



## The Good Samaritan

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Series: Stories of Hope

St George's Battery Point

Date: 27 April 2025

Bible readings: Luke 10:25-37;

Isaiah 58:6-12

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Lord, we ask this morning that you will soften our hearts to be open to you as we look into your word in the Bible. Let it work deeply in our lives. Amen

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This is the first in a series over the next few weeks looking at some parables from Luke's Gospel. Jesus uses these short stories with meaning to help tell us the "Good News about the Kingdom of God"<sup>2</sup> to explain what God's kingdom and his king look like. They are stories of hope. Jesus was a master story teller. Often there was a surprise, a twist to the story that turned their (and our) conventional understanding on its head and stirred people to self-examination.<sup>3</sup> "[They] break through mere words and make us ask whether there has been any real difference in our lives."<sup>4</sup>

Today we are going to spend some time looking at the parable that we know as "The Good Samaritan". To the Jews of Jesus' day that would have been an oxymoron, a phrase that combines two contradictory elements, two things that just did not go together. No Samaritan was "good"! The Jews hated them. The Samaritans had intermarried with the local people of the land and had betrayed their Jewish heritage. The feeling was mutual.

How will Jesus use this unlikely situation to meet one of our most basic needs, "how we can inherit eternal life?" What does this mean? Can we achieve this by our own effort? Can we be made right with God, be justified, by what we do? Can we ever be good enough? If not, what hope is there for us?

Dallas Willard once did a teaching series on the parables. The title of his talk on the Good Samaritan caught my attention, "The Good 'Half-Breed' and the Full-Blooded Stinkers. The Neighborliness of the Kingdom."<sup>5</sup>

So, what will this parable teach us about the kingdom of God?

Let's turn to Luke chapter 10 and see what it's all about.

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

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<sup>1</sup> Public domain, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/File:Samaritan.jpg>

<sup>2</sup> Luke 4:43 But he said, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.'

<sup>3</sup> <https://bibilium.com/38-parables-of-jesus-parables-of-jesus/>

<sup>4</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Parables of Jesus*, 1983, location 104, free sample Kindle book, <https://www.amazon.com.au/Parables-Jesus-James-Montgomery-Boice/dp/0802414494/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://dwillard.org/resources/audio/parabolic-teaching-about-christs-kingdom>, now published posthumously as *The Scandal of the Kingdom: How the Parables of Jesus Revolutionize Life with God* by Dallas Willard, 2024.

So, let's imagine the scene – a group of people sitting around listening to Jesus, a teacher who taught as one who had authority<sup>6</sup>. An expert in the law was in the group and he stood up to test Jesus, to put Jesus on the spot, perhaps to try and trap him, but Jesus wasn't fazed.

Remember, this question: What must I do to inherit eternal life? It is the context, the purpose and background, of the whole story. And when did the expert in the law start to realise that there was a twist coming?

<sup>26</sup> 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?'

Jesus answered his question with another question, one that Jesus knew that the expert in the law could answer. It wasn't threatening to him. He felt quite comfortable. This is what teachers did and Jesus was becoming more famous as a rabbi by the day.

<sup>27</sup> He answered, "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, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5<sup>7</sup> and Leviticus 19:18<sup>8</sup>, the great summary of the Ten Commandments. That's what Jesus and the onlookers would expect an expert in the law to do. He was feeling quite confident that he was fulfilling the law and all was well.

<sup>28</sup> 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.'

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'

Did the expert in the law just want to win the point, to come out on top in this public confrontation? Perhaps he was trying to lure Jesus into saying something that might sound heretical.<sup>9</sup>

Or, maybe he could have just been anticipating that Jesus would give him a list of who to include. He would have been able to tick each one off and say, "Yes. I do that."

Even more than all this, he wanted to "justify" himself. Did he just want to show that he hadn't asked a trivial question? Or was it more fundamental? Did he want to show that what he was doing every day made him right with God, justified? If he kept God's law perfectly, he would be OK.

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead.'

Jesus didn't enter into a debate; he told him a story instead. So, let's try to imagine this morning that we are in the audience sitting around listening to Jesus.

There are four main characters in this story, all travellers.

The road was steep, rugged and isolated, and therefore dangerous.

Normally people travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho would be Jews. Jesus doesn't say so specifically, but his audience would probably have assumed that.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 7:29

<sup>7</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

<sup>8</sup> Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> *Luke for Everyone (New Testament for Everyone Book 4)*, Tom Wright, 2001. p128

<sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

Perhaps the wounded man was just conscious enough to be aware that someone was near. A friend. A countryman. Help had arrived!

