

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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The Parables of our Lord

The Good Samaritan

Toward the beginning of His third year of ministry, Christ sent His disciples out by twos¹. When they returned they told of fantastic stories of victory and triumph over the kingdom of Satan.² Christ warned His disciples that their chief “rejoicing” should not be over what they had done for God but over what God had done for them.

Luke 10:20, “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”

Now in a Jewish context, this statement would have raised many eyebrows. Because in order to receive the great blessing promised by Christ in Luke 10:21-22 and to be assured of the salvation spoke of here in Luke 10:20 far more would be required of these disciples than what they had done thus far.

How could Christ say such things?

Now it is most likely this context that prompted the lawyer of Luke 10 to step forward with this question: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25).³

Notice Christ's response. In verse 26 Christ responds to the lawyer's question by posing another question: “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” (Luke 10:26).

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

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

And yet this raised a very important question, “Who is my neighbor?”

¹ Compare Luke 10:1-16

² Compare Luke 10:17-19

³ 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. Here I stress with Hendriksen (*Luke*, NTC, page 533), it must be stressed that this is the *possible* context of our passage.

If you were living in the days of Christ you would know that this was a loaded question. In order for the Jews to fulfill the call to love their neighbor and thus be saved, they had to redefine who their neighbor was. And thus, there were those in Judaism that took Leviticus 19:18 as saying, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”⁴

Jewish law limited this commandment to those of your blood line, “You shall love your neighbor, the Israelite.”

The Pharisees taught that you were to “Love your neighbor, the Pharisee.”

And so, to “justify himself” and to show that he really wasn't that bad⁵ this lawyer raised the question of the hour, “Who is my neighbor?” He did this with the expectation that Christ likewise would limit the scope of this word and thus assure him of his salvation.

The Setting

Far from assuring this man of his salvation, Christ told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Let's walk our way through this text beginning with the setting.

Luke 10:30, “And Jesus answering said, **A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho,** and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”

While Christ does not identify the nationality of this “certain man,” the assumption here on the part of those listening to Christ would have been that he was a Jew.⁶

Furthermore, the mentioning of a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho would have been significant to Christ's audience. The distance between Jerusalem and Jericho was only seventeen miles, and it was more than 4000 feet lower in elevation than Jerusalem.⁷ So the road that led to Jericho from Jerusalem was a mountainous and rocky path. 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 traveling, skirted, as it is, by many a cave or hollow, facilitating escape for robbers and other criminals.”⁸

Cruel Treatment

And thus, it is no surprise to discover that in the days of Christ this road was notorious for its danger on

⁴ Compare Matthew 5:43-48

⁵ Compare Luke 10:29

⁶ 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)!

⁷ Jerusalem is 3000 feet about sea level and Jericho is more than 1000 feet below sea level.

⁸ Hendriksen, Luke, *New Testament Commentary*, page 593

account of the many robberies and muggings that went on there.⁹

Luke 10:30, “And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”

Here we read that the man was surrounded by robbers and that they repeatedly beat him. Then they left him for dead. In essence, this man was mugged. And yet, the focus of this verse is NOT on the fact that he was robbed BUT on the fact that he had suffered cruel treatment.

And thus when the muggers left, all that was left of this “certain man” was his life; yet this also was in peril as night would soon fall.

The Snubbing

Luke 10:31-32, “And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and 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.¹⁰ Yet, this assumption is unwarranted. The priest and the Levite were traveling 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, they typically traveled as a group to the temple.¹¹ It was on their way home that they would split up; some doing errands, others visiting family and friends, etc.

Furthermore, both of these ministers were “going down” from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Because they were alone and traveling to Jericho, it is obvious that the priest and the Levite were finished with their temple service and thus were on their way home.¹²

From this we conclude that it is best not to try to impute motive here on the part of the priest and Levite, but rather to accept Christ's story as He tells it. All that we can surmise here is that both the priest and the Levite simply do not want to get involved. For whatever reason, they of all men are loveless!

And yet, who are these two characters?

The priest 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!

Luke 10:31-32, “And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: **and when he saw**

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Compare both Leviticus 19 and Numbers 19

¹¹ Compare Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, pages 203-204

¹² Compare Luke 1:8, 23

him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and 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.¹³ The Old Testament required God's people to show mercy to strangers¹⁴ and enemies.¹⁵ And yet, this “holy man”, when he saw him, “passed by on the opposite side of the road.”

So much for Christian charity! Yet, the next traveler fared no differently.

