

The Parables of Jesus

- The Good Samaritan

(Luke 10:30-37)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is only found in the Gospel of Luke. The context and true purpose for the giving of this parable can be found in the verses prior to Jesus giving this parable. In Luke 10:25 a man described as a "lawyer" came to Jesus and asked the question, "...Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

At first glance it would seem as if the lawyer is asking a reasonable question. However, we see that the scripture tells us that, yes, he was asking what seemed outwardly to be a valid question, but the reason for his asking was to "tempt" or "test" Jesus. In other words his motive most likely was not a correct one. He was most likely trying to get Jesus to say something that they could use against Him and accuse Him of wrong doctrine and teaching.

The term, "lawyer" in those days was a "profession" within the Jewish community. However, it meant something much different than our modern day concept of what a "lawyer" is. In Biblical times, a "lawyer," and in this case a Jewish lawyer was considered to be an expert on Jewish Law. This was a person who was not necessarily a scribe (one entrusted to copy and write Torah and also considered an expert on Jewish Law) but he was one who we can say in today's understanding, held a Doctorate (Ph.D.) in Jewish Theology.

As a "lawyer of the Law" he would be considered as an expert in debating the Law. He was thought to be most knowledgeable of all the aspects and application of the Torah, the "Oral Law" and the "traditions" of the rabbis. He would be used as an expert in matters that were brought before the Jewish civil judicial system such as legal matters that would come up between Jewish people. Because of their expertise in Jewish law, they would be used as "expert witnesses" and counselors in deciding Jewish judicial and civil matters.

Now that we have a better grasp on this lawyer's background and his supposed "expertise" in all Jewish law, we can get a better understanding of what he may have been trying to do as he questions Jesus. So why would the lawyer ask this question to "tempt" or "test" Jesus? What would be His motive? Why would this be a "trick" question?

In Jewish thinking, "eternal life" did not only mean "life after death." In Jewish thought "eternal life" also meant a particular quality of life in this lifetime. It refers to a person's "quality of life" that is either "blessed by God" or "cursed by God" and experienced in this present life here on earth based the person's actions and lifestyle. To the Jewish person, "eternal life" had as much to do with this present life as much as it had to do with the afterlife. They were not totally incorrect. As we know Jesus taught that a disciple of His is to live a life of moral excellence as taught through the Ten Commandments, Torah and the Jewish scriptures which would open the door to a life full of God's abundance.

However, Jesus and the New Testament writers also taught that a person could never truly live this type of lifestyle in their own strength. This can only be accomplished through the atoning blood of the spotless Lamb of God and through the indwelling and regenerative power of the Holy Spirit in the person's life.

The Jewish leadership believed and taught that it was the Jewish people's rightful inheritance to have and experience abundance in life as well as eternal life after death in the resurrection because they were "children of Abraham." They did not believe they needed a "Savior" to "save" them from their sins. This was accomplished through their father Abraham and his covenant with God. They believed that a person's social status in life reflected what that person's spiritual level and relationship with God was. If you were rich and wealthy then you were thought to be in a great relationship and in right standing with God. If you were poor it would mean the opposite. Ultimately, they believed, what you did here on earth would affect the individual's "afterlife" in the resurrection.

Having said all that, most important thing we must remember is the definition of “eternal life” that Jesus had given us. According to Jesus “eternal life” is **knowing** and being in **oneness** with the Father and with His Son, Jesus. This is found in John 17:3,22- 23, - *"And this is **life eternal**, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent... that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."*

Luke 10:26 tells us Jesus' response to the lawyer's question. He responds with His own question to the lawyer. Responding to a question with another question was a common way of debating, discussing and learning truth in those days. Jesus asks the question, *"What is written in the law? how readest thou?"* The point being was that if the lawyer was truly an expert of the Law, then he should be able to answer the question, himself.

Knowing the Law and not wanting to miss the opportunity to show off his expertise of the Law to Jesus and to all those listening, the lawyer proceeded to tell Jesus, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."* - Luke 10:27

Jesus tells the lawyer that he answered correctly. He also told him, *"This do, and thou shalt live."* The lawyer spoke the Word according to the scriptures. Jesus could not and would not disagree with God's Word no matter who spoke it. The key here was that, it is one thing to know the Word and quite another to now go and do the Word."

The scripture tells us that the lawyer sought to "justify himself" so he asked another question. What this was referring to was that, as a lawyer sent to possibly trick Jesus, he was not doing a good job. As a lawyer of the Law, he was to be an expert in "debating" the Law and trapping others in their faults by using the scriptures. He was trying to get back on course with his task of putting the pressure on Jesus.

