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The Good Samaritan

Toward the beginning of His third year of ministry, having sent His disciples out in twos (Luke 10:1-16) and having received them back with fantastic stories of victory and triumph over the kingdom of Satan (Luke 10:17-19), Christ warned His disciples that their chief “rejoicing” should NOT be over what *they* had done for the Lord BUT over what *God* had done for them.

Luke 10:20, “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”

Now in a Jewish context, this statement would have raised many eyebrows! In order to receive the great blessings promised by Christ in Luke 10:21-22 and to be assured of the salvation spoken about in Luke 10:20, far more would be required of these disciples than what they had done thus far. So how could Christ say such things?

It was in this context that the lawyer of Luke 10 stepped forward and asked, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)¹ Notice Christ’s response. In v. 26 He answered the question by asking question this way:

Luke 10:26, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?”

The lawyer, whose primary focus of study was the Pentateuch, immediately quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: “Love God and love your neighbor.”

To which Christ said, “Do this, and you will live,” Luke 10:28.

And yet this raised a massively controversial question at the time, “Who is my neighbor?”

There were some in Judaism that took Leviticus 19:18 as saying, “You shall love your neighbor *and hate your enemy*” (cf. Matthew 5:43-48). Jewish tradition (the Mishnah) limited this commandment to those of your blood line, “You shall love your neighbor, *the Israelite*.” Some Pharisees taught that you were to “Love your neighbor, *the Pharisee*.”

Now so to “justify himself” — to show that he really wasn’t that bad (v. 29) — this lawyer raised the question of the hour, “Who is my neighbor?” with the expectation that Christ, as the other religious leaders, would *limit* the scope of this word and thus assure him of his salvation.

And yet far from catering to this man’s desire, Christ told the parable of the Good Samaritan which is given to teach us whom we ought to love.

Luke 10:30, “a certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.”

While Christ does not identify the nationality of this “certain man,” the assumption on the part of those listening to Christ would have been that he was a Jew.² Furthermore, the mentioning of a journey “from Jerusalem to Jericho” is significant. The distance between Jerusalem and Jericho was only 17 miles, and yet was more than a 4,000 ft. drop in elevation (Jerusalem is 3,000 ft. *above* sea level and Jericho is more than 1,000 ft. *below* sea level). And so the road that led “from Jerusalem to Jericho” was a mountainous, rocky path. In fact, it was a perfect place for crime since the terrain provided an easy ambush and escape. Hendriksen wrote of this road:

It is rugged and rocky, and during the days of Christ's sojourn on earth- and, in fact, until rather recently- dangerous for travelling, skirted, as it is, by many a cave or hollow, facilitating escape for robbers and other criminals. (Hendrikson, 1978, p. 593)

And thus, it is no surprise to discover that in the days of Christ this road was notorious for its danger on account of the many robberies and muggings that went on there.³

Luke 10:30, "and he fell among robbers [lit. was surrounded by robbers], and they stripped him and beat him [here it is the present tense, 'they repeatedly beat him'], and went off leaving him half dead."

In essence, this man was mugged; that is the focus. It is NOT on the fact that he was robbed, BUT on the fact that he had suffered cruel treatment such that, when the muggers departed, what remained was a man whose life was in peril, especially since nightfall was coming!

Luke 10:31-32, "And by chance [lit. by a concurrence of events] a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise, a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side"

It has been widely suggested that both "the priest" and "Levite" didn't want to touch this man for fear that if the man died they would be ceremonial unclean (cf. Leviticus 19; Numbers 19) and thus unable to serve in the temple. Yet, this assumption is unwarranted. First, "the priest" and the "Levite" were travelling ALONE. Jericho at the time of Christ housed about half of the priestly orders! Thus, when it was time for an order of priests to serve in the temple, the practice was to travel as a group⁴- *it was on their way home that they would split up* — some doing errands and others visiting family and friends.

Furthermore, both of these temple servants were "going DOWN on that road" indicating that they were going from the higher elevation ("Jerusalem") to the lower elevation ("Jericho") (v. 31). And so, because they were (1) alone and (2) travelling to Jericho, it is obvious that "the priest" and the "Levite" were finished with their temple service and thus were on their way home (cf. Luke 1:8, 23)!

All of this is to say that it is best NOT to impute motive here on the part of the priest and Levite (which many a preacher has done), BUT rather to accept Christ's story as He tells it. All that we can surmise from the detail given here is that both the priest and the Levite simply did not get involved. For whatever reason, they of all men were loveless- which is shocking, for consider who these men were.

