

The Good Samaritan

Grace and Forgiveness · Parables of Jesus

A certain lawyer, seeking to justify himself, asked Jesus 'Who is my neighbor?' (Luke 10:29), hoping to limit the scope of the Levitical command 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Leviticus 19:18). Rather than provide a definition, Christ told a story that demolished ethnic and religious boundaries while exposing the emptiness of mere profession without compassion. The parable indicts ceremonial religion divorced from mercy and reveals that true righteousness transcends tribal loyalties.

A man traveling the treacherous road from Jerusalem to Jericho—a seventeen-mile descent of 3,600 feet through rocky, desolate terrain notorious for bandits—fell among thieves who stripped, wounded, and abandoned him half dead. A priest came upon the scene, saw the wounded man, and passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite observed the victim and crossed to avoid him.

Note: Both priest and Levite likely reasoned that touching what might be a corpse would render them ceremonially unclean (Numbers 19:11-16), preventing temple service. They chose ritual purity over compassion, external religion over the weightier matters of the law. The Greek word *antiparēlthen* ('passed by on the other side') suggests deliberate avoidance. Their very proximity to the victim made their callousness more culpable.

But a certain Samaritan—member of a people whom Jews considered heretical half-breeds, despised for their mixed ancestry and corrupted worship—journeyed that way, saw the wounded man, and had compassion. Here Christ's Jewish audience would recoil: the hero of the story was their ethnic and religious enemy. The Samaritan's actions demonstrated covenant

love: he bound up the victim's wounds, pouring in oil (soothing) and wine (disinfecting), set him on his own beast (walking himself), brought him to an inn, took care of him through the night, and the next day gave the innkeeper two pence (two denarii, roughly two days' wages) with instructions to provide whatever care was needed, promising to repay any additional expenses upon his return.

Christ then turned the lawyer's question inside out: 'Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?' (Luke 10:36). The lawyer couldn't bring himself to say 'the Samaritan' but replied, 'He that shewed mercy on him.' Jesus commanded, 'Go, and do thou likewise'—not 'determine who qualifies as your neighbor,' but 'be a neighbor to anyone in need.' The parable reveals that God's grace breaks down walls of hostility, that true religion consists of mercy rather than mere ceremony, and that love for God inevitably manifests in sacrificial love for others, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or social standing.

Key Verses

Luke 10:29-30

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? 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.

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.

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.

Luke 10:36-37

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Leviticus 19:18

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

James 2:15-16

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

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