

Parable of the Good Samaritan

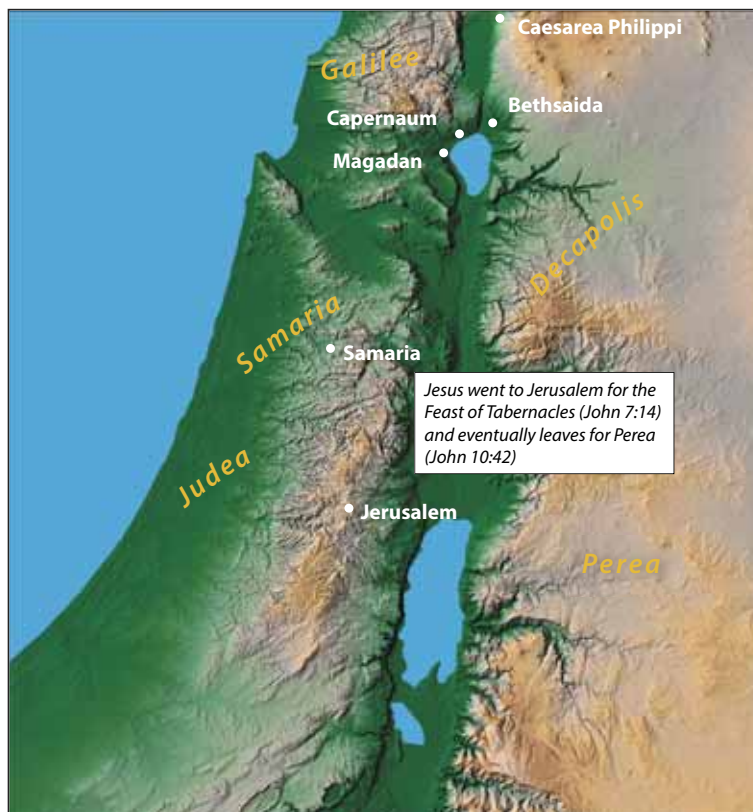
Love is a strange word. It is a four letter word, but this four letter word conveys positive thoughts and creates great emotion between people. It has a wide range of meanings. It means one thing between parents and children and another between a husband and a wife. It means something different between friends or between a person and their caregiver. Some think that all we need in life is love. Mae West once said, "Love conquers all things, except poverty and a toothache." She wasn't very accurate since there are other things that love cannot fix. David Frost said, "Love is staying awake all night with a child or with a healthy adult." Eric Hoffer commented, "It's easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one's neighbor." He was right with that comment and that is what our study is about - love of a neighbor. Our study is not a definition of love. It is an illustration of love from Luke 10:25-37. The study is about the Good Samaritan. You will discover soon that Jesus never calls this man good, but He does call him a Good Samaritan. We have called the man the Good Samaritan, implying that he was an unusual Samaritan.

JESUS IS CONFRONTED BY A LAWYER. This event took place sometime after Jesus had a conversation with the seventy disciples after they returned from their missionary trip.

We do not know how much time has elapsed when a lawyer stood up and challenged Jesus by asking Him a question. But that is not important anyway, is it? How the lawyer and how you respond to Jesus is what's important. Right?

The opening verse of our study is Luke 10:25.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Luke 10:25 (NASB)



Then the judge announced, "Now that the lawyers have identified themselves, we will begin." I wonder if that event actually occurred.

