
The Good Samaritan 2020

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The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the strongest Bible passages on Christian social responsibility.

“Over the centuries the parable of the Good Samaritan has been cited as a definition of Christian social responsibility.”—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.¹

Dr. King mentioned the parable on April 3, 1968, the night before his assassination, in his final speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”

**This is as timely a word for us today
as it was 50 years ago
and as it was 2,000 years ago.**

There’s a disturbing trend in the body of Christ. Many are getting meaner and the body more segregated all the time:

- Toward our perceived enemies—in the name of protecting ourselves and our families
- Toward our real enemies—in the name of patriotism
- Toward other Believers—in the name of apologetics and doctrinal “purity”

For the Christian it is always a heart issue. We’re becoming content to walk on the other side of the street in fear, anger, and suspicion instead of thoroughly looking into matters with critical thinking. We have chosen to adhere to and defend fear-mongering headlines and posts instead of gospel principles of courage, truth, compassion, and care.

We need this Good Samaritan word today.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25–37

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “**What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?**” So he answered and said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” And He said to him, “**You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.**” But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Then Jesus answered and said, “**A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ So which of these three**

¹ Carson, Clayborne, Susan Carson, Susan Englander, Troy Jackson, and Gerald L. Smith, eds. *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume VI: Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948 – March 1963*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press at Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2007.

do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Let’s unpack this parable by looking at the two questions the young lawyer poses to Jesus.

HOW DO I INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE? WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

How Do I Inherit Eternal Life?

There was a certain lawyer/scribe, someone skilled in the laws of Moses, and he wanted to test Jesus and see how He would answer a biblical question: *How do I inherit eternal life?*

- **Luke 10:26–27**
He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” So he answered and said, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.”
- Jesus answers the lawyer’s question with a question: *What does the law say; how do you read it?*
- The lawyer answers: *Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and your neighbor as yourself.*
 - **Deuteronomy 6:5**
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.
 - **Leviticus 19:18**
You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Jesus affirms the lawyer’s answer and is ready to leave it there, but because of his religious arrogance, the lawyer isn’t satisfied.

Who Is My Neighbor?

The lawyer wants to justify himself and seeks deeper personal affirmation for his rightness. So he asks Jesus another question: *Who is my neighbor?*

- The lawyer expected Jesus to answer with, “only and every Jew,” the prevailing thought of the day.
- Instead Jesus offers him the parable of the Good Samaritan.

JESUS STORY TIME

1. Luke 10:30—The Man

Then Jesus answered and said, “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”

- **A certain man:** Jesus leaves this man unidentified in every way. He does so in order for this “certain man” to become every man or woman we encounter. This man represents all of humanity.
- **Went down from Jerusalem to Jericho:** This was a 16-mile, 3,000-foot descent on the “Way of Blood,” a road so called because it was very dangerous and violent. Thieves preyed on travelers with impunity. This highway represents the road of life all humans travel—one that is dangerous, bloody, and full of thieves.
- **Full of thieves:** The thieves stripped, beat, wounded, and left the man half dead. This represents

the harsh realities of life we endure at some times—full of abuses, injustices, and attacks of all kinds.

2. Luke 10:31—The Priest

Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

- **A certain priest:** The priest was someone responsible for knowing the moral law of God. He should have been the one to help the man, just based on his scriptural obligations (Deuteronomy 22:1–4). Instead he saw the man and chose to pass by on the other side of the road. Why would the priest do this? There are several theories:
 - Maybe he was afraid of a set-up, of becoming a victim of the thieves himself.
 - Maybe he was afraid of becoming ceremonially unclean for seven days by touching the man (Numbers 19:16). If so, he was more concerned about ceremonial purity than moral obligation.
- **Warning**—Like the priest, we can make decisions to appear righteous, pious, and patriotic, and at the same time we can be violating the very heart of God’s commands. We must be careful.

3. Luke 10:32—The Levite

Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.

- **A Levite:** Levites were assistants to priests and were responsible for knowing ceremonial law.
- This Levite at least paused to look at the man, but he too did nothing to help. He did just enough to appease his own conscious, but as he left to worship God, the man was still laying there in need.

Consider—The priest and the Levite between them represent the totality of the moral and ceremonial Law of Moses, and yet they did nothing for the needy, abused, and broken man, who represents *us*.

**The law can’t do anything for the needy.
It merely looks at the need,
points out the need,
and continues down the road.**

Romans 3:19–20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

- The law shows us our guilt, but it doesn’t remove our guilt.

