

WEEK 3: THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25–37



The Place of the Passage

While the Gospel of John contains extended metaphors (e.g., John 10:1–18; 15:1–8), it contains no parables. The Synoptic Gospels¹ (mostly Matthew and Luke), however, record up to seventy parables. Nine of those parables are found in both Matthew and Luke. Matthew provides ten unique parables, and Luke sixteen. The parable of the good Samaritan is one of those parables unique to Luke. It comes near the start of what is known as Luke’s travel narrative (Luke 9:51–19:27), in which Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51).

The Big Picture

As Jesus journeys toward the cross, he challenges his followers to do two things: reorient their vision of God and his character and priorities; and live in a way that reflects this new vision. The parable of the good Samaritan fits in perfectly with those goals.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Luke 10:25–37. Then think through and write your own notes on the following questions. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on pages 1976–1977; online at www.esv.org.)

Think of a time when you saw someone in need—perhaps a homeless man asking for food or a family with car trouble at the side of the road. Did you stop to help? If not, why? Were you busy or running late? Was it inconvenient? Were you afraid?

Does the man who approaches Jesus and asks him a question approach him with pure motives? Why does Jesus answer the man's question with a question of his own?

What is good about this man's question (10:25)? What is not so good? (For help with your answer, turn to Luke 10:21–24 and read what Jesus teaches right before this passage.)

A "lawyer," in Jesus' day, was a scholar who was an expert in the law of Moses.² This is why the lawyer quotes from Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18.

Jesus applauds his answer: "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live" (Luke 10:28). Since we know from elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Rom. 3:20) that no one can keep the law perfectly, why do you think Jesus says this?

In Luke 10:29, Luke offers an insight into the lawyer's internal thoughts: "He, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" The lawyer is wanting to limit whom he has to love. Why, then, is Jesus' parable an ingenious answer to his question?

Both the priest³ and the Levite are journeying from Jerusalem, where they have presumably led God's people in worship through sacrifices (e.g., Lev. 4:26) and songs (e.g., 1 Chron. 15:22). How do their religious callings heighten the hypocrisy of their actions? What is one way you could apply what Jesus implies here?

A priest was commanded not to touch a dead body, for in doing so he would "make himself unclean" (see Lev. 21:1). Look carefully at Luke 10:30. Could this priest use that excuse? Moreover, how do the principles Jesus teaches in Matthew 12:11; 23:23 apply here?

Thanks to this parable, in the Western world the word *Samaritan*⁴ has good connotations. For example, many hospitals are called Good Samaritan Hospital, and most states have what are called “good Samaritan laws,” which legally protect people who attempt to aid victims and in doing so inadvertently harm the person. To a Jew of Jesus’ day, however, what was so shocking about Jesus’ making the hero a Samaritan (see Luke 9:52–54; John 4:9, 27; 8:48)? What might be an equivalent today?

List all the characters in the parable. Who are the main ones? Often Jesus has a lesson to teach based on how each main character thinks, speaks, and acts. What is the point of application for each character?

When Augustine interpreted this parable, he claimed that Jerusalem was the heavenly city; that the man who was mugged was Adam (who fell into sin, just as this man fell into the hands of the robbers); that the priest and Levite represent the Law and the Prophets (neither of which saves); and that the inn is the church (where the oil of baptism and the wine of communion are administered). Do you think it is appropriate to symbolize each character and detail in this way? Why or why not?

What is certainly appropriate to say is that the mercy of the Samaritan symbolizes the greater mercy of Jesus Christ. Jesus goes out of his way to save us when

we are not merely injured but dead because of our sin. What are some other connections to Christ here?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

LOVE AS THE FRUIT OF LOVE. Some have understood the parable of the good Samaritan to teach salvation by works: if we love our needy neighbors, we will “inherit eternal life” (Luke 10:25). In fact, however, three features of the parable demonstrate our need for the *gift* of salvation. (1) Without a deep heart change, even knowing our duty will not motivate us to do it (v. 29). (2) Jesus calls for the kind of love that counts even an enemy as a neighbor, a mark of those transformed by God’s mercy (6:27–36). (3) Jesus speaks this parable as he journeys toward Jerusalem (9:51) to secure eternal life for us. Strength to love our neighbors is the fruit of the love God shows us in his Son.

THE COMPASSION AND MERCY OF THE LORD. In James 5:11, Jesus’ brother reminds us of how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Those truths lie at the very heart of the good news of Christianity. It is God’s love for sinners—his loving attitude (compassion) and actions (mercy)—that leads him to save us. As Paul writes, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Whole-Bible Connections

THE TWO GREATEST COMMANDMENTS. Jesus teaches that all of God’s law is summarized in the commandments to love God and neighbor (Matt. 22:37–40; Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27). The fact that both of these commandments are

found in the law of Moses (Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18) and are detailed in the Ten Commandments (first four commandments, our relationship with God; last six, our relationships with neighbors) demonstrates the unity of Scripture and shows that Jesus knows Scripture and knows how to explain it. The New Testament certainly reveals new depths and dimensions of love (see John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-11, 19), but love for God and neighbor has always been at the heart of Scripture.

SAMARITANS AND THE SPIRIT. The Samaritans were considered racial “half-breeds.” As we see in the Gospels, even Jesus’ first Jewish disciples had difficulty when Samaritans received the blessings of Jesus the Messiah. In Acts this issue of acceptance resurfaces. Jesus’ mission is clear: the twelve, after they receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, are to be Jesus’ “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea [to Jews] and Samaria [to Samaritans], and to the end of the earth [to all the Gentile nations]” (Acts 1:8). But it is not until God bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit (8:17) on those Samaritans who “had received the word of God” (v. 14) that both Jewish and Samaritan Christians understand that they are united spiritually and are members of the same body of Christ.

Theological Soundings

THE MOTIVATION FOR MISSION. The word Matthew, Mark, and Luke use most often to describe Jesus’ emotional response to physical and spiritual needs is “compassion.” For example, in both of Jesus’ miraculous feedings, before he feeds the crowd he has “compassion” on them (Matt. 14:14; 15:32). Jesus’ compassion compels him to send the disciples on their mission. Jesus’ compassionate heart still drives the church’s mission today.

THE SCOPE OF THE CHURCH’S MISSION. From Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21, God reveals himself as a missionary God. Through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) God promises to bless all the nations of the earth, and that promise finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is the promised descendant of Abraham—the true and final offspring (Gal. 3:16)—who receives the inheritance and shares it with all who are united to him by faith, regardless of their ethnicity (Gal. 3:6-29). Through Christ’s redeemed people, God will take the gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Luke 10:25-37 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin,

and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the *Personal Implications* for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) the passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

Handwritten notes for Gospel Glimpses.

2. Whole-Bible Connections

Handwritten notes for Whole-Bible Connections.

3. Theological Soundings

Handwritten notes for Theological Soundings.

4. Luke 10:25-37

Handwritten notes for Luke 10:25-37.

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Jesus' parables. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

Definitions

- ¹ **Synoptic Gospels** – The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are labeled “synoptic” (from roots meaning “to see together”) because they include a number of the same narratives and teachings of Jesus.
- ² **Law of Moses** – The first five books of the Bible, also called the Pentateuch or the Torah.
- ³ **Priest** – In Old Testament Israel the priest represented the people before God and represented God before the people. Although the whole tribe of Levites was given duties overseeing worship, only those descended from Aaron could be priests. Prescribed duties of priests also included inspecting and receiving sacrifices from the people and overseeing the daily activities and maintenance of the temple.
- ⁴ **Samaritan** – A person from Samaria, which was populated with people who were part Jew and part Gentile.