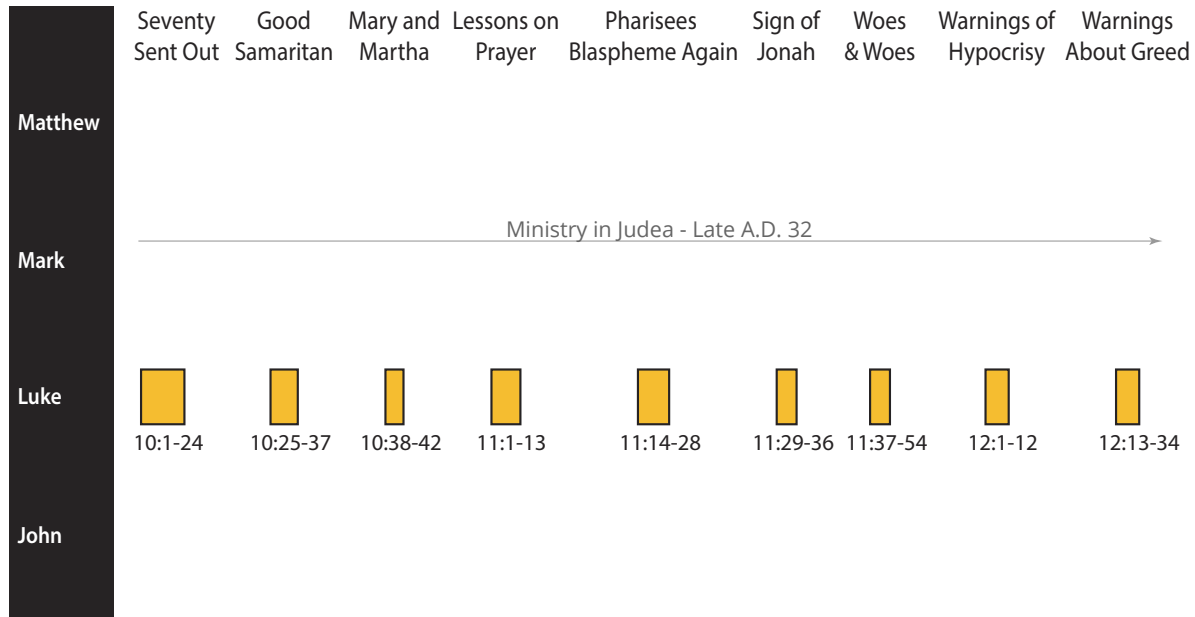
Anyway, the lawyer that spoke to Jesus was not a Perry Mason or a Benjamin Matlock. He was an expert in law. In Jesus time, a lawyer was a scribe who was supposedly an expert in understanding the scriptures. He understood the technical details of the law. They had studied the scriptures and probably memorized most of it. If someone had a disagreement about the meaning of a part of scripture, a Jewish lawyer was supposedly the man who had the correct answer.

There is a story told about two lawyers who came to court one day to deal with a difficult case. On the opening day of the court trial one lawyer jumped up and called the other lawyer a liar. In reaction, the other lawyer called the first

When we are told that He put Jesus "to the test." The Greek word for test is *ekpeirazos*. The basic meaning of the word is "to give someone a test" but it can also mean "to trap." The same word is used of the Devil testing Jesus in Matthew

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4:7. The tense of the Greek word is a perfect participle and this reveals that the lawyer actively engaged in the discussion. Since the lawyer was repeatedly testing or challenging Christ, one wonders if the lawyer had planned to ask a series of questions about eternal life. Maybe Jesus helped the lawyer to finally understand some errors in his theology? Maybe Luke ignored most of the discussion and records only the most important point - the conclusion of the discussion.

WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE LAW. The concluding question comes from Christ. Did Jesus surprise him with this question?

He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” Luke 10:26 (NASB)

Jesus did not answer his question about what he had to do to gain eternal life, but instead Jesus asked him a question, “What is written in the Law?” We can be confident that the lawyer thought he had the ultimate answer to Jesus’ first question. He was supposed to be an expert in the law. Jesus’ second question calls for the lawyer’s interpretation of what

he found in the scriptures, “How do you read it?” Since the lawyer was eager to test Jesus, we can be confident that not only did he think he had the answer but he would have been eager to give his answer. Most likely he was not humbly looking for answers.

The lawyer’s reply reveals that he answered well.

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.” Luke 10:27 (NASB)

The lawyer’s reply is not what most Christians believe is the correct answer, however. First, he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and then Leviticus 19:18. These two passages of scripture were written on pieces of parchment and placed into the phylacteries that the Israelites wore and still wear on their heads. He believed that love was the key that unlocked the door called eternal life. Later in Jesus’ ministry another lawyer, a Pharisee or a Sadducee, will ask Jesus what is the greatest commandment? Here is the account of the discussion.

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:34-40 (NASB)

In this future discussion, Jesus will reveal that all of the commandments hang on those two commandments. A close examination of the ten commandments reveals that everyone of the commandments hang on the principle of loving God or people. The first four commandments teach us to love God first: have no others gods, not make an idol for worship, not swear by God's name and they were to worship God on the Sabbath. The remaining six commandments teach us to love others: honor father and mother, not murder, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear false witness and not covet your neighbor's possession. One who loves God will keep the first group of commandments and those who love others will keep the second group of commandments. The Ten Commandments will be kept by those who love God and others.