The expert in the law would identify with the priest, he was a Jewish religious leader too. He knew that the priest should stop and help, he had quoted the Old Testament to Jesus that said as much. Why didn't he stop? What was his excuse? He just went on by.

But nobody listening to Jesus would have expected the priest to stop. The man might have been dead. To touch a corpse would have made the priest ritually unclean for a week. He would have been excluded from the temple and he might have lost his turn of duty there. He didn't even go close enough to see properly.

Was this the way that the expert in the law would justify not helping someone in need? Was he starting to feel uncomfortable? This was not going as he had hoped. He was starting to be torn between his conscience and his religious duty.

<sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

Another countryman. Would this one stop?

What about the Levite? Another religious leader. The expert in the law was starting to feel increasingly uncomfortable, his inner battle was escalating.

A Levite was the priest's assistant who was responsible for the liturgy and music. He would be ritually unclean too if he touched a dead body, and, besides that, the priest would be waiting for him. He didn't want to be late. So, he hurried on by too.

Maybe they both thought it was too dangerous. It could have all been a decoy for an ambush. Can we identify with this explanation? How often have I avoided doing what I know is right because I'm afraid – afraid of being embarrassed, of looking foolish, of having to stand out from the crowd, of being misjudged ... even if there is no actual physical danger? Especially if it is towards someone who has treated me badly.

<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

The wounded man was just conscious of another potential rescuer. But as this one came closer, he realised that he was a Samaritan, a despised enemy. Disappointment, fear, dread ... What would he do to him? Would he hurt him even more?

Everyone listening would have assumed that a Samaritan would have walked on by, perhaps even spitting on him as he went. Remember the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other, so why would he help?

But this Samaritan, when he saw that the poor man was in a bad way, had compassion on him. Did he stop to think that the man was probably a Jew, his enemy for generations? Maybe, but it didn't change what he was about to do.

<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

He not only felt sorry for the man, he did something about it. He cleaned him up, bound him up and struggled to get him up onto his donkey. He spent the night looking after him. Not a very pleasant task no doubt.

<sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."

This was not an insignificant amount. A denarius was the usual day's wage for a labourer.

This meant that the whole operation was dangerous, costly, inconvenient and time-consuming for the Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked,

<sup>36</sup> 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'

Jesus had changed the narrative. The expert in the law may have expected a list, but he ended up with a probing question. By now he was feeling very uncomfortable.

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'

The answer was obvious. He got it right. Perhaps he said it through gritted teeth. Or maybe with eyes wide open in shock. Jesus had opened a window into his soul, and what Jesus said next challenged him to his core. He knew the right answer, but did he live it? Had it reached his heart? He was an expert in the law, but now he was being challenged by what the prophets had been saying all along.<sup>10</sup> The kingdom of God had different values and this would turn his world upside down.

Here is the answer to his original question, and here is the twist!

Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'

It was clear now that there was to be no "other" who could be excluded. No one was to be hated, feared and shut out from God's blessing. The values that Jesus revealed in this story were radically different from those of the priest and Levite, and indeed the expert in the law, who were more concerned about their religious and moral purity than helping someone in need.

In this simple story Jesus had exposed the expert in the law's heart. He also was sick and in need of a doctor, a sinner in need of forgiveness. Jesus offers healing and forgiveness to any who will turn to him in repentance. But what was the expert in the law's response? We are not told. Did he respond with repentance and openness to change, or did he retreat into pride, self-justification and hardness of heart to protect his privilege and reputation? What about those who were looking on? And what about us who are looking on from a distance?

Jesus showed that there was not to be a different set of expectations for the religious leaders of the day. The expectation was the same as for everyone else – love and compassion for the poor, the needy, the broken, the downtrodden, the foreigner. These are the values of God's kingdom. They apply to all of us, we all need to be a true neighbour to everyone we meet, friend or foe alike.

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. Isaiah 58:6-12, Micah 6:6-8, Zechariah 7:8-10

So far, we have looked most closely at two people in this exchange between Jesus and the expert in the law. Firstly, we have walked with the expert in the law who wanted to justify himself before God by doing good works and fulfilling the law. But he was undone when Jesus exposed his heart. Secondly, we have journeyed with the wounded man, in this story that