Jesus another question. He skips right over the part about loving God and addresses the second half of the law when he asks, "And who is my neighbor?"

The lawyer thought that he was doing what the law commanded. In the lawyer's eyes, he was loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength, and with all his mind and loving his neighbor as himself. Well, unless of course, there was a different definition of 'neighbor' than the one he had.

The Jewish oral tradition stated who was and wasn't their neighbor. The lawyer didn't believe that just anyone was his neighbor. The Jews thought that only their close relatives, fellow Israelites, and those who were considered righteous were their neighbors. Anyone outside that group, such as a Gentile, Samaritan, or even a proselyte was not their neighbor. Anyone who they thought a sinner was also not their neighbor. The Jews could even kill someone who wasn't considered their neighbor and they wouldn't be tried for murder. This is one of the false notions that Christ addresses in the following parable.

This is the context of the story of the Good Samaritan. When looking for the meaning of this parable we can't ignore all that happened before the man asked who his neighbor was. We also can't ignore the condition of the man's heart when Jesus responds. Jesus knows the man's condition, as He always does, and He directly addresses that condition in His response. As you read the story of the Good Samaritan you should be asking yourself, "What were the incorrect assumptions the lawyer was making" and, "How does the parable directly address those false assumptions?"

## The Parable

<sup>30</sup> *Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead."*

Keep in mind as we go through this story that it is just that, a story. Jesus gives us the information we need to properly interpret the parable and we don't need to speculate about the details that He doesn't give us. It doesn't matter why the priest was going down the road, or where the Levite was headed, or why they were going where they were going. We don't know what their motives were or what they were thinking. In fact, they didn't have motives or thoughts because they aren't real; they are just fictitious characters in a story.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a notoriously treacherous road. Jerusalem was about 2,500 feet *above* sea level and Jericho was about 800 feet *below* sea level. Along this 17 mile stretch of road there were rocks, caverns, caves, crevasses, and it dropped 3,300 feet along the way. That's an average decent of almost 200 feet per mile of road travelled. It was a dangerous road that was a favorite spot for robbers and highwaymen to hideout waiting for victims to come their way. A man travelling down this road and being robbed was an all too familiar story.

The robbers stripped the man of his clothes leaving him cold and naked. They also beat him with many blows and left him for dead. The Greek word used for 'wounds' in verse 34 is *trauma*. The man was in critical condition. He was dying and was already half way there when the first person walks by.

<sup>31</sup> *And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

The priest was also going *down* that road so he was also on his way to Jericho.

Priests were Levites but also descendants of Aaron. They were in charge of the Temple, offered sacrifices, and lead all Jewish ceremonies and festivals. These were the religious leaders and were God's representative to the people. They would have known the Old Testament well.

### **Micah 6:8**

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the LORD require of you  
But to do justice, to love kindness,  
And to walk humbly with your God?

### **Exodus 23:4-5**

<sup>4</sup> If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. <sup>5</sup> 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.

### **Leviticus 19:33-34**

<sup>33</sup> When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. <sup>34</sup> The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.

The priest should have helped this dying man. He should have shown kindness to him as Micah 6 required him to do. Exodus 23 states that even if your enemy's donkey gets lost or stuck you are to return him to his owner. How much more should this priest have helped his own countryman.

"Passed by on the other side" is one word in the Greek and it means to literally 'go opposite'. It could be translated 'went the other way'. When the priest saw the man from a distance, he completely avoided going near the dying man. Even according to the priest this dying man would have been considered a neighbor, yet he showed no love toward his neighbor.

<sup>32</sup> *Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*

A Levite was a descendant of Levi but not of Aaron. Their job was to assist the priests in their duties. They assisted in the liturgy, were the temple police, helped carry out sacrifices, etc. They were intimately involved in the workings of Judaism and would have also known the law well. This man also should have helped the man who laid there dying.

Again, we see the same Greek word and the Levite 'went the other way'. He also showed no love for his neighbor.

<sup>33</sup> *But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,*

The Samaritans were hated by the Jews. According to the Jews they were the most vile people on earth, lower than the Gentiles. This hatred stems back to the days of Nehemiah.

When the northern kingdom of Israel went into exile some of the Jews were left behind. Those Jews intermarried with Gentiles who took control of the land. Their descendants were the Samaritans. When the Jews of the southern kingdom returned from exile in Babylon and started to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem, the Samaritans showed up to help. The Samaritans were turned away by the Jews because they had defiled their race. The Samaritans became the Jews arch enemies and, lead by Sanballat, tried to prevent the Jews from rebuilding the wall and the temple.

The Jews hated the Samaritans so much that they wouldn't step foot in Samaria; they would walk around. If they wanted to insult someone the worst insult they could give was that they were a "Samaritan and demon possessed."<sup>2</sup>

According to the lawyer, this Samaritan would have been the most hated enemy of the dying man and the farthest thing from a neighbor. He was not a fellow Jew, he was not a blood relative, he didn't live close by, he was a complete stranger, and what is worse he was his sworn enemy. But, this Samaritan is the one who has compassion on him.

A common objection here is that it is unlikely that a Samaritan would be travelling this road. Some have questioned what the Samaritan was doing travelling down the road from Jericho to Jerusalem in the first place. After all, he was in the land of his enemies. Not only was he endangering himself from robbers and highwaymen but also from the Jews who frequently travelled this road. But remember, this is a story, an illustration, a parable. It was Jesus who was telling the story and if he wanted to place a Samaritan on this road in the story He could. It doesn't matter that it's unlikely that a Samaritan would travel this road. It's just a story.

<sup>34</sup> *and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him.* <sup>35</sup> *On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'*

These two verses tell us about what the Samaritan did for this man, and it is extensive.