In the book of James we are warned to love everyone and not be selective, loving certain people and not others.

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. James 2:8-10 (NASB)

The lawyer was correct, but was he selective in who he loved? We will soon discover.

Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus revealed that the Pharisees taught that it was okay to love your neighbor and hate your enemy (Matthew 5:43). Since that was the teaching of the rabbis, we can wonder if the lawyer prac-

ticed that type of selective love? Did he love those whom he liked and hated those he regarded as his enemy? The answer appears to be, "Yes!" because of what happens next.

HOW TO GET INTO HEAVEN. The lawyer had correctly understood the true message of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. He believed that if one loved God with his entire being and loved others as himself, then he would gain eternal life. What Jesus did not say to the lawyer is that no one can love perfectly. We can never love perfectly so that we can obtain eternal life. Jesus had already said that only God the Father is perfect. The message is that if someone could be perfect, then they could gain eternal life; but no one will ever be able to gain eternal life that way. We can never be perfect.

Since the lawyer's answer was correct, Jesus told him he was accurate.

And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." Luke 10:28 (NASB)

Now watch the lawyer's reaction.

But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Luke 10:29 (NASB)

The lawyer knew he was not perfect and Jesus' reply made him feel uncomfortable. Maybe he panicked inside. He is like many today. Christians can give the correct Bible answers but often do not want to apply it to themselves. They want an exception for themselves.

There are two important facts that we must notice at this point.

Pharisees: Only the Righteous Were Neighbors. The first fact is that the Pharisees and scribes believed that only the righteous were their neighbors. The name Pharisee meant "holy or sanctify" and consequently, they separated themselves from those that they considered to be evil, wicked or sinners. They even considered some of the Israelites to not be neighbors if they were tax-collectors or prostitutes. Since the Gentiles could not be righteous unless they became Jews, they were not neighbors either. Worst of all were the Samaritans. The prophets in the

Old Testament had prophesied future judgment on Samaritans. The Pharisees and scribes hated the Samaritans. Therefore, the Samaritans could not be their neighbors since they were considered wicked.¹

Jesus: Only God Was Good and Perfect. The second important truth is that there is only one who is good in the universe and that is God. In Matthew 19:17 Jesus said, “There is only One who is good.” He was not referring to the lawyer. Men and women are not any different today than they were in Jesus’ day. Just like them we think that our “good” deed will please a holy God. We think that some how we can impress God or at least squeak through the gates of heaven. But the truth is there is always some imperfection in our good deeds. There is always some flaw in our good deeds (Romans 3:12). Earlier in Matthew 5:48 Jesus said that in order to get into heaven, we have to be perfect. Are you perfect?

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48 (NASB)

Therefore, when the lawyer asked the question, “Who is my neighbor” he wanted to justify himself. Was his heart racing due to panic? The Greek word that is translated as “justify” is *dikaioo*. The word has the sense of wanting to demonstrate he was morally right. He knew he did not qualify for heaven if he had to love everyone perfectly. He had not been loving all of his neighbors. He was selective and he knew it. Maybe he had heard Jesus say this,

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Matthew 5:46 (NASB)



The road from Jerusalem to Jericho (After a Photograph)

He was not perfect. He knew he was not keeping the Ten Commandments perfectly. According to the Ten Commandments, he was not a righteous religious leader. He had been following the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes who justified hate. This helps us understand why Jesus taught the parable of the good Samaritan.

PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a challenging parable. It is about four men. One man is a Jew who was stripped naked, beaten by robbers and left to die. Then there are three other men who see the man as they are walking from Jerusalem down the road to Jericho. The first man is a priest and the second is a Levite. Neither one of them want to help the half-dead man and so they don't. What is worse is that they get as far away as they can from him while walking on the road.

But the third man, a Samaritan, stops to help him. Here is the parable.

Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him

half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him . . .” Luke 10:30-33 (NASB)

Jesus says that the man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. There are two things to notice with His opening statement. First, Jesus said “going down” because Jerusalem is at a higher elevation than the city of Jericho. Jerusalem is at an elevation of about 3,000 feet (914.4 meters) and Jericho was at about 1,000 feet (304.8 meters). Second, since the man left the city of Jerusalem, most likely the man was a Jew

1. Alfred Edersheim. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 1973. Book 2. pp.236-237.

on a trip to Jericho. The road between these two cities was a rough one and a favorite place for criminals and thieves to abuse travelers. In Joshua 18:17 this road was called Adummim or “The Pass of Blood.” The path was rugged, rocky and dangerous. This gives us a sense of the danger that the man encountered. Some priests and Levites lived in Jericho and so they would regularly travel between the two cities. Jesus adapted His parable to something that would have been familiar to the lawyer. One wonders if the event really happened.

the people in the days of Noah and at the time Sodom was destroyed. Men and women are still evil and getting worse.

Finally, we are told that the man was left alone and left almost dead. That reveals they also beat him severely. They robbed him, stripped him naked to get his clothes and then beat him almost to death. The robbers were not happy with just his clothes. The greed and hatred of people is unbelievable.

Then Jesus said that sometime later a priest approached the man. It is obvious that the priest saw the man since the



PRIEST AND LEVITES ARE INDIFFERENT. Next we are told that the Jewish man is robbed and stripped. The Greek word for “stripped” is *ekdyo*. It means “to take clothes off.” That is he was robbed and the robbers took all of his clothes. They wanted everything that the man had, including his clothes. Why? Did the robbers want to wear them or to sell them? What incredible greed! People were sinners in Jesus’ day and they still are today. Later in Luke 17:26-30 Jesus will tell us that when He returns, the world will be like

priest moved to the opposite side of the road. The priest could see that the man was in trouble, but he did not care. Maybe he had to get home for a very important meeting? Maybe his wife was waiting for him and they had a special evening planned? Maybe, he just hated the man too much!

Then Jesus tells us that a Levite did the same thing. A Levite was not a descendant of the high priest Aaron but of Levi (Exodus 4:14; Numbers 3:6, 9). The Levites had the responsibility of maintaining the tabernacle in the wilderness and later the temple in Jerusalem (Exodus 38:21; Num-

bers 3:3-8; 16:9).

Why did both religious leaders avoid the man? Did both of them have dinner dates with their wives? One would have thought that of all the people in Israel, they would have helped the man. Their behavior reveals what happens when no one is watching. Have you ever wondered what pastors do in private when no one is watching? Have you ever wondered what the people who criticize pastors do when no one is watching them?

Pastors and other clergy are a favorite group that people criticize. Have you stopped and wondered why Jesus used religious leaders in His parable? It appears that Jesus selected the priest and Levite because of all the people in Israel they were considered to be godly men. That is, one would not expect such horrible behavior from someone like those two men. But one would expect that those who criticize pastors would ignore the half-dead Samaritan! Right? Therefore, which one are you like? Are you like the one who does not help the half-dead Jew or the one who does help the half-dead Jew?

SAMARITAN HAS COMPASSION AND HELPS. But the most shocking part about the parable is not the behavior of the priest and the Levite. What is unbelievable is that the man who helped the half-dead Jew was not the Jewish priest or the Jewish Levite but a Samaritan. A man that they hated!

... and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. Luke 10:33-34 (NASB)

A Samaritan was someone the Jews hated (John 4:9). Supposedly it was okay to hate them, because they were considered to be half-Jews and did not worship at the temple in Jerusalem but at a temple in Mount Gerissim. The woman at the well in John 4:20 hints at this fact.

