

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL STORIES AND SIGNS

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

The Good Samaritan

This is the time of the year when children die in hot cars – approximately 30 to 40 each year. This happens because the kids are either left behind by parents and caregivers or by going into an unlocked car. People who walk by a car and see a child in it alone on a warm day can help prevent tragedies. But a survey of parents by Public Opinion Strategies for Safe Kids showed that many people are worried about getting involved in such an incident. Some say they are hesitant because they fear a lawsuit. States have written what is called Good Samaritan laws to extend protection to ‘Good Samaritans’ in order to reduce bystanders’ hesitation to assist for fear of being sued or prosecuted for unintentional injury or wrongful death. The term ‘Good Samaritan law’ takes its root from a story of Jesus.

Today, we are going back to the place where the concept of the Good Samaritan originated – the story that Jesus told in answer to a lawyer’s question.

This lawyer was not like what we know as lawyers today. Lawyers or scribes in Jesus’ day were teachers of the Mosaic Law. They would interpret the Law and help people put it into practice in their lives. One of their main weaknesses was failure to put into practice what they taught. Are we any different from the ‘lawyers’ of Jesus’ day knowing what is ‘right’ to do and then failing to do it?

Loving God and loving our neighbor sums up the law.

Read Luke 10:25-28 (ESV) ²⁵ *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him [meaning Jesus] to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* ²⁶ *He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”* ²⁷ *And he answered, “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.”* ²⁸ *And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”*

Don’t you just love the way our Lord often answers a question with a question of His own? Jesus’ question was to make the man see his own need of salvation. Sometimes people just ask questions to show off their own knowledge – not because they want your answer. The scripture says that the lawyer wanted to put Jesus *to the test*. That indicates the man was looking to “trick” Jesus into giving an answer he could “pick a part” much like we see the media do today with people they interview. The expert showed his knowledge of the holy scriptures. First, he quoted **Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* Second, he quoted **Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ *... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

The lawyer asked - *"what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* The short answer to that question is – You cannot **do anything** to inherit eternal life. Jesus did it all. However, the man's question would have not meant then what it means now. At the time of this man's question, the cross of Jesus was yet in the future. The man was most likely referencing the earthly kingdom that the Jews expected the long-awaited Messiah to bring. It would not be until 'after the cross' that anyone fully understood the spiritual kingdom of God that came to earth at the first coming of the Messiah.

Loving my neighbor means showing compassion.

Read Luke 10:29-35 (ESV) ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

The lawyer wanted to discuss what we might call 'political rhetoric' with his *who is my neighbor* question. Jesus, on the other hand, always deals with specific people and specific needs. Jesus moved from *duty* to *love*, from *debating* to *doing*. Warren Wiersbe relates the following story to illustrate this point: "Pastor D.L. Moody was attending a convention in Indianapolis. Mr. Moody asked singer Ira Sankey to meet him at 6 o'clock one evening at a certain street corner. When Sankey arrived, Mr. Moody put him on a box and asked him to sing, and it was not long before a crowd gathered. Moody spoke briefly, inviting the crowd to follow him to the nearby opera house. Before long, the auditorium was filled, and the evangelist preached the Gospel to the spiritually hungry people. When the delegates to the convention started to arrive, Moody stopped preaching and said, "Now we must close as the brethren of the convention wish to come and to discuss the question, 'How to Reach the Masses.'"

Jesus did not specifically designate this story as being a parable; therefore, it is quite possible that the characters in the story were real people. Commentators Wiersbe and Ironside both agree that most likely this was a true event even though most Bibles today place the title *The Parable of the Good Samaritan* over this passage.

The Jericho Road was not a nice place. It was a 17-mile downhill trek descending from hilly Jerusalem to Jericho located in the Jordan Valley. The countryside is barren, rocky, and full of caves and even today is still a dangerous place. Jesus' mention of an actual area is an indication that this story actually occurred.