We know the Samaritan was on a journey and had a donkey, mule, or some other kind of pack animal. The wine was poured on the wounds as an antiseptic to clean and disinfect. Wine was a necessity. Water wouldn't keep long so if you needed fluids to drink with you on a journey you would take wine in wine skins. The Samaritan's wine wasn't used sparingly either. It was liberally poured out onto the man's wounds. Oil was also usually carried on a journey to cook with or eat; it was another necessity. Oil was used to sooth the aching wounds and the Samaritan poured it out onto the wounded man. The bandages were probably articles of clothing the Samaritan had with him that he tore up and used to cover the dying man's wounds to keep dirt out.

The Samaritan is giving away all the necessities he would have had with him on his journey: clothes, wine, oil, and then money.

The Samaritan helped the man onto his beast and took him to an inn while he himself walked. When they were at the inn the Samaritan took care of the man and watched over him all night long. The next day he gave the innkeeper enough money to provide him with room and board for at least a few weeks. He then told the innkeeper to keep a tab so if there was any additional expense he could repay him when he returned. The Samaritan was going to go on his way, to where ever he was going, and now he was at least one night behind

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<sup>2</sup> John 8:48

schedule. The Samaritan would also return to pay for any expense and check up on the progress of the man that he found half dead.

<sup>36</sup> *Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?"*

<sup>37</sup> *And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."*

The lawyer couldn't bring himself to say, "a Samaritan", but he was forced to recognize that the man's neighbor was not the priest or the Levite who he thought qualified to be the man's neighbor. Jesus then commands him to, "Go and do the same."

## Conclusions

The first two men, the priest and the Levite, qualified as the dying man's neighbors according to Jewish tradition. The third man, the Samaritan, did not, and was the furthest thing from a neighbor in the eyes of a Jew. Jesus was telling the lawyer that your neighbor is not just the people around you, your fellow countryman, your kin, and your friends. Your neighbor is anyone, even your enemies. This is the direct answer to the lawyer's second question and the application most people take away from the parable. But, this isn't the main point Jesus is making. What about the lawyer's first question and the false assumptions he was making there?

We know the lawyer's answer to his original question, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life", was the correct answer. Not only because it is plainly stated in the Old Testament law, but also because Jesus clearly states, "you have answered correctly." The law requires you to 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.

The kind of care given by the Samaritan was extensive, over the top, and a bit outrageous. It was extreme generosity, lavishly poured out; he left an open account for the man to get any care he needed. This isn't anything anyone would normally do for anyone but maybe close family, such as a spouse or a child, let alone an enemy. He found a complete stranger, an arch enemy, and lavishly took care of every need he had with his own necessities. The Samaritan gave away what he needed to live on. Then he paid large amounts of money to make sure the wounded man had all the care he needed. Nothing was spared. Then Jesus commands the lawyer to "Go and do the same."

Have you ever done this for anyone? Have you ever loved anyone to that extent? Think about it. Have you ever cared for anyone the way this Samaritan cared for his enemy? You may have given a homeless man some change or some food or given to a food bank or served in a soup kitchen but that isn't anywhere close to what this Samaritan did. But, if you think about it long enough you'll realize something. There *is* someone you've done this for. We all have. You've done it for yourself. Isn't this exactly what the law says? Love your neighbor ***as yourself***.

This is the part the lawyer was missing. Nobody cares for others the way they care for themselves. But, this is what the law requires, and the law must be kept perfectly. Jesus tells him, "do this and you will live." Jesus then goes on to explain in the parable just how to 'do this' and commands him to "Go and do the same." But, this is impossible for us. The problem that the lawyer didn't see was that he couldn't keep this law, especially not perfectly and all the time.

With this parable Jesus is showing the extent to which one must keep the law to attain eternal life. This kind of love is to be shown to your neighbor all the time, perfectly, without flaw. We cannot do it. And this is just the second half of the law. The first half of the law, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and

strength, also has to be kept perfectly and constantly. This is impossible for any of us to do. Even in our best efforts we don't even come close.

The lawyer thought he could keep the law and inherit eternal life by his merits. The lawyer was making assumptions both on who his neighbor was and what it meant to love his neighbor. Jesus shows the man that he is wrong on both accounts and falls woefully short of keeping the law. Then add to that what we learn in James 2.

### **James 2:10**

<sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

So if the way to eternal life is by keeping the law perfectly, without stumbling at any point, how does anyone inherit eternal life? Yes, by Jesus paying the penalty for your sins on the cross. But, this still doesn't fulfill the law. It still doesn't get us to where Jesus said we need to be. We still need perfect obedience to the law as Jesus stated; "do this and you will live." If we do not have perfect righteousness before God we are cursed.

### **Galatians 3:10**

<sup>10</sup> For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM."<sup>3</sup>

Here's the key:

### **Romans 5:10, 19**

<sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life...<sup>19</sup> For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Because of Jesus' perfect obedience to God's law, He earned perfect righteousness before God. Jesus' righteousness is then imputed to us, through faith, that in His life we might have the perfect righteousness that God requires. There is a double imputation. Our sins are imputed to Jesus and Jesus' perfect righteousness is imputed to us. You are saved through both the death of Christ and the life of Christ that He lived in perfect obedience to God and His law.

If you asked someone what is at the heart of the parable of the Good Samaritan I doubt that anyone would tell you that's it's about our need for imputed righteousness. In fact, if you told someone that the parable of the Good Samaritan is about the doctrine of imputed righteousness they would probably think you're nuts. But, this is the ultimate answer to the lawyer's original question and is what he didn't understand. It is what's at the heart of this parable. What shall I do to inherit eternal life? Keep the law, the whole law, every part of it, perfectly, all the time, without fail. You can't do it. Jesus did. His righteousness is imputed to us through faith in Him. Without it, there is no eternal life.

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<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 27:26