Galatians 3:24

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

- The law is our tutor, and it brings us to Jesus. *He* is our Good Samaritan!

Fact—In our broken, abused, guilt-filled condition, the law leaves us naked, beaten, and half dead. It shows us no compassion, it doesn’t clothe our nakedness in robes of righteousness, and it doesn’t give us life. The law leaves us on the Way of Blood, waiting for another to come and show us compassion and grace.

4. Luke 10:33–35—The Samaritan

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’

- **The Samaritan:** Samaritans were despised by the Jews, who called them half-breeds and dogs. In

Jewish estimation Samaritans were worse than backslidden Jews and Philistines, were as unclean as lepers, and would cause a curse to be placed on a Jew's children if one housed a Samaritan. Samaritans were publicly cursed in synagogues and considered unworthy of salvation and eternal life. We see evidence of this in scripture:

- In **John 4**, when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well she is astounded and can't understand it because, as she tells Jesus, Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.
- In **John 8**, when the Pharisees are irate with Jesus, the worst insult they can offer is to call Jesus a Samaritan who has a demon.
- In **Luke 9** even Jesus' own disciples show their prejudice. When a Samaritan village does not receive Jesus, the disciples want to call down fire from heaven to consume it. Jesus replies, **"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."** (**Luke 9:55-56**)
- A Samaritan comes by and, with courage and compassion, provides the care and pays the cost to see the man healed and come to full life! He's personally engaged and involved in what was a dangerous and unpopular mission.

Question—When we see people who are different from us, do we want to walk on the other side of the road and pass by without getting our hands dirty? Or do we want to love them like Jesus loves them, no matter the cost to us?

5. Luke 10:36-37—Who is My Neighbor?

"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, **"Go and do likewise."**

- Jesus asks the arrogant, legalistic, compassionless lawyer, "Who was a neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"
- The lawyer answered, "He who showed mercy on him."
 - The lawyer's prejudice was so enormous that he couldn't even bring himself to say the words, "the Samaritan."
- Jesus tells the lawyer to go and do likewise. How?
 - Expand what *loving God with everything you've got* means to and requires of you.
 - Grow the definition of whom your neighbor is.
 - Allow the compassion and grace that touched you in your hour of need to flow through you to others in their hour of need.

Application—On the dangerous road of life, we must:

- *Realize* our neighbor is every man and woman we have an encounter with.
- *See—really see*—the beaten, broken, abused, poor, underprivileged, underserved, oppressed, persecuted, and mistreated. We were those people once ourselves.
- *Do something about it* by courageously looking into dangerous or unpopular situations, compassionately caring for the hurting, and generously helping to cover costs for the unable.

Remember what Jesus said:

- **Matthew 25:34-40**

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in

prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

Closing Thoughts

Dr. King suggested that the priest/Levite and Samaritan asked themselves two different questions:

- **Priest/Levite:** “What will happen to me if I try to help this man?”
- **Samaritan:** “What will happen to this man if I don’t help him?”

“Therefore, he (the Good Samaritan) was a great man because he had the mental equipment for a dangerous altruism. He was a great man because he could rise above his self-concern to the broader concern of his brother.”—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.²

Let’s be great men and women of God!
Let’s grow in our greatness
and look to where we can make a difference for our neighbors.

Note: Director of Diversity Janice Gaines is starting a class that the entire staff has already gone through to help us understand some things about those around us and how to expand God’s kingdom with our neighbors. Sign up, show up, and reach out!

Discussion Questions

1. What evidence do you see of growing division and meanness in the body of Christ?
2. How do we inherit eternal life? Why was the lawyer not satisfied with Jesus’ answer to his first question?
3. Who is your neighbor? How does this definition challenge you? Does it change your thinking?
4. Discuss the broader interpretations of “the certain man,” the “Way of Blood,” the thieves, the Levite, the priest, and the Good Samaritan.
5. Discuss: “In our broken, abused, guilt-filled condition, the law leaves us naked, beaten, and half dead. It shows us no compassion, it doesn’t clothe our nakedness in robes of righteousness, and it doesn’t give us life. The law leaves us on the Way of Blood, waiting for another to come and show us compassion and grace.”
6. What about the person of the Good Samaritan most stands out to you? How has the telling and retelling of this story sanitized the power and impact of Jesus’ meaning?
7. What will it take for all of us to become Good Samaritans?

² Ibid.

NOTES