

# Parable of the Good Samaritan

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Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we glorify you, we praise you for all that you give to us in Jesus. And we offer you these gifts.

We pray, Father, that you accept them as a token of the giving of ourselves back to you. And Father, we pray by your Holy Spirit that you will help us to love you with all our heart and mind and soul.

And we ask, Father, that you will bless Dr. Packer as he preaches. By your Holy Spirit, speak through him and open our hearts and our minds to you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, it is a beautiful and poignant story, isn't it?

This story of the Good Samaritan. I expect it's very familiar to all of us. I suppose that it's one of the two parables out of St. Luke's Gospel that everybody remembers, the other one being the prodigal son.

[ 1 : 19 ] If you want to follow the sermon, which is on the passage, it's on page 68 of our Pew Bibles.

Familiarity, though, can be a problem. And I think we have difficulty in getting the message of this parable just because we know it so well.

If you put yourself in imagination in the place of the Jew lying half dead in the gutter, or if you put yourself imaginatively in the shoes of the Samaritan who came to his help, well, the story will begin to tug at your heart again.

But, as I said, when things are familiar, so often the shine wears off them, and we think about them casually, when really they are meant to shock us.

And this story, actually, was meant to impart a shock, as you'll see in just a moment. It's a story of compassion unlimited.

[ 2 : 44 ] The priest and the Levite representing official religion, they averted their eyes and wouldn't bother with the guy lying in the gutter.

But the Samaritan was kind to him. It's a story of self-protection abandoned. Clearly, the priest and the Levite didn't want to be involved in this situation.

And we know that feeling, so many today react in just the same way when something out of the ordinary and possibly demanding has come close.

I think of that case that was reported so widely on the media a little while ago, where a woman was abducted, murdered, actually, as she was on her way to work early in the morning.

Neighbors heard her screaming. Nobody came out of the house. Nobody informed the police. They didn't want to be involved. But the Samaritan was prepared to put himself out to help this man in trouble.

[ 3 : 57 ] And it's a story of racism overcome. Do appreciate that. Jews and Samaritans thought of each other as pariahs, people with whom we don't have anything to do.

The Jews despised the Samaritans. The Samaritans despised the Jews. There were historical reasons for that, which we need not go into.

Just remember, it was a racist situation. And the Samaritan, seeing a man in trouble, disregarded all of that and took appropriate action.

Alas, this story is regularly mishandled by us preachers. Some of us make of it, almost at the drop of a hat, an allegory of the gospel.

Augustine was the man who began that and it went on through the Middle Ages and it goes on today. The man in the gutter who's been robbed is the sinner.

[ 5 : 13 ] That's you or me. The Samaritan who comes along is the Lord Jesus who brings the relief that we need.

The inn to which the Samaritan took the half-dead Jew is the church. And in the Middle Ages, they were very strong on the thought that the two pence, which the Samaritan gave the innkeeper, were the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

And the innkeeper himself, of course, you've guessed it, was the Pope. But Jesus didn't tell the story to be an allegory of the gospel, although there's great preaching mileage in aspects of that way of taking it.

And then others of us, us preachers I mean, we use the parable as a call to social action.

Come on, let's do something for the relief of poverty, something to help the disadvantaged and the needy, and so on and so forth.

[ 6 : 35 ] Again, this is a good lesson and a good point to make, but it's not the point of the parable. Some of you heard me say from this pulpit, I say it, I know, often enough, it's a little rhyme that Rudyard Kipling left us.

I have six honest serving men, they taught me all I knew. Their names are what and where and when and why and how and who.

The questions you see that you ask in order to understand. And we're going to ask three of those questions now. We're going to ask who, we're going to ask what, and we're going to ask why.

Question number one, who? Who was it who drew this parable out of our Lord Jesus? Well, we're told in verse 25, he was a lawyer who stood up, stood up in a crowd that Jesus was teaching to ask a question, to put Jesus to the test, says the text.

He was trying Jesus out, trying it on, as we would say. People do that nowadays, of course, still in public meetings. Here is the lawyer doing it.

[ 7 : 59 ] The lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? I'm a lawyer.

Well, what must I do? Jesus, being wise, as always, responds, as you would respond, to an expert in the law, he asks him to quote the law.

What's written in the law? How do you read it? And the expert in the Jewish law says, well, you shall love the Lord your God with all that you've got, and your neighbor as yourself.