The Lawyer decided to ask another question in the same attempt to possibly get Jesus to say something that they could use against Him. He then asks Jesus, *"Who is my neighbor?"* Again, this seems like an innocent question. However, it was a “loaded” question asked to again “test” and trap Jesus. Again, to truly understand why this was a “loaded” question, we must remember the times they were in and we must understand Jewish thinking of that time (and even in many instances still in effect today).

For the Jewish person, the term "neighbor" was not an all-inclusive term. In the Jewish mind it meant anyone who was Jewish. The thinking of a Jewish person would be that they would be keeping the Law if they "loved their Jewish neighbor." It excluded **everyone else** who was **not Jewish**. When the lawyer, being an expert in Jewish Law (so he thought), asked the question, it was actually a "trick" question which if not answered correctly could have an impact on Jesus' whole ministry to the Jew and the Gentile. Hence, in response to the question, *"Who is my neighbor,"* Jesus answers with the "Parable of the Good Samaritan."

The "Parable of the Good Samaritan" - Luke 10:30-36 - *"And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?"*

To better understand this parable it is vital for us to get acquainted with the "characters" in this parable

1. The "man" that "fell among the thieves" - We are not certain who this "man" is or where he is from. I believe Jesus left that information out purposely. If something is not specifically mentioned within the text, than we should not deposit our own suppositions in the scriptures to make it "fit" our own ways of thinking. Instead we need to ask ourselves why it was not given. The bottom line was, in this parable, it did not matter who he was. He was a person who would come to be in need of help.
2. A "priest" and the "Levite" - Both of these men, based on Jesus' specific mention of who they were, not by name but by position in Jewish society, would have been considered and looked upon as religious and devout Jewish men. They were both from the priestly line of the tribe of Levi.
 - The "priest" would refer to someone who would have been from the "line of Aaron" in the role of the priesthood. This meant that he had a prestigious role of officiating over the sacrifices and rituals of the Temple.
 - The "Levite" also would have had a role in Temple being from the tribe of Levi. The Levite's role would be that of service in the many other aspects and needs of the Temple. They would be considered more like the servants to the priesthood.
 - However, being a priest and a Levite, they would both be considered men who would have known the Law and would have known God's command to "love thy neighbor as thyself." They would have been expected to obey and do the commandments of God.
3. The "Samaritan" - A brief history on the Samaritans is needful here. This is vital to the whole parable.
 - These were people that originally came from the ten tribes of Israel (Northern Kingdom) that were taken captive to Assyria when the Assyrian Empire was a dominant force in the area in the time of the divided Kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians could not conquer the Southern Kingdom of Judah. However, they were able to conquer and take away captive the Jews from the Northern Kingdom back to Assyria whose capital was Nineveh. These Jews who were in captivity to the Assyrian Empire became very much assimilated into the Assyrian culture and religious rites. They mingled and intermarried with the Assyrians. They took on their ways of worship and mingled it with the worship of Yahweh.
 - The Babylonian Empire than rose up, defeated the Assyrian Empire and went on to conquer the Southern Kingdom of Judah. They took those Jews from Jerusalem, Judah and Benjamin back to Babylon. However, those Jews never truly assimilated into the Babylonian culture. We read about Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc. When the Medo-Persian Empire rose up they defeated and conquered the Babylonian Empire. We know that the decree went forth that the Jews were able to go back to their homeland. The Jews that were taken away captive by the Babylonians but never assimilated into the Babylonian culture, returned to Jerusalem and to what we became known as the region of Judea.
 - The Jews that were taken captive originally by the Assyrians and were in Nineveh returned, not to Jerusalem, but to what was to become known as Samaria, a region just north of Jerusalem, whose "capital" or primary city was Sychar also known as Shechem. Their "worship" became one mixed with the pagan worship they learned in Assyria. They believed in Yahweh God and the Pentateuch. However, their worship of God was tainted with rituals and practices that were used in the worship of pagan, Assyrian gods.
 - These "Samaritans" were considered "half-breeds" and traitors to Judaism. They were considered to be lower than a Gentile. Even to this day the "Jews" who have the Samaritan blood in them are not considered true Jews. There are still some that continue to worship in the hills of Samaria in the "Samaritan" way.

- By the way, the feeling was mutual. The Samaritans did not care too much for the Jews either. That is why Jesus used a "Samaritan man" in this parable. This man being from Samaria was "key" to the whole parable. It was the hated Samaritan, not the Priest or Levite, who put aside all his prejudices to do the right thing according to the commands of God.