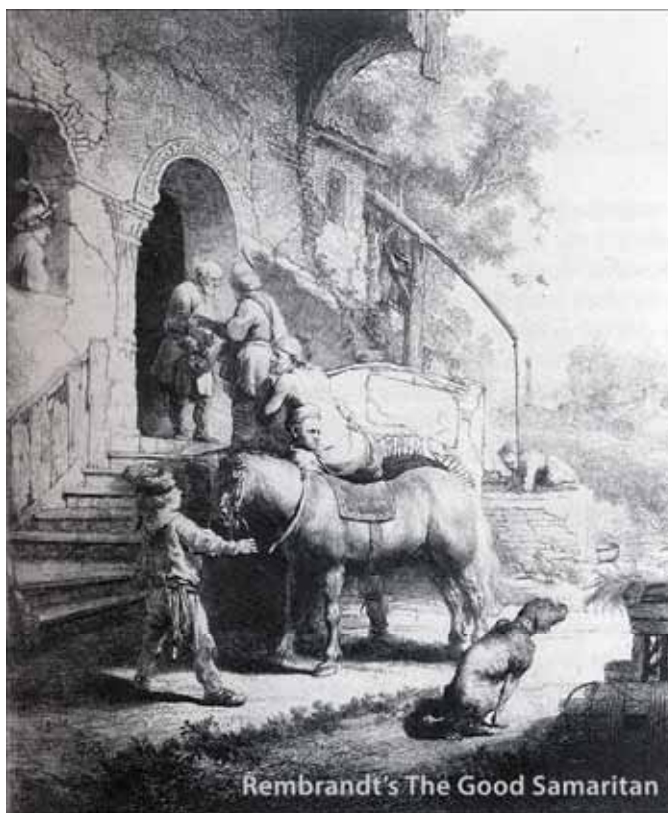
Notice that the Samaritan felt compassion for the half-dead Jew and then touched him. The Samaritan was willing to be personally involved as opposed to being distant. He touched him! Then he became even more personally involved. He used some of his own possessions: clothes for bandages, oil and wine. The Samaritan spent time, touched him, gave up his own possessions to help and then put the half-dead Jew on his own animal. Most likely, he walked on foot to the inn. At the inn he took even more time to care for the seriously injured Jew. The Samaritan proved that he cared about the man.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee writes this,

Then we are told that a certain priest passed by on the other side. He represents ritualism and ceremonialism which cannot save a person. Someone has said that the reason the priest passed by on the other side was because

he saw that the man had already been robbed! Next a Levite came by, and he too passed by on the other side. He represents legalism. Neither ritualism, ceremonialism, nor legalism can save. Then a "certain" Samaritan passed by. Whom did the "certain Samaritan" represent? He is the One who told the parable. When ritualism, ceremonialism, legalism, and religion could not do anything to help man, Christ came. He is able to bind up the broken-hearted. He is able to take the lost sinner, half-dead, lost in trespasses and sins, and help him.²

2. J. Vernon McGee. Matthew through Romans. Thru the Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1983. p. 293.



Rembrandt's The Good Samaritan

The Samaritan did more than do a good deed or feel compassion for the seriously injured Jew. He did both. He felt compassion and did a good deed. How many Christians do only one or neither one? Some feel compassion and give money. That is good. Some Christians do not feel compassion, but out of a sense of duty will go and help. The Samaritan not only did a good deed, he also loved the man.

On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you." Luke 10:35 (NASB)

Next, the Samaritan spent his own money and asked the inn keeper to take care of the wounded traveler, whatever the cost. He gave the innkeeper as we say a "blank check."

THE GOOD NEIGHBOR. Now Jesus asks the critical question and gives the reason why He told the parable. He asks, who was the neighbor to the half-dead Jew?

Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands? Luke 10:36 (NASB)

The answer is obvious, but Jesus' question makes us think about ourselves. How often do we read the Bible or hear a pastor preach from the Bible and then we ignore the message? God told the prophet Ezekiel that people were listening to him and ignoring what he had to say (Ezekiel 33:31-32). His words were just like a "sensual song" - an emotional song, but they did not practice what they heard. How did the lawyer respond to Jesus' parable?

Think for a second. Jesus spent time telling the parable. The parable was an emotional one. It touches our hearts. It is a "sensual" parable. Jesus wanted the lawyer to understand who his neighbor was so that he would know who he was supposed to love as himself. Here is the lawyer's reply.

He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." Luke 10:37 (NASB)

The man answered correctly. The neighbor was one who showed mercy. The root Greek word that is translated as mercy is *eleos*. It means "to show compassion on someone

who cannot help himself." The half-dead man could not help himself. The half-dead man may not have even been able to say, Thanks!"

CONCLUSION. Now Jesus' was not trying to teach the lawyer how to go to heaven. He was trying to help the man see that he was not good enough to get into heaven by doing any good deed. Love does not get one into heaven. Love is not the key ingredient because we cannot love perfectly. There is always some flaw in our love. The lawyer did not love all of his fellow Jews. He would never be good enough to go to heaven by his own good works.

But in the process of teaching the lawyer, Jesus has revealed to us that everyone is our neighbor, especially those in need. Did you know that God wants Christians to do good to everyone, especially to other Christians (Galatians 6:10). If you agree, that is wonderful. Then the only question is are you a priest, Levite or a Good Samaritan?