And Jesus says to him, you've answered right. Do this, and you will live. Yes, if anyone ever kept the law of God, the law of love, love to God and love to everyone else, perfectly and sincerely from the heart, we would indeed live.

We would indeed have worked our way to life. love. So, Jesus' answer is, shall I say, impeccable from the lawyer's standpoint, and it makes the lawyer look a little bit foolish because the question Jesus asked him, which he answered, is a question to which you may suppose, we may suppose, anyone and everyone in the crowd would have known the answer.

[ 9 : 54 ] What did he need to ask that question for? And so, the lawyer felt the need, we're told, to justify himself. That is to show that this is really a difficult question on which he wants wisdom, or claims to want wisdom, from Jesus, the teacher.

He doesn't want to lose face with the crowd, so he frowns, I suppose, and asks his further question. And, who is my neighbor, he asked.

And it was in answer to that question that Jesus told this parable, and then, at the end, put a question to the lawyer, as people do put questions to lawyers, which of the three actors in the story do you think was neighbor to the man who was robbed?

The answer, of course, is obvious, and the lawyer gives it. I suppose, the one who showed mercy on it. Jesus says, go, and do likewise.

Go, and do the same. End of exchange. As always, the Lord Jesus is in charge.

[ 11 : 27 ] Now, we ask another of our three questions. What? What did the lawyer and the others in the crowd hear?

As Jesus unfolded a story, this story, which they'd never heard before, they didn't know what was coming, I will offer you, friends, the guess that the lawyer for sure, and others with him, disliked what they were hearing as it unfolded.

feeling. This is an unpleasant story, surely. It's putting good people, priests, Levites, officers in the church, in a bad light.

Such stories, really, can't be told without lapsing into bad taste. as the story continues, it exposes an uncaring attitude on the part of the priest and the Levite, and for all I know, the lawyer and others listening, quietly cringed, who hasn't at one time or another avoided being involved in a situation of

someone else's need.

I expect they felt a little bit guilty as that bit of the story went by them. And certainly they must have felt it, as I said a moment ago, as a put-down for the class of Israel's religious professionals.

[13:18] As nowadays we feel it's rather bad form to go out of your way to criticize the clergy, although we all do it. Yes, you do. don't pretend you don't.

So it was then. The lawyer, you see, represents that class of religious professionals to which the priest and the Levite belong. And from that standpoint, again, he would have felt that Jesus was getting at him.

and when it comes to the rejection of racism, well, I am sure that he and others in the crowd felt resentment at that point.

A Samaritan behaving well when the priest and Levite hadn't. A Samaritan going out of his way to help a Jew. Such things don't happen and such things shouldn't happen.

That would have been the feeling. But Jesus tells his story to the end and then issues his challenging question to the lawyer.

[14:33] there are three words to notice as Luke tells the story, two of them in the story itself and one of them in the lawyer's answer to Jesus' question.

Verse 33, Jesus makes a point of saying, the Levite, sorry, the Samaritan, when he saw this poor man in the gutter, had compassion.

And you look at verse 34 towards the end and it says, he brought the poor man to an inn and took care of him.

He'd already bound up his wounds, we're told, pouring on oil and wine. The point there, by the way, is that in those days, oil was thought of as a cure for everything and wine was thought of as a disinfectant.

So, really, it's thoughtful care that the Samaritan is exercising here. And then he takes him to the inn, as I said, and takes care of him.

[15:46] He has compassion, he takes care. And then Jesus asks the question of the lawyer, which of these three do you think prove neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?

and the lawyer has to say it, and does say it in verse 37, the one who showed mercy on him. Compassion, care, mercy.

That's what we're talking about here. And Jesus says, well, that's the model. Go and do likewise. my guess is that when the lawyer asked his question, who is my neighbor, he was assuming that the neighbors would all be Jews, nobody else would be a neighbor, and that the answer Jesus would give to the question would distinguish Jews who deserved to be treated as one's neighbor from Jews who didn't.

And how different that expectation was from the answer that Jesus actually gave. Well, that's the frame, that's the context, that's the exchange between Jesus and the lawyer into which the parable fits.

[17:15] And now we ask our third question, why? Jesus says, go and do likewise. Go, it doesn't mean go away, it's go your way, rather, it's perfectly courteous.

But the command and the challenge and the obligation is very, very clear.

