

Bible Studies

The Good Samaritan



Read Luke 10v25-37

Jesus parables were usually told in response to an incident or a question. The incident gives us the meaning Jesus intended us to grasp. In this case an expert in the Law, that is the Torah (first five books of the Bible) and the oral law, a set of traditions believed to have come from Moses, asked Jesus a question.

What question did he ask Jesus? Is this a reasonable question?
Why do you think he asked it? How would you answer this question?

You do not do anything to inherit eternal life, it is not achieved by works. The lawyer's whole question was flawed. Eternal life is God's gift to us. We receive it by believing in Jesus Christ and making Him our Lord and Saviour. Jesus answered the lawyer's question with another question, He wanted to know what the lawyer thought. This is a good technique to use when people ask us questions about God. **How did he answer?**

This is a quotation for the Law, Deut 6v5 & Lev 19v18. Within Judaism of the day, this was the right answer. It is also consistent with what Jesus Himself taught. Matthew 22v37, Mark 12v30-31. Jesus first agrees with him and then tells a story that turns the man's whole world view on its head.



Read Matthew 19v16-21, Mark 12v28-31

What did this young man need to do to inherit eternal life?

There are similarities in this account but here Jesus adds the need to follow him. The lawyer and Jesus probably had quite different understandings of what it meant to love God. For the lawyer it meant to obey the commands, for Jesus it meant to commit yourself to God wholly and from the heart. This is the basic requirement of salvation. *Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD. Leviticus 19v18*

Why did the lawyer ask who his neighbour was?

It says he wanted to justify himself. This means he wanted to look good, but it also means that he sought to be justified by obeying the Law. Something the New Testament tells us is impossible. Perhaps he also wanted to avoid doing anything he did not need to.

Why did Jesus tell this parable?

He wanted the lawyer to expand his idea about who he should show love to.



The Story

Jerusalem is in the high country and Jericho in the Jordan valley. It was a long, winding, descent of about 20km though hilly, arid terrain. Ideal country for bandits. Wadi Kelt, with an all year stream flows from Jerusalem to Jericho. People could follow the wadi or a road that ran parallel to it some distance away. It is interesting that this is not referred to in the Bible as a parable, it could well have been based on a recent event. It is unlikely such an event featured a Samaritan as its hero.

What state was the man left in by the bandits?

Who were the three men that followed down the road?

Why did Jesus choose these people to pass by?

The first two were a Priest and a Levite. The Levites were responsible for the upkeep of the Tabernacle/Temple. After the time of the Exile the distinction between the two groups diminished greatly. Both were greatly respected people, just the kind of people you would have expected to be the first to help. Jesus is not directly criticising the priests.

It has been speculated that they avoided the man because they thought he was dead or was about to die and would therefore make them ritually unclean and could have stopped them performing their priestly responsibilities, Numbers 19v11. (They were going AWAY from Jerusalem.)

Was this a good reason not to help the man? Why didn't they help him?

What did the law say they should do? Exodus 23v4-5

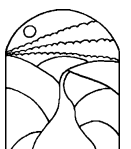
Judaism has always upheld the sanctity of human life, it holds that almost all the laws can and should be broken in order to protect life. Luke 13v15, this concept is called Pikuach Nefesh. Only the high priest would be constrained from helping under these circumstances. Lev 21v11. Equally assuming they thought he was already dead, they were still not off the hook. Providing

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Waiuku AG
Ray Moxham
www.wag.org.nz
WaiukuAG
@wag.org.nz

burial for a stranger was one of Judaism's ultimate good deeds.
The Priest and the Levite passed by because they concluded, this man was not their neighbour.

What did the Samaritan do? What characteristics did he show?

What made his actions stand out? Why did he help?

Would he have been criticised for not helping?

No one would have expected a Samaritan to help. The priest's concern was 'am I obligated to help this man? Is it my duty?' The Samaritan acted out of love. Jesus is calling for a change not only in the lawyers behaviour but in his total outlook. A change for law to grace.

Did the Samaritan do the minimum for the man?

The Samaritan left the man at an inn where he could rehabilitate. He paid generously for his care.

The Jews and Samaritans hated each other. John 4v9. The Samaritans were gentiles that had been settled in the north of Israel by the Assyrians. 2 Kings 17v24. They had taken on many of the beliefs of the Jews in a divergent form. They were if you like renegade Jews. Hatred often gave way to racial violence. The animosity was real. To the Jews "*good Samaritan*" was an oxymoron.

What were the current relations between Jesus & the Samaritans? Luke 9v51-55

Why do you think Jesus picked a Samaritan to be the hero of the story?



What point is He trying to get across?

Is Jesus saying the Samaritans are better than the Jews?

Who would be the equivalent of the Samaritan for you?

The Samaritan was the last person you would ever have expected to help and the person you most despise. Jesus intends this story to be scandalous, even offensive. When the lawyer answers Jesus parting question, he avoids the word Samaritan. If Jesus were telling this story in a Samaritan village He would have made the hero a Jew!

Would the story have had the same edge if it had been a Jew helping a Samaritan?

What was the answer to the lawyers question, who is your neighbour?

If even a Samaritan is your neighbour, then everyone is.

What does this story say about racism among believers?

Can a Christian maintain racist views?

In a way Jesus is speaking against racial stereotypes. This was not the actions people expected from a Samaritan. Jesus found something good where others could find only evil.

What happens when you look for good in people?



The Allegory

Some people have found an allegory in this story. Jesus is the Good Samaritan, we are the beaten wretch. The Priest represents keeping the law something that could not help us. Meanings are found in the oil and wine, the inn is the church. Some have even found a meaning for the donkey!

What barrier did Jesus cross to help us?

Can you think of a problem with interpreting the story this way?

You could say the story has a secondary meaning. It illustrates how we receive eternal life. At His own cost, Jesus became our neighbour. He acted like the good Samaritan, when we were helpless He came to our aid. It is a beautiful picture and has blessed many. But this is not the reason Jesus told the story. By emphasising an allegorical interpretation, we find ourselves in the embarrassing position of ignoring what Jesus wanted to tell us! Like the lawyer, who could not admit that it was the Samaritan who helped. Like him we want to avoid the point, it is too uncomfortable.



What about you?

What is the moral of this story?

What was Jesus concluding remark to this man?

Did he want the man to change his attitude or his actions?

Read Matthew 5v43-46, 1 John 3v16-18, James 1v27

The man's original question was about inheriting eternal life. Jesus is saying, that inheriting eternal life requires you to reach out to the unloved, as God did for us.

Is there a connection between loving God and loving others? 1 John 4v20-21



How will you behave differently because of this story?

How are you going to do likewise?

Who are you going to do likewise to?

How should we behave toward those we hate or despise?

Is the Gospel just for people like us?

Is it just people like ourselves that we should help?