The Levite 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 the image of a “holy man.”

And yet we read that he too “passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:32). Just like the priest, this Levite passed by on the other side of the road. And yet, this was not without some curiosity.

Luke 10:32, “And likewise a Levite, **when he was at the place, came and looked on him,** and passed by on the other side.”

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, AND THEN passed by on the other side.¹⁶ In other words, this Levite was not afraid of being mugged himself. Rather, he examined the man and the situation, and for whatever reason walked on by!

Now at this point in the story, the thought emerges, “This fallen Jew has no hope.” After all, if a priest or a Levite refused to aid this man (and they being the most holy and godly of all), who else would stoop so low as to help this dying man?

The Serving

Luke 10:33-35, “**But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,** And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.”

With the mentioning of the “Samaritan” the crowd listening to Christ would have been shocked and would have begun expecting the worse. Recall that the Jews and the Samaritans were not on the best of terms.

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

¹³ Compare Micah 6:8

¹⁴ Compare Leviticus 19:34

¹⁵ Compare Exodus 23:4, 5; 2 Kings 6:8-23

¹⁶ See I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC, page 449

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 peoples of their conquered kingdoms to other conquered regions. This proved quite effective in controlling their conquered regions.

During the exile, these lower class, uneducated Jewish people who were left in Israel intermarried with the transported Gentile peoples: thus creating a “half-bred” race called the Samaritans, they were half Jew and half Gentile.

Now for the pious Jew who typically prayed, “I thank Thee God that I am neither a slave, gentile, or a woman,” there was nothing worse than a Samaritan, for they represented compromise! Accordingly the religion of these “Samaritans” was always looked down upon by the pure Jew. Speaking of the Samaritans we read this in 2 Kings.

2 Kings 17:34, “Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.”

The result was that from 722 BC onward there was constant friction between the Samaritans and the Israelites. For example, 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.¹⁷

And this continued up to the time of the New Testament. Most Jews traveling 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 is so shocking.

And if they did happen through the region, upon entering into Judea they would shake the dust off their sandals not wanting to pollute Israel with Samaritan dirt. 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. And when the enemies of Christ wanted to vent their anger toward the Lord, they called Him a “Samaritan.”¹⁸

And so, by the time of Christ, there was not a lot of love between the Jews and Samaritans.¹⁹ And thus, what would have been expected after Christ's words in verse 33, “But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him...” is that if we are generous, “...he passed by on the other side of the road” — and yet if we are just fair, we could expect this Samaritan to do even further harm.

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

Luke 10:33, “But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him²⁰.”

This is the word frequently used of Christ when He felt compassion and mercy for hurting and lost people.²¹ Here we see that the Samaritan is very Christ-like.

¹⁷ Compare Ezra 4:1-3

¹⁸ Compare John 8:48

¹⁹ Compare Luke 9:52-53

²⁰ This literally reads “groaned from his bowels.” *σπλαγχνιζομαι* *splagchnizomai*; to be moved in the inward parts,

²¹ Compare Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34

Luke 10:34, “And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”

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

What makes this act even more significant is that this beaten up man could have been a trap. And though this 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 10:34, “And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, **and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.**”

What an amazing picture, a Samaritan traveling on foot allowing an injured Jew to ride on his beast!²² The Samaritan's love did not end when they arrived at the inn. Rather, he spent the night caring for his Jewish companion. And yet, even here his love has not been exhausted.

Luke 10:35, “And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.”

The Samaritan gave an amount equal to two days wage. Now if the price for lodging in that day was a twelfth of a denarius as has been suggested²³ the payment here would have been enough for twenty-four days lodging.²⁴

And yet, the Samaritan still is not finished. If the Jewish victim was not well enough by the time the money ran out, the Samaritan gave the inn-keeper a “blank check” to care for this guest with the promise of full payment later.

The Significance

Luke 10:36, “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?”

Christ's point of application is very important here. Notice Christ does NOT directly answer the question posed by the lawyer in verse 29, “Who is my neighbor?” (Essentially, “Who is qualified for my help?”). Rather, Christ turns the focus to, “To whom am I to be a neighbor; what need can I meet?”

Christ does not define who our neighbor is rather He calls us all to BE a neighbor to any and all in need!

Luke 10:37, “And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

²² 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).

²³ See Jeremias, *Parables*, page. 205.

²⁴ Morris suggests that the amount given would have covered 2 months worth of lodging, cf. his commentary on *Luke*, page. 208.