The first was a priest. This would have been a descendant of Aaron who as such was specially called to minister in the Temple. He had the awesome responsibility of participating in the divine worship: sacrificing the animal, sprinkling its blood, etc. Thus, the mention of a priest would have evoked the image of a "holy man" — a man of God! And yet, when he saw the

battered and beat up man, what did he do?

Luke 10:31b, "...he passed by on the other side."

Of all men this priest should have expressed love for this victim. Showing mercy to ones in need was one of the most basic commandments of God.⁵ In fact, the Old Testament required God's people to show mercy to strangers⁶ and enemies.⁷ And yet this *holy man* "...passed by on the opposite side of the road." So much for Christian charity! Yet, the next traveler fared no differently.

The second was a Levite. His being a Levite, he was a "helper" to the priests. While only those of the house of Aaron could participate in the temple worship, all remaining Levites were called to aid the Aaronic priesthood (Levites were responsible for the liturgy in the temple and for policing it). And so likewise, the mention of this man would have evoked in the mind of those listening the image of a "holy man." And yet once again we read this:

Luke 10:32b, "...when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."

Just like the priest, this Levite passed by on the other side of the road. And yet, this was NOT without some curiosity. The text says, "when... he saw him." The idea here is that when this Levite reached the spot where this man had been mugged, he went up close to the man to see him (he stood over his wounded body), AND THEN passed by on the other side.⁸ This is important for it is obvious that this Levite was NOT afraid of being mugged himself (which is often suggested as the reason both "the priest" and the "Levite" passed the individual by). And so like the "priest", this "Levite" examined the man and the situation, and for whatever reason walked on by!

At this point in the story, the thought would have emerged, "*This fallen Jew has no hope.*" After all, if "the priest" or a "Levite" — the spiritual Green Berets of Judaism — refused to aid this man, who would extend grace to this dying man? That brings us to the serving.

The Serving

Luke 10:33, "But a certain Samaritan [in the emphatic position], who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him..."

With the mentioning of the "Samaritan" the crowd listening to Christ immediately would have begun expecting the worse! For you see, the Jews and the Samaritans were NOT on the best of terms... in fact they were enemies! Recall in 722 B.C., when the Assyrians took God's people into exile (taking mostly the rich and upper-class), all that remained in Israel was the uneducated and lower-class Jew.

As most of the powers in the ancient Near East, the Assyrians took part in what is known as "Transporting." Because you generally would NOT die for a land that was not your own, the

Assyrians transported the upper class, wealthy, powerful, and educated of a newly conquered land to other parts of their empire (usually other conquered kingdoms). This proved to be quite effective in controlling conquered regions.

Accordingly, when the Northern Kingdom was taken into exile all that was left in Israel was the lower class, uneducated Jew who would have been thrilled to live in the recently vacated homes of the upper class. And when the educated, powerful, upper class of other *Gentile* peoples were resettled in Israel, in no time the two peoples intermarried which created, what was viewed at the time, a “half-bread” race called the Samaritans (they were half Jew and half Gentile).

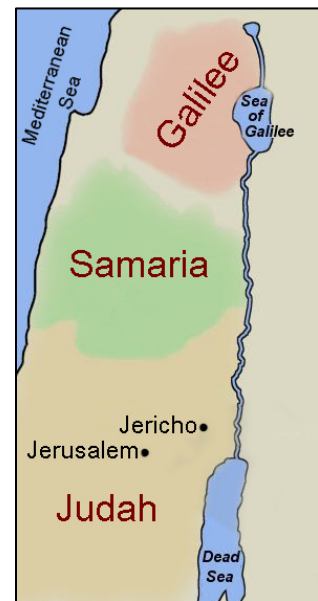
Because in the ancient world you didn’t want to offend local deities, these transported Gentiles would have adopted the religion of Judaism which meant from the perspective of the Northern Jew, they were NOT compromising; they were marrying converts to Judaism!

Now for the pious Jew in the South (Judah) who typically prayed, *“I thank Thee God that I am neither a slave, gentile, or a woman,”* it would have been difficult for them to imagine anyone worse than a Samaritan, for they represented compromise! Accordingly the religion of the “Samaritans” (which continued to revolve around Yahweh) was looked down upon by the Jew. We read this speaking of the Samaritans in the book of 2 Kings:

2 Kings 17:34, “To this day they do according to the earlier customs: they do not fear the Lord, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances or the law, or the commandments which the Lord commanded the sons of Jacob, whom He named Israel.”