The robbers on the Jericho Road exhibit the first of three life attitudes in the story. (1) What is yours is mine and I intend to take it! These robbers are the reason we need to be a good neighbor! Robbers often show up in places we would not expect. Jesus said in *Mark 11:17 (ESV)*¹⁷ ... “*Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.*” Yes, we can even find robbers in church. They may not steal our money but they are waiting to steal our joy.

The priest and the Levite share the same category. (2) What’s mine is mine and I’m going to keep it! Sadly, this is still a common attitude even among Christians. The priest and the Levite could have used the excuse that they didn’t want to touch the man because he might be dead. That would have kept them from serving God in the temple. However, look closely, the priest and the Levite were *going down from Jerusalem to Jericho*. They had already finished their temple duties and were heading home; therefore, they had no excuse for avoiding an injured man. Jesus’ story highlights their hypocrisy. They claimed to love God but would not help the wounded man. According to the law, they were supposed to help even an enemy with his stray donkey. *Exodus 23:4 (ESV)*⁴ “*If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him.*” Jesus’ story tells of two individuals who would be most expected to be full of compassion, love and mercy but they were instead full of legalism and ritualism.

The third passerby was the Samaritan. Samaritans were an inferior mixed race in the Jewish mind. The Samaritan race originated after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (also called Israel) to the Assyrians. Many were exiled but some remained in the land and intermarried with pagans brought in by the Assyrians. The people of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) viewed these people as half-breeds. After the Babylonian exile, when the Jews set about to rebuild the temple, the Samaritans offered to help and were rejected because they did not serve Jehovah alone. However, a Samaritan was the very person who had the attitude of the heart that every follower of Christ should have. (3) What’s mine is yours and I am going to share it!

Let’s take a look at exactly what the ‘good’ Samaritan did for the wounded man. First and foremost, the Samaritan did not cross to the other side of the road to avoid him! Instead he used what he had available to help the man. Oil and wine were common dressings used by people in those days. Oil soothed the wounds and wine disinfected them. People often carried these items on a journey. The Samaritan was prepared to fulfill the commitment required of a good neighbor. His preparation did not require a college education. His preparation did not require a large sum of money. His preparation involved using the means that he had. He enlisted others to help but he paid them. So often within the church family, we come up with “great ideas” but we expect others to pay the way and do the work! We need not feel guilty for not doing something **others** think we should do. However, we should do what **the Lord** impresses upon our hearts to do! *James 2:8 (ESV)*⁸ “*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.*”

Compassion from Jesus leads to compassion for others.

Read Luke 10:36-37 (ESV) ³⁶ *Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?* ³⁷ *He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”*

The expert in the law could not bring himself to say the word Samaritan. Rather he said, *The one who showed him mercy*. The word Samaritan must have stuck in his throat. Prejudice is a defining factor in who we consider our neighbors. God’s Word makes it plain that it is dangerous business to judge others. **James 5:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

Hearing Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan often brings a feeling of guilt because if we are honest, we have all ‘neighbors’ whom we would rather avoid by “crossing the street.” It might not seem like a big deal – it may be just taking time with a lonely person who needs our attention. Yet, we find ourselves thinking, “I don’t have time for him. I’ll just wait inside until he goes back in the house.”

We tend to want ‘good neighbors’ but the real question is, “are we good neighbors? Bible.org sums up today’s lesson:

- We must not think that our “membership” in the body of Christ or rituals in our church services satisfy the commands to love God and love our neighbor.
- When we love our neighbor, we show that we love God.
- Biblical love transcends boundaries of geography, race, religion, socio-economic status and even convenience. We must love all men equally and well.
- My neighbor is anyone with a legitimate need for which God has given me the resources to meet that need.
- Love means moving toward others even if it is not convenient.

I will leave you with one more picture from Jesus’ story – that is the wounded man. The world today is like that man who fell among robbers and needs our help. Oil and wine in scripture are frequently used as symbols of the Holy Spirit. The good Samaritan shared his oil and wine with the wounded man. Are you willing to share your ‘oil and wine’ with the wounded ones you encounter along the road of life?