Returning to our parable, Jesus tells us of "a man" who was traveling on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. This was and still is an actual road that is known as the "Jericho Road." It is a very treacherous road that goes through various hills and valleys. This road goes through some areas where "the sun never shines." This section of the road was commonly referred to as "the valley of the shadow of death." It has many places where thieves would hide and wait for someone to come by.

The people listening to this parable of Jesus knew the place and the road that He was referring to very well. They also were well aware of the dangers of traveling that road. Yet, it was the only road between Jericho and Jerusalem.

Let's review the parable once more. The man traveling on this road is robbed, beat up and left on the side of the road. First a "priest" came by and then a "Levite," both of who would be considered "spiritual and devout Jews," who knew the Law of "*Loving thy neighbor as thyself.*" They walked by the man, completely ignoring him and doing nothing. They refused to "get involved" which was a contradiction to both their spiritual duty, as well as their duty as humane people. The "dreaded" and "hated" Samaritan man comes by and takes care of the man in need. He goes above and beyond by bringing the hurt man to a place of refuge and then pays for all of his needs.

Jesus then asks the lawyer a question, "*Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?*" The lawyer is forced to admit, "*He that shewed mercy on him.*" (Luke 10:37) Jesus then says, "*Go, and do thou likewise.*" (Luke 10:37)

There was nothing anyone could say to Jesus. The lawyer did answer correctly. He had to admit that it was the one who "showed mercy" to the traveler. It does not matter who or what a person is or where they are from. As a people, especially those who consider themselves spiritual and devout followers of God and His ways, we are called to have and show mercy towards anyone and everyone. The definition of mercy is basically, "seeing a need and doing something to meet that need." James 1:22 tells us - "*Be ye a doer of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*"

As a disciple of Jesus, we are to look upon every person as our "neighbor." That was the simple, basic truth of the commandment of God concerning loving others. This was, is and always will be the heart of the Father. He showed mercy to everyone. God so loved the "world" – Jew, Gentile, Samaritan and everyone else – that He sent Jesus to shed His love upon and die for them. (John 3:16) God's love is "no respecter of persons." (Acts 10:34)

The "lesson" I believe that Jesus was teaching the lawyer and all those who were listening, as well as His disciples today, was that it is not enough to just know the Word of God. Knowing the Law made the lawyer feel that he was in the righteous. His social status made him arrogant in thinking that he blessed by God, therefore, again thinking he was in good standing with God.

Unfortunately, he was missing the "next step"- actually doing the Word. He was missing the point of God's Word and commandment. He had made God's Word fit into His "comfort level" and that was it. The point being that doing the commands of God in the way that they were originally intended meant that he could not be a respecter of person concerning who or how he would love his neighbor - his neighbor being every person - not just those he chose to love. This speaks to us, today.

The use of a "Samaritan" in this parable drove that point home. It was a hated Samaritan who chose to help this "man" who was in need of help no matter who he was or where he came from. It was the hated Samaritan who fulfilled the Law, when the two "spiritual and devout" Jews, who should have known better, did not.

As we discussed, Jesus brings this aspect of "loving thy neighbor as thyself" to an even higher level of loving others. We, as His disciples, are to love everyone **as He loved**, even our enemies. Jesus, throughout His life role modeled that love for us and to us. Below are a few scriptures for us to meditate on concerning this.

- John 13:34 *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."*
- John 15:12 - *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."*
- Matthew 5:44 - *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*
- Luke 6:27 - *But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,*
- Luke 6:35-36 - *But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*

Remember, the initial question of the lawyer was concerning "eternal life." Therefore, Jesus, as our role model, exemplified what that should look like in the life of a disciple of His. He gave us "eternal life" by loving us which meant He needed to give His life for us. We are to do the same. We are to "give and lay down our lives" to Him by "giving and laying down" our lives to others. We are to look upon all people as "our neighbor." Jesus extends this even further by commanding that we are to love those that we may look upon as being our enemies. Yes, even our enemies, Jesus declares, are our "neighbors." Hmmm.... This is tough stuff!!!

As we have seen from our discussion, the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" has many valuable lessons. Let us not forget that one of these valuable teachings found within this parable is that concerning what a true disciple of Jesus really encompasses. It reveals to us what the true character of an individual who truly "knows" and is in "oneness with the Father and with Jesus should be expressing from out of their lifestyle. It is a lifestyle of actually doing and putting into practice the commandment of loving your neighbor. After all, according to Jesus this is what reveals if an individual truly has "eternal life."