

STUDY ON THE PARABLES OF JUDGMENT

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Read Luke 10:25-37

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is precipitated by and in answer to a question posed to Jesus by a lawyer. In this case the lawyer would have been an expert in the Mosaic Law. The lawyer's question was, *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25).*

The text says that the scribe (lawyer) had put the question to Jesus as a test. Why would he want to test Jesus? Was he really interested in the answer? What was his motive? Was he looking at Jesus as a sabbath-breaker and a despiser of tradition? The wording of the question does give us some insight into where the scribe's heart was spiritually.

Jesus answers the question with a question: *"He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?'" (Luke 10:26).* By referring to the Law, Jesus is directing the man to an authority they both would accept as truth, the Old Testament. In essence, He is asking the scribe, what does Scripture say about this and how does he interpret it? Jesus perhaps, knew the motive of this lawyer and thus avoids an argument and puts Himself in the position of evaluating the scribe's answer instead of the scribe evaluating His answer. This directs the discussion towards Jesus' intended lesson. The scribe answers Jesus' question by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (**Deuteronomy 6:5**)

"... you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord." (**Leviticus 19:18**)

This is virtually the same answer that Jesus had given to the same question in Matthew 22 and Mark 12.

"Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."'" (Matthew 20:37-40)

In verse 28, Jesus affirms that the lawyer's answer is correct. *"You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."* Jesus did not say "know this and you will live" but "do this and you will live". Jesus' reply tells the scribe that he has given an orthodox (scripturally proper) answer, but then goes on to tell him that this kind of love requires more than an emotional feeling or just knowing; it would also include orthodox practice; he would need to "practice what he preached."

Q: In what ways do we preach something and practice something else?

The lawyer asked: "who is my neighbour?"

The bible records that he was seeking to justify himself. Why would this lawyer seek to justify himself? Again, what was his motive for asking Jesus this question?

We cannot justify ourselves before God. It is God who justifies us.

"How then can man be righteous before God? Or how can he be pure who is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4)

The word "neighbour" in the Greek means "someone who is near," and in the Hebrew it means "someone that you have an association with." This interprets the word in a limited sense, referring to a fellow Jew and would have excluded Samaritans, Romans, and other foreigners. Jesus then gives the

parable of the Good Samaritan to correct the false understanding and cultural error that the scribe had of who his neighbour is, and what his duty is to his neighbour.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan tells the story of a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, and while on the way he is robbed of everything he had, including his clothing, and is beaten to within an inch of his life. That road was treacherously winding and was a favourite hideout of robbers and thieves. The next character Jesus introduces into His story is a priest. He spends no time describing the priest and only tells of how he showed no love or compassion for the man by failing to help him and passing on the other side of the road so as not to get involved. If there was anyone who would have known God's law of love, it would have been the priest. By nature of his position, he was to be a person of compassion, desiring to help others. Unfortunately, "love" was not a word for him that required action on the behalf of someone else. The next person to pass by in the Parable of the Good Samaritan is a Levite, and he does exactly what the priest did: he passes by without showing any compassion. Again, he would have known the law, but he also failed to show the injured man compassion.

The next person to come by is the Samaritan, the one least likely to have shown compassion for the man. Samaritans were considered a low class of people by the Jews since they had intermarried with non-Jews and did not keep all the law. Therefore, Jews would have nothing to do with them.

We do not know if the injured man was a Jew or Gentile, but it made no difference to the Samaritan; he did not consider the man's race or religion. The "Good Samaritan" saw only a person in dire need of assistance, and assist him he did, above and beyond the minimum required. He dresses the man's wounds with wine (to disinfect) and oil (to sooth the pain). He puts the man on his animal and takes him to an inn for a time of healing and pays the innkeeper with his own money. He then goes beyond common decency and tells the innkeeper to take good care of the man, and he would pay for any extra expenses on his return trip. The Samaritan saw his neighbour as anyone who was in need.

Q: By virtue of this parable, can we redefine who a neighbour is? Who is your neighbour?

Because the good man was a Samaritan, Jesus is drawing a strong contrast between those who knew the law and those who actually followed the law in their lifestyle and conduct.

Remember, Jesus was speaking to someone within the Old Testament context. Our good works will not lead us to salvation. Salvation is only through Jesus and Jesus alone. However, our "continuing salvation" requires that we follow the teaching of this parable.

Jesus now asks the lawyer if he can apply the lesson to his own life with the question "*So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?*" (**Luke 10:36**). Once again, the lawyer's answer is telling of his personal hardness of heart. He cannot bring himself to say the word "Samaritan"; he refers to the "good man" as "he who showed mercy." His hate for the Samaritans (his neighbours) was so strong that he couldn't even refer to them in a proper way. Jesus then tells the lawyer to "go and do likewise," meaning that he should start living what the law tells him to do.

By ending the encounter in this manner, Jesus is telling us to follow the Samaritan's example in our own conduct; i.e., we are to show compassion and love for those we encounter in our everyday activities. We are to love others (vs. 27) regardless of their race or religion; the criterion is need. If they need and we have the supply, then we are to give generously and freely, without expectation of return.

Thus, the lessons of the Parable of the Good Samaritan are three-fold:

1. We are to set aside our prejudice and show love and compassion for others.

2. Our neighbour is anyone we encounter; we are all creatures of the creator and we are to love all of mankind as Jesus has taught.
3. Keeping the law in its entirety with the intent to save ourselves is an impossible task; we need a saviour, and this is Jesus.

There is another possible way to interpret the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and that is as a metaphor. In this interpretation:

- The injured man is all men in their fallen condition of sin.
- The robbers are the devil attacking man with the intent of destroying their relationship with God.
- The lawyer is mankind without the true understanding of God and His Word.
- The priest is religion in an apostate condition.
- The Levite is legalism that instils prejudice into the hearts of believers.
- The Samaritan is Jesus who provides the way to spiritual health.

Although this interpretation teaches good lessons, and the parallels between Jesus and the Samaritan are striking, we must conclude that the teaching of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is simply a lesson on what it means to love one's neighbour.