The result was that from 722 BC onward there was hostility, anger, and heated friction between the Samaritans and the Israelite. And so following the Babylonian Captivity when some Samaritans offered to help rebuild the temple, they were contemptuously rejected — despite their claims to be worshipers of the true God (Ezra 4:1-3).

And this animosity continued up to the time of the New Testament. Most Jews travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem would NOT travel through Samaria — they would go around it utilizing either the King’s Highway or the Via Maris! This is why Christ’s presence in Samaria in John 4 was so shocking. And if they did happen through the region, upon entering into Judea the pious Jew would shake the dust off his sandals, not wanting to pollute Israel with Samaritan dirt. Accordingly, in the New Testament, when the enemies of Christ wanted to vent their anger toward Him, they could think of no greater insult than to call Jesus a “Samaritan” (cf. John 8:48)! In fact, according to Jewish tradition at the time of Christ (the Mishna), the Samaritan fell outside the definition of a neighbor — and hence the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30ff).



In light of this, what would have been expected after Christ's words in v. 33 would be something like "But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him..." If we are generous, "...he passed by on the other side of the road"- BUT if we simply are fair, "...he went through his pockets and, finding no wealth, he roughed him up further."

Amazingly, however, we read of the Samaritan's actions.

Luke 10:33b, "he felt compassion."

This could read literally "groaned from his bowels." This is the word frequently used of Christ when He felt compassion and mercy for hurting and lost people.⁹ The Samaritan's actions here are very Christ-like!

Luke 10:34a, "And came to him, and bandaged up his wounds [lit. he 'bound them down'], pouring oil and wine on them..."

Both oil and wine were used for medicinal purposes in Christ's day. When poured in a wound, "oil" acted as a kind of salve; it soothed the wound. And because of its alcoholic content, "wine" was used both as a disinfectant and an antiseptic.

Now what makes this act even more significant is that this helpless Jew could have been a trap! And yet, though the Samaritan obviously was a man of means (he had an animal and he had money to spend), he nevertheless risked it all to help this man!

Luke 10:34b, "...and he put him on his own beast..."

What an amazing picture, a Samaritan travelling on foot allowing an injured Jew to ride on his beast!¹⁰

Luke 10:34c, "...and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."

The Samaritan's love did not end when they arrived at the inn. Rather, he spent the night caring for this Jewish man. And yet, even here his love was not exhausted.

Luke 10:35, "...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.'"

The Samaritan gave an amount equal to two days wage. Now if the price for lodging in that day was one-twelfth a denarius as has been suggested,¹¹ the payment here would have been enough for twenty-four days lodging!¹² And yet, the Samaritan still is not finished. For if the Jewish victim was not well enough by the time the money ran out, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper a "blank check" to care for this guest with the promise of full payment when he returned.

The Significance

Luke 10:36, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?"

Christ's point of application is very important. Notice, Christ does NOT answer the question posed by the lawyer in v. 29, "Who is my neighbor?" Essentially, "Who is qualified for my help?" RATHER, Christ inverted the question, "To whom am I to be a neighbor; what need can I meet?"

That means Christ here did NOT define who our neighbor is. Instead, He calls us all to BE a neighbor to any and all in need- which is the effect of Christ's final exhortation.

Luke 10:37b, "...Go and do likewise."

When the lawyer said that the man who showed pity was the one who was the "neighbor," Christ said, "*Then make that your practice!*" Love for our neighbor implies that we must love any and all in need!

And that brings us to the point of this parable. Seeking an escape clause in order to justify his lack of love toward outsiders, the Lawyer asked, "*Who is my neighbor?*" And far from granting an escape clause when it came to the obligations of the Law (as the religious teachers of that day typically did), Christ taught here that love and compassion must never be partial. Rather, our love must be expressed to any and all in need.

On the surface this sounds lovely! Yet when you endeavor to take this into real life situations, it gets rather sticky. How are we to love someone who has been just rotten to us? How do we turn love on when there is no love at all? Needy people often are unpleasant people... so how are we to love them when the over-riding, knee-jerk reaction is that of revulsion?

These are great questions, for they reveal a lack of understanding when it comes to biblical love on our part. What is biblical love? First, understand that it is NOT an emotion (at least not at first). We read of God who does NOT have emotions; He is Impassible.

John 3:16a, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..."

This does NOT mean that God felt warm fuzzies about the world. In fact, "the world" referenced here was and is composed of the wretched, rebellious sinner who had rejected God and would in fact murder His Son!!!