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 your 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?” Now far from granting an escape clause when it came to the obligations of the Law, Christ teaches that love and compassion must never be partial and that our love must be expressed to any and all in need.

Now why is that?

Why is this such an important theme?

Love is so important in the Kingdom of God because it is God’s nature.

1 John 4:7-8, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”

God here is said to be love. Now you know that aside from the name of Yahweh (which references God's essence), every other name used of God describes not so much what God is but what God does!

In light of this when this text says that “God is love” it is telling something about what God does as Yahweh.

Accordingly love is a determined act of the will that always results in determined acts of self-giving regardless of the worth of the recipient.

What does God do since He is love?

He gives mercy, compassion, and grace to ones who are unworthy. Our call as children of God is this:

1 John 4:20-21, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

Because God is love, the ethic of the Kingdom of God necessarily is love.

In light of this John here could say that if you do not love, you are not a child of God.

And yet that raises the question: How is this ethic fleshed out? What will a life of love look like?

1 John 3:16-17, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

Do you see it?

THE ethic of the Kingdom of God is that of self giving, pouring oneself out for the sake of others.

Family of God, we need to hear this! Because of our sin nature, it is common for us to lapse into living the life of the old man whereby we live for self and not God or others!

James 2:1, “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.”

And this we have done. So often in our dealings with other people (both inside and outside the body of Christ) what we do is determined by what is done to us. If we are loved, we love in return. If we are blessed, we bless in return. If we are ignored, we likewise ignore. If we are opposed, we rebuke and revile. Our actions toward other people are predicated by the circumstances and the conduct of others.

The result is a “disconnect” between THE ethical norm of the Kingdom of God and our conduct.

The Double-Minded Church

I know of a city church in the south that was committed to world missions. Thousands of dollars were spent to evangelize the lost in Asia, South America, and Africa. They frequently held conferences that stressed the importance of world missions. The pulpit regularly proclaimed the need for evangelizing the lost.

The day came when one of their most beloved missionaries to Africa left the mission field to work as an associate pastor in this church. As his heart had always been for the African, when he came home he immediately was drawn to the black neighborhoods surrounding the church.

Before long black families began attending and the missionary was out of a job.

Why was he fired?

The church board didn't want “those kind of people attending.”

Thousands of dollars is too little to spend for the salvation of the lost in Africa, but a pew is too great a cost for the salvation of a black person at home!

A new bike and a trip to the zoo is too little to spend on our children, but a listening ear is too much when WE have “more important things to do.”

A diamond ring and a dozen roses is too little to spend when it comes to our wives, but loving support is too much when our expectations are crossed.

A four course meal is too little to spend when someone is hurting, but to actually get involved and bear their burdens is too much when it comes to our love. 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.”²⁵

Truly it behooves us as the body of Christ that of all people we cast off the hypocritical and conditional love so characteristic of the church today and sincerely love all in our path: black, white, male, female, young, old, friend, foe, clean, or dirty. As the people of God our love needs to go beyond the warm smiles and hearty handshakes, lavish gifts, a willingness to help others, and even praying for the hurting. The love commanded in Luke 10:30-38 is a self-sacrificing love that practically involves itself in the lives of needy people. To do anything less is to play the hypocrite!

As I close, I want to go back to the question that the Lawyer posed at the beginning of our text, “teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25).

In light of this parable, does Christ answer the lawyer's question? Is it possible that the one who is saved is the one who loves like this Samaritan?

YES! ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE LOVED AS DID THIS SAMARITAN WILL BE SAVED!

In light of this, it should be obvious that, as with the lawyer, such love is beyond anyone of us!

So what should we do? Should we throw our hands up in resignation seeing how we could never love like this?

NO! As none of us can love as Christ commands in this text, we must allow this command to drive us to Christ for salvation. This passage is not simply a story that Christ told to illustrate the importance of love, it ultimately is a declaration of the work that He came to do as Messiah!

Christ is the Samaritan. Despised and rejected by man. He holds the wealth of eternity.

We are the “certain man” whom no one in this world could or would even dare help.

Yet what has Christ done?

He came to us (and fear rose in our hearts as to what He might do). He condescended to our level (He got off of his donkey). He bandages up our wounds. He personally care(d,s) for us. He brought us into a mansion with many dwelling places.

Let us cling to Him, the Good Samaritan, and having known such love, let us extend this love to everyone whom we see in need!

²⁵ Frederick Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, page 223

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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