

Introduction: The “Good Samaritan” parable appears in Luke 10:25-37. It is truly a parable for today’s world. The basic ingredients for the story can be found in the news every day. As Ecclesiastes reminds us, there is really nothing truly new under the sun. Fallen people do not change their moral inclinations without God’s intervention.

In the “Good Samaritan,” Jesus talks about racial discrimination, violence, crime, and hatred. As I said, it sounds like today’s news.

In the parable Jesus speaks of neglect and unconcern in the face of harm, but He also speaks of love and mercy. The words of the parable are easy to understand. Understanding the parable’s meaning is another issue. To grasp the meaning, the parable must be studied in its context. What led Jesus to speak this specific parable?

A lawyer asked Jesus a question, ***“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*** It was a question the lawyer and his friends debated frequently. Jesus gives a startling example with a surprising message. Jesus teaches that you cannot separate your relationship with God from your relationship with your fellowman.

Luke 10:25-37: **And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”** ²⁶ **He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”** ²⁷ **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.”** ²⁸ **And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”**

²⁹ **But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”** ³⁰ **Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.** ³¹ **Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.** ³² **So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.** ³³ **But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.** ³⁴ **He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.** ³⁵ **And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper,**

saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’

³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Comments: The parable consists of two connected stories. First, a lawyer asking a question about salvation. Jesus answered him with a question – what is the answer given in Scripture? The lawyer answered correctly that one must love God with all their being and love their neighbor as their self.

The lawyer seems to have been uneasy at this point. A logical follow-up question would have been how could anyone do all the Law required? He would then have heard the gospel from Jesus.

But the lawyer moved from the question of salvation to ask, “who is my neighbor.” This is a typical lawyer’s request for a speaker to define their terms. He most likely anticipated a theoretical discussion like he had with other lawyers. But Jesus tells a parable with a concrete specific situation.

The common view of the Jews was that the Law’s command to love your neighbor applied only to loving Jews. Some limited even more saying the command applied only to loving Jews from your circle of acquaintances. The key point is “neighbor” was considered to be a limited term. In the parable Jesus presents a man with a specific immediate need. Who will meet the need? Who is the man’s “neighbor?”

The lawyer correctly answered Jesus question with Scripture commands “**love your neighbor as yourself.**” Jesus responds to his request for a definition of “neighbor” with a story revealing the more important issue of “who are we to treat as a neighbor?”

The Story: A Jewish man walking from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked, beaten, robbed, and left naked and bleeding beside the road. People passed by without stopping. Eventually one came along who did stop and give help. The identity of both those who passed by without stopping and the one who stopped and helped are surprising. Think with me about the different individuals involved in the parable and their attitudes toward the injured man lying beside the road.

To the Thieves the Man Was a Victim to be Exploited : The ones attacking the traveler were focused on possible gain from robbing him. Their operating philosophy was “you have what we want. We are strong enough to take it from you, so that is what we will do.” They cared nothing for the harm they might do.

God gives us *things* to use for our benefit, but He gives *people* to love. People are intended to mutually care for one another. But people who love *things* tend to *use* people to gain things. In that mode, the tendency is to exploit people we encounter. While we may not physically abuse people to achieve our ends, we frequently hurt them with attitude and words. This raises the question of when we encounter someone along the road of life, what do we think about them and what do we do?

To the Priest and Levite the Injured Man was a Risk and a Nuisance: Jericho was a priestly city. The road to Jericho from Jerusalem dropped more than 3000 feet in a 17-miles. It is a desolate area. Limestone cliffs and rocky gullies border the road. Though heavily traveled, the road was unsafe because of robbers.

Many priests lived in Jericho (“city of palms”) making the journey to Jerusalem frequently for their cycle of duty in the Temple. Since Priests and Levites regularly walked the road connecting Jerusalem and Jericho, it is strange the road was allowed to remain so dangerous.