In this context, what is love? It most certainly could NOT be a feel-good emotion (on account of the character of God and the state of man at Christ's coming)! So what is it? Listen to the text again, "For God so loved the world, that He gave..." From this we conclude that love is NOT first an emotion, BUT a determined act of the will that always results in determined acts of self-

giving. We see it in what I call the “*other* John 3:16.”

1 John 3:16, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

The “*other* John 3:16” beautifully defines the love of John 3:16. What is that love? It is evidenced in that Christ “laid down His life for us”! It truly is a determined act of the will which always results in determined acts of self-giving!

Yet the definition is incomplete. For what was the condition of man when Christ “laid down His life” for them?

Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Most of you have heard my horrible story that I have used to illustrate this, but it is worth remembering. “The wages of sin is death” which involves, among other things, the degradation of life- that is, the deterioration unto rottenness of life.

A few years ago I took the kitchen trash out to the cans on the side of our house. I opened one of the lids to see if it was empty, and in less than a second, I was gagging. A couple of days before I placed a rather large, dead bird in the can on top of one of the trash bags.

At the time, we had hawks living in our neighborhood and one evidently had caught a bird, ripped its insides out, and then got spooked (for the remains of this bird were left in our back yard). Well throughout this bird were hundreds of maggots... and the smell? Instantaneous gagging! It was awful! And yet, as I composed myself and held my breath, I looked at the bird and realized that that was the condition of mankind when Christ gave Himself up. We were NOT:

- Loveable in any way.
- Worthy to be saved.
- Desirable in any way!

In fact, get the context of Romans 5:

Romans 5:7-8, “For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while we were yet sinners**, Christ died for us.”

From all of this we conclude that love is a determined act of the will that always results in determined acts of self-giving regardless of the worth of the recipient! Isn’t that what we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan? We do NOT read that the Samaritan wanted to become this Jews best friend. RATHER, the Samaritan made a decision to sacrifice himself unto the

benefit of a Jew who in his right mind most likely would have sought to injure the Samaritan!

That is love! And that is the calling of the text before us this morning! It is NOT

- Feeling a certain way about another.
- Being driven by our feelings (that is the error of Eve when she rebelled against God in the Garden).

Frederick Danker criticized our hypocritical love when he wrote this:

A casual Good Samaritan will do the spectacular emergency deed as a kind of sentimental reaction, but when the needy one becomes a burden or makes demands on time, a quick exit is sought. (Danker, 1988, p. 223)

RATHER, love is to be driven out of conviction (specifically as it relates to God) which results in sacrificing ourselves for the good of another. When we do this, we are loving someone biblically regardless of how we feel!

- And so your co-worker has betrayed you multiple times?
- Your parents have let you down?
- Your spouse is a wretch?

None of this can thwart biblical love! In fact, did NOT Christ exhort us in Matthew 5:44, "...love your enemies..."?

Once and again we conclude that biblical Love is NOT an emotion, BUT a determined act of the will that always results in determined acts of self-giving regardless of the merit or worth of the one loved! So Christian, "To whom ought I to be a neighbor? Who ought I to serve in the name of Christ?" The answer is: "Anyone in need!"

References

Danker, F. (1988). *Jesus and the New Age*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Hendrikson, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

End Note(s)

¹ While Luke records the previously described context before our text, it may very well be that a completely different act or teaching prompted the Lawyer's question in Luke 10:25. With Hendriksen (*Luke*, NTC, p. 533), it must be stressed that this is the *possible* context of our passage.

² Much of the significance of this parable is lost if he isn't a Jew since Jewish tradition at the time of

Christ would not have had any care for a non-Jewish victim. In other words, at the time of Christ, to neglect a gentile who had been mugged would not have been *that* bad (cf. Sir. 12:4-6)!

³ In fact, Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey) made war on the criminals on this road (Strabo 16.2.41). Further, we read of the danger of this road in Josephus' *War*, 4, 8, 3 and Jerome's writings 3.2.

⁴ Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, pp. 203-204.

⁵ Micah 6:8.

⁶ Leviticus 19:34.

⁷ cf. Exodus 23:4, 5; 2 Kng. 6:8-23.

⁸ See I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC, pg. 449.

⁹ cf. Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34.

¹⁰ The word for "beast" here (*ktanos*) references any domesticated animal, including animals for riding or bearing burdens (cf. Acts 23:24; 1 Corinthians 15:39; Revelation 18:13).

¹¹ See Jeremias, *Parables*, pg. 205.

¹² Morris suggests that the amount given would have covered 2 months' worth of lodging, cf. his commentary on *Luke*, p. 208.