

*Luke 10:25-37. Someone who's merciful to the weak or generous to the poor is said to be a good Samaritan. The term is a complement today, a kind of person we might want to emulate. Yet, Jesus didn't craft this story to give us a lofty example. It's a story about salvation.*

*What are we to glean from this parable? That none of us are the good Samaritan. No one is good enough to get into Heaven.*

It isn't a difficult parable, but it may be the most controversial. One writer read it and concluded, "The parable of the Good Samaritan is socialism."<sup>1</sup>

Socialism? Well, Jesus wants me to share my property with everyone in need. So, what's mine is yours when you're in need, and what's yours is mine when I'm in need. Since the community around us always has needs, all that's yours can't really be yours. It must belong to those around you, the community. Wealth redistribution—is this what Jesus had in mind with the Good Samaritan?

**“THE LORD’S MISSION WAS TO REDEEM US FROM SIN,  
NOT TO REDISTRIBUTE OUR PROPERTY OR IMPOSE AN  
ECONOMIC EQUALITY ON US”**

**~ MARK HENDRICKSON.**

Some say the Good Samaritan was Jesus' charge to eradicate poverty or to help the poor. And yes, God's people should be generous to those in need (Prov 14:31; Jas 1:27). I don't disagree, but is this what Jesus had in mind here?

A lawyer asked Jesus about eternal life: "What must I do to enter Heaven?" Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan. It isn't a parable about socialism or generosity—it's a parable about salvation. The point of the parable isn't: *Go, and be merciful. Be a good person, just like the Samaritan, and you'll go to Heaven.* Rather, this story should have left the lawyer feeling hopeless and helpless.

The lawyer shouldn't have walked away feeling great about himself or encouraged. No, he should've left feeling defeated. No one enters Heaven by being the Good Samaritan. We can't be good enough. We enter by turning to the grace of God for salvation.

## WHAT MUST I DO?

(LUKE 10:25-28)

*Luke 10:27—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*

Jesus was teaching when a lawyer stood up to test Him. He asked the Lord a good question though with the wrong motive. We might have asked, "How can I have a better life here and now?" Yet, this lawyer asked about the future: "How can I have eternal life?" *How can a good person make sure he's in God's kingdom?*

God had promised an eternal kingdom to the Jewish people (Gen 12:1-3, 15:5; 2 Sam 7:16; Isa 9:7). They viewed it as a future kingdom with a Jewish king ruling over them in a physical land. Oppression made them yearn for these things. The Jews were under the Romans in Jesus' time, longing for messiah to come, to free them, and to inaugurate God's kingdom on earth.

As for the man who asked the question, he wasn't a lawyer of civil law but religious law. Ironically, he wasn't afraid he might miss out on the kingdom—others might, but not him. This man had the right ancestry, being descended from Abraham. As a scribe or Pharisee, he had the right schooling and the right walk in life. If anyone earned his own way into the kingdom, he thought it would be him.

Abraham was the father of the Jews. He believed God, and God declared him righteous (Gen 15:6). So far so good. Yet, it was taught with great pride that Abraham's children were righteous. Jesus taught otherwise—ancestry doesn't save you (John 8:33-59). Though the man in our passage didn't agree with Jesus on much, he wondered what Jesus might say.

So, Jesus asked the lawyer, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (Lk 10:26). And a correct answer was given. The lawyer summed up the entire Law of Moses with two commands: Love God. Love others. Before Jesus stood a man with a solid grasp of the Torah. His theology was spot on, and Jesus affirmed him: "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live" (Lk 10:28).

*Do this, and you will live?* Keep loving God and others. Keep those commands perfectly day by day, minute by minute, and you will live. The lawyer was a good theologian, but he didn't know himself. Jesus didn't intend to raise the man's self-esteem. He wanted to shatter it. No one perfectly loves God or others. No one earns Heaven.

# The Good Samaritan

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## THE PARABLE

(LUKE 10:29-35)

*Luke 10:29—“But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”*

What must I do to be saved? Everything. According to Jesus, you need to love God and everyone else perfectly—just do that, nothing more, and you’re fit for Heaven. Encouraging, isn’t it? I think most people understand this isn’t possible. As for the lawyer, he missed the point: *Jesus, let us discuss this word, “neighbor.”*

The lawyer was blinded “desiring to justify himself.” He was certain of salvation, because “neighbor” was a very narrow term, so narrow he believed he fulfilled the command. *And who’s my neighbor, Jesus?* It wasn’t an innocent question. The lawyer wanted the Lord to affirm him in front of a crowd. He wanted to be able to say: *You see everyone, I’ve kept the Law, I’m in the kingdom—even Jesus agrees with me!*

Jesus didn’t give a textbook definition of “neighbor” but told a story. He invited the lawyer to picture a man beaten by robbers and left for dead on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem. A well-known path went between the cities, about twenty miles in length. It was a desolate and dangerous way, like walking alone through a dark alley at night. It wound through some of Israel’s remote mountainous terrain around jagged rocks and steep cliffs. It was perfect for ambush.

The Lord begins His parable saying a man walked this path alone. He took a risk, and lost big. Thieves took all he had, even his clothes, beat the man repeatedly, and left him on the side of the road. The hot desert sun and icy night winds would finish him off as he lay dying miles from help.

The setting is hopeless, but Jesus says three men happened to come along. The first two were well-respected religious figures, a priest and a Levite. We don’t know why they came along or what they were thinking (it’s a parable, these weren’t real people). The first saw his fellow Jew dying, as did the second when he later passed. What did each do? Walked as far as he could to the other side of the road. A third man came along. He wasn’t one of the religious elite or even a Jew. He was a Samaritan.

Samaritans were the Jewish descendants of Israel’s old Northern Kingdom. The New Testament Jews had descended from Israel’s Southern Kingdom. Both kingdoms fell to much greater empires

(Assyria and Babylonia) many centuries prior to Jesus’ time. In the aftermath, Samaritans married non-Jews, while their brothers to the south condemned the practice as apostasy. The Samaritans weren’t regarded as wayward Jews or even as non-Jews. They were viewed by the Jews as a degenerate class worse than Gentiles.

Five-hundred years of bitter, even violent, hatred had grown between these two groups. So, when Jesus said a Samaritan helped a Jew, it was ridiculous, even offensive. *A Samaritan did what the best of our people didn’t? Nonsense.* And that’s why Jesus developed the story as He did. He sought to convict all within earshot that they knew so little about love. All were guilty of breaking the Law and needed salvation.

*Romans 5:8—“...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

The Samaritan bound his enemy’s wounds, fed him, took him to an inn, and paid his expenses. Enemy or not, anyone you’re able to help suddenly becomes your neighbor. This isn’t the only principle God has written on the subject (2 Thes 3:10), but it’s a good place to start. God loved His enemies. How can His own people not love theirs?

## GO AND DO LIKEWISE

(LUKE 10:36-37)

What started with a lawyer testing Jesus ended with Jesus testing the lawyer. The man believed he had kept the Law and could corner the Lord into affirming him in front of everyone. Yet, Jesus cornered him when He asked: “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”

“The one who showed him mercy.” The lawyer knew the answer but wouldn’t even utter the word, “Samaritan.” Nonetheless, Jesus told him, “You go, and do likewise” (Lk 10:37). *Be like a Samaritan?! It was an ethnic outrage, but worse, it was an impossible standard.*

Certainly strive to love others, even your enemy as yourself. And when you fail, should you regroup in order to try harder or be better? Well, that’s not the good news of the gospel. That’s legalism.

Jesus didn’t tell this parable to encourage the lawyer to be better. He wasn’t on the right path and needed to see he didn’t measure up. No one measures up. What we need for eternal life isn’t to be good Samaritans, but to cast ourselves upon divine grace. We need mercy. We need a Savior.

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Barroso, *The Way*, 2013.