

Parable Of The Good Samaritan

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The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) differs from most other parables in that it is so simple and concrete that a child can understand its basic point. However, it is also an insightful and memorable exposition of practical moral principles. That so many religious and secular people understand it shows the effectiveness of its simplicity and depth. Unlike other parables, each figure in the story does not necessarily represent a spiritual equivalent. The whole narrative describes working compassion as contrasted to selfishness, of hate compared with love.

In the parable's introduction (Luke 10:26), Jesus uses a technical term regularly used by the scribes or lawyers when consulting one another about a matter of the law: "What is your reading of it?" The lawyer gives the only right answer—the necessity of loving God and his neighbor (verse 27). He then asks the question—"Who is my neighbor?" (verse 29)—that prompts Jesus into giving His parable. The lawyer believes that no Gentile is his neighbor, although it seems he suspects they really are. This parable makes clear who is our neighbor and how we should respond to his needs.

1. What is meant that the priest and the Levite stumbled across the injured man "by chance"? Luke 10:30-31; Ecclesiastes 3:1, 17; 9:11-12; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:11.

Comment: The road between Jerusalem and Jericho was a steep, rocky, dangerous gorge, troubled by prowling robbers. Because of their high religious stature, thieves did not usually assault priests and Levites, but others were "fair game."

The word used here for "chance" means the coincidence of time and circumstance, indicating that the priest and the Levite traveled that road as a matter of habit. We see that it was also habitual for them to ignore the needs of others. However, it was by God's design that the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan came to the spot where the suffering man lay. God plans and orchestrates human events and knows how to send relief. Within the sovereignty of God, there is no such thing as pure chance for God's people.

2. What character traits were missing in the priest and Levite? Luke 10:31-32; I Timothy 6:18; II Timothy 3:1-5; Titus 1:16; 3:14; James 2:14-17.

Comment: Supposedly, the priest served God and His law, which encourages mercy. He professed his love for God and human beings, and he prayed several times a day. This spiritual leader, one of 12,000 priests living in Jericho at that time, had left service to God back at the Temple, having neither time nor compassion for his neighbor. The priest knew that God's law endorses loving God and neighbor, yet he failed to put his faith into action.

The Levite was of the same tribe as the priest but of one of the inferior branches. As a servant of the Temple, a custodian of religious worship, and an interpreter of the law, he should also have been eager to assist the battered man. These two spiritual leaders

should have been the first to apply their faith in God by aiding the beaten traveler, yet Jesus must rebuke the heartless and unkind spirit of their form of religion. Both men ignore God's instruction by neglecting the intent of His law.

3. What is different about the Samaritan's attitude? Luke 10:33-35; Proverbs 25:21; Matthew 18:33; Luke 6:27-31; Galatians 5:13-14; I Peter 3:8-9.

Comment: The Samaritans were a Gentile people mostly living in Samaria, and Jews thought of them as inferior and hated them. It probably shocked the lawyer to hear Jesus speak well of the Samaritan as the only one who acted compassionately toward the beaten traveler.

"Compassion" in Luke 10:33 comes from the Greek *splagchnizomai* meaning "to be moved as to one's inwards." A person's innards represent the seat of the warm, tender emotions or feelings. It specifically symbolizes the higher viscera: the heart, lungs, and liver, signifying compassion out of the depth of one's character. The Samaritan not only intervenes on behalf of the beaten traveler, he goes beyond the call of duty to ensure the man receives care until he has recovered. He does not contemplate his action but reacts from the pre-shaped compassion of his true character.

4. How should we treat our neighbor? Luke 10:27, 36-37; Proverbs 14:21; Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 6:7-10.

Comment: Following the moral to the parable—the command to love our neighbor as ourselves—Jesus encourages the lawyer to "go and do likewise." Helping the needy without asking first who he is and what his relationship is to us fulfills this. The Samaritan proves himself a neighbor by his unprejudiced mercy and compassion. Without distinction of race, nationality, or religion, the human being that we affect good or bad by our conduct is our neighbor. More specifically in light of this parable, he who needs our aid, no matter who he is, is our neighbor. The question, then, should not be "Who is my neighbor?" but "Are we neighborly?" Are we friendly, kind, helpful, considerate, caring, cooperative, amicable, merciful, and compassionate? Do we love our fellow human beings more than ourselves?

Jesus Christ is the quintessential good neighbor, and His example is the one to imitate. He saw a world of sinners robbed of their potential, stripped of spiritual ideals, wounded by sins, and unable to rise by themselves from their beaten state. He came down to where the sinners are and gave mankind a corresponding act of mercy, seen in type in the good Samaritan. Through His death and resurrection, He covers our nakedness, binds up our wounds, and heals them. He puts us in the safety of His church and provides for our physical and spiritual needs. God gives us abundantly more than we ask.