And Jesus' words, put the lawyer on the spot, no two ways about that. I suppose by this time the lawyer's conscience and the consciences of the people in the crowd have been stirred with Jesus' vision of what, which he's sharing with them, you see, of what neighbor love really means.

And now the question is, how can any of us justify ourselves in going away and behaving any less lovingly, helpfully, imaginatively, compassionately, mercifully, than the Samaritan in Jesus' tale?

I suggest to you that what you see here is not only Jesus teaching basic Christian morality to a man who needed to understand it, but it's actually Jesus beginning a strategy as so often he does, which, if it succeeds, will turn this lawyer from being a proud pundit who really thinks of himself as in a position to patronize Jesus and try him out and trip him up, into a disciple, a disciple who humbly follows Jesus as his Lord and Master.

[19:28] You say, how can that be? Well, no one becomes a disciple of Jesus until our pride is punctured and we're brought down to earth and made to face the fact that we are sinners just like anybody else.

We may have a position of some social distinction as this lawyer did, but it doesn't alter the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message that he preached and embodied and that he preaches still

through the New Testament to all our hearts, this message brings us all down to the same level. We are persons who've failed by God's standards. sinners. We are sinners. We haven't done what we ought to have done and now that we see just how much is required of us, we realize that we can never manage to do what we ought to have done.

So we have to admit we are sinners. Guilty, weak, helpless, failures on the moral front. And we can only live by being forgiven.

And that's the way in to real discipleship to the real Jesus Christ. I think that Jesus handles this interview in the hope of sending the lawyer along the first steps of the path of self-discovery.

[ 21 : 28 ] Go and do likewise. Go and behave this way. But who can? Whoever does.

We try our best, but our best is not good enough for God. No, I think Jesus was hoping that in due course the lawyer would come back to him chastened and humbled, acknowledging that he hadn't done it, he couldn't do it, and only Jesus could help him out of the place of inability in which he finds himself.

I think Jesus was doing something very similar with a rich young ruler. Do you remember? He too came to Jesus with this cheerful question, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Just like the lawyer did. And Jesus asked him about the commandments and he gaily said, oh, I've kept all these from my youth up. And Jesus, I think, recognized in that man also lack of self-knowledge, lack of realism, conceit, pride which needed to be punctured.

And Jesus told him, remember, go and sell everything that you've got, give it to the poor, and come and follow me in personal poverty.

[ 23 : 10 ] And by doing that, I think he wanted to make the young man realize that he was really the slave of his own wealth.

He loved his wealth more than he loved God. And realizing that, I think Jesus hoped that the young man would be humbled, he'd come to his senses, spiritually speaking, and he would come back acknowledging that at this point he's been a grievous sinner.

And I suggest that the same story applies to you and me who worship regularly in church on Sunday. It's natural to us too, as to the lawyer and as to the rich young ruler, to take for granted that we shall gain eternal life by doing the things that it's conventional for Christians to do, the things I mean that Christians are supposed to do.

And we don't really measure ourselves as to whether we have done them, done them properly, whether we can do them properly.

We haven't yet faced up to our failure, we haven't yet faced up to our inability. We haven't therefore faced up to our guilt and our need to find Christ's forgiveness before anything else.

[ 24 : 52 ] But our Lord is very patient and gentle with us and he uses his word to dig us in the ribs harder and harder until we face these things.

And that's how we become Christians, you and I. some of us could testify to that. Some of us perhaps need still to wake up to it.

Well, this is the frame, I think, into which the parable fits. And just as it's important for us to embrace the ideal of neighbor love which the parable teaches, Jesus.

So it's important to us to face the reality of our own sin and need of the forgiveness and the renovation of nature which our Lord Jesus brings us when we come humbly and in faith to his feet. the Jew in the story was stripped, we are told, by the thugs who beat him up, robbed him.

[ 26 : 10 ] And we, in another sense, have to face the fact that we too are stripped of what we thought was the very acceptable clothing of religious behavior and morality and uprightness.

We kid ourselves that we've done pretty well. But, oh, friends, we have to come to the point where before the Lord Jesus we recognize that we are sinners and Lord have mercy on me.

A sinner has to be the cry of our heart. Well, these are the lessons, I think. the idealism of neighbor love and the realism of the sin which should bring us to Jesus begging forgiveness that we're meant to learn from this story.

God bless it to our hearts and lead us forward along the true path of life. For his name's sake.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.