On their way to the Temple, religious workers had to be careful to remain ceremonially clean. Contact with an unknown, naked, bleeding man, who might be dead, was not to be heard of. When they saw the injured man, they likely thought things like, the injured man is none of our doing, the robbers may still be close by, if we stop to help we may ourselves be attacked, and we may become ceremonially unclean and unable to perform our religious duties. On the other hand, if they were on their way home after Temple duties, they would be in a hurry to get home. Surely someone else can help.

So what do the Priest and Levite do? They carefully walk by on the other side of the road.

To the Lawyer the Injured Man was a Problem to be Discussed: Although Jesus did not include the lawyer in His application, he is worth some thought. The lawyer was an expert in Old Testament law, a professional theologian trained to study Scripture and apply it to daily life. At the time Jesus spoke the parable, Jewish lawyers frequently discussed the issue of “What is required of a man to inherit eternal life?”

This lawyer asked Jesus that question, perhaps believing Jesus could not handle such a complex issue of the religious law.

Jesus was too wise for him, so the lawyer tried another question. “Who is my neighbor?” He really meant, Jesus define the term “neighbor.” The lawyer wanted to discuss the abstract theme of what being a neighbor signified and to whom the term applied. Jesus controlled the discussion by giving a concrete example of a man who had been beaten and robbed. Specific concrete needs are much more difficult to sidestep than theoretical questions. The lawyer failed to realize that the important question was not “Who is my neighbor?”, but “To whom should I be a neighbor?”

To the Samaritan the Injured Man was a Neighbor to be Served: When Jesus said the word Samaritan, no doubt His Jewish listeners were startled. Jews would have nothing to do with the racially mixed Samaritans (Assyrians blended with Jews). Assyria had conquered the north kingdom 750 years earlier and deported many Jews, replacing them with Assyrians. Intermarriage occurred. Samaritans built their own temple. The Jews considered them as apostates who were worse than pagans.

No Jew would expect a Samaritan to help an injured Jew. But here was a hated Samaritan stopping to help the injured man, giving him first aid, taking him to an Inn, caring for him, and paying for his continued care.

The Samaritan could easily have justified passing by the injured Jew. The law’s interpretation stated that the injured man was no neighbor of the Samaritan. In fact, both nationality and religion could easily have justified the Samaritan not stopping. The Jews hated the Samaritans, and the Samaritans hated the Jews.

The Priest and Levite had shown no mercy though the man was a Jew. The Samaritan treated the man with the love due a neighbor, though in the world’s view he had ample cause for not doing so. The injured man was bleeding and naked, and the Samaritan was on a purposeful journey. He had a schedule to keep. But personal inconvenience and sensitivity did not stop him from helping the injured man.

When he rescued the man, he put him on his donkey to take to the Inn. Blood from the injured man undoubtedly got on the Samaritan’s clothes. The Samaritan had to walk while the injured man was on his donkey. The Samaritan lost time through the delay of his trip, plus he spent his own money for the man’s care at the Inn.

These are kinds of inconvenience and expenditures we are reluctant to incur, especially for the sake of a stranger. Jesus is teaching a necessary lesson, one that goes counter to our natural instincts.

We easily recognize our biblical obligation to our own family: *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 Timothy 5:8). We recognize a special obligation to Christians: *“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:10).

But doing good to “all people” is another issue. Jesus’ point is that everyone we encounter is to be treated as our neighbor. Everyone we encounter presents us with an opportunity to do good to them.

Doing good to people isn’t always possible. Circumstances beyond our control and even people’s attitudes may prevent us. We also recognize that we are finite creatures with limited capabilities and opportunities. But, on our part there should be no lack of willingness to do good, no attitude of viewing a person (even our enemy) as being beyond the circle of people we are to treat as neighbors.

We are to be guided by the knowledge that we each have an obligation to reach out to every human being we encounter (all are creatures made in the image of God), regardless of whether the person qualifies as a member of our group.

Acts of grace, motivated by a desire to be like Christ, not only helps someone and pleases the Lord, but it also helps the one who ministers. Where the ripples of a stone of mercy dropped into the pool of humanity will come to an end cannot be known, but the ripples for sure reach beyond our limited vision.

Jesus says, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37b).

What is Next: The parable of the “Foolish Farmer” or the dangers of success.