

## The Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke 10v25-37 The Story of Mary and Martha Luke 10v38-42



N. T. Wright has pointed out that “*The best known stories are sometimes the hardest to understand. The Good Samaritan has passed into folklore and changed the meaning of the word “Samaritan.” The idea today of a Samaritan is to give help to someone in dire need. This is not what people would have meant by the word in Jesus’ day.*”

People’s understanding of the story ranges from “if someone is in a ditch, go help them” to a moral lesson about the poison of racial hatred and religious prejudice.

*Martin Luther King Jr.* spoke on this parable:

“Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. One day a man came to Jesus; and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters in life. At points, he wanted to trick Jesus, and show him that he knew a little more than Jesus knew, and through this, throw him off base. This conversation could have easily ended up in a philosophical or a theological debate. But Jesus immediately pulled that question from mid-air, and placed it on a dangerous road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

And he talked about a certain man, who fell among thieves. You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side. They didn’t stop to help him. And finally a man of another race came by. He got down from his beast, decided not to be compassionate by proxy. But with him, administered first aid, and helped the man in need. Jesus ended up saying, this was the good man, this was the great man because he had the capacity to project the “I” into the “thou,” and to be concerned about his brother. Now you know, we use our imagination a great deal to determine why the priest and the Levite didn’t stop...

But I am going to tell you what my imagination tells me. It’s possible that these men were afraid. You see, the Jericho road is a dangerous road... It’s a winding, meandering road. It’s really conducive for ambushing. In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the *Bloody Pass*. And you know, it’s possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it’s possible that they felt that the man was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them over there for quick and easy seizure.

And so the first question that the Levite asked was, ‘If I stop to help this man what will happen to me?’ But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

This story is followed by the visit of Jesus to the house of Mary and Martha for dinner. Mary’s actions during the visit of Jesus reflect the same basic idea: Loving God may be bigger than what everyone thinks it is.

### Discussion Question

How would you answer the question, “who is my neighbor?”

### A. The Jewish Lawyer (The Expert at Law) Luke 10:25-28

Judaism taught that greater knowledge brought greater responsibility; the Gentile nations were accountable to keep only seven commandments, whereas Israel, who had received the law, had

613 commandments. These commandments represent the minimum moral and religious requirements for those in covenant relationship with God. Keeping these laws was a full time job. Ultimately, Jesus would narrow it down to one Commandment:

1. An Expert in the Jewish law stands up to test Jesus, but this is more than a quiz. He wants to *thoroughly* test Jesus.

What do you know about Experts in the Law and their role in Jewish society?

2. Both Jesus and the Expert of the Law agree about what was the most important commandment. What is the relationship between loving God and loving your neighbor?

3. Why was the Expert in the Law trying to justify himself?

4. Who would a Jew think was his neighbor?

5. Do you think the Expert has the same understanding about eternal life that Jesus did?

6. When Jesus says love your neighbor as yourself, does that mean that we need to like ourselves before we can love our neighbor?

### **B. The Parable: Luke 10:29-37**

The *priests* make the sacrifices, the *Levites* take care of the provisions, the cleaning of the Temple area, and other practical matters related to the Temple services. Priests were supposed to avoid especially impurity from a corpse; Pharisees thought one would become ritually clean and impure if even your shadow touched the corpse.

1. Jesus uses a parable to answer the Expert's second question. In their cultural context, the parable had a shocking dimension. What was it, and why was it so shocking?

2. Why does Jesus tell the story from the perspective of the man who is robbed, or as some have said, from the perspective of the ditch?

3. What is the difference between the Expert's question, "*Who is my neighbor?*" and Jesus' question, "*Who was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?*"

4. There are two reasons why the Priest and the Levite passed by the man on the road.

a) They couldn't take a chance to make themselves ritually unclean;

b) They were afraid that the man in the ditch could be a trick, and if they went over to help him, they could be robbed and worse.

This means that it is either self-security or "rules" that have priority over the duty to love.

How is the response of the Samaritan different from the Priest and the Levite?

How does it illustrate the point that Jesus is trying to make to the Expert in the Law?

5. Read the following passages:

*1 John 2v7-11* Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

*John 14v15*: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Based on these passages, how do we "Go, and do likewise"?

6. What is the connection between eternal life, the great commandment, and who is my neighbor?

7. What are reasons today that Christians give for not getting involved with others?

8. Jesus says two things: 1) "Who is my neighbor"; 2) "Go and do likewise."

How do you respond to this challenge?

### **C. Mary and Martha Luke 10v38-42**

The parable of the Good Samaritan has provided a powerful comment on the person-to-person dimension of God's requirement of love. Now we are invited to concentrate on the vertical aspect of love of God.

1. Why was Martha so upset with Mary?

2. What was Mary doing that would upset Martha (and most Jewish men) so much?

3. There are some cultural expectations in this story that are not being met. What do you think they are?

4. Jesus scolds Martha when she complains to Jesus about Mary. What does he say to Martha?

### **D. Application Questions**

1. Jim Perryman says that the two most important groups of people in the church are those who clean and setup the church for Sunday morning and those who greet people when they arrive at the door of the church.

How does the story of Mary and Martha relate to what Jim says?

2. The movie *City Slickers* deals with the question regarding the **one thing** that life is all about. The main characters are on a cattle drive, and Curly, the boss, takes Mitch, one of the cattle drivers, with him to catch a few stray cattle. That night Curly talks to Mitch about the meaning of life:

**Curly:** Do you know what the secret of life is?

**Curly:** [*holds up one finger*] This.

**Mitch:** Your finger?

**Curly:** One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and the rest don't mean nothing.

**Mitch:** But, what is the "one thing?"

**Curly:** [*smiles*] That's what *you* have to find out.

Compare this to what Paul writes to the Church in Philippi:

<sup>13</sup>Of course, my brothers and sisters, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead.

<sup>14</sup>So I run straight towards the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above (Phil. 3:13; TEV).

What is the *one thing* that these three stories have in common?

What is the *one thing* in your life?

3. Jesus tells a story about putting new wine into old wineskins (Matt. 9:17). How do the stories of the *Good Samaritan* and the story of *Mary and Martha* illustrate the story of the new wine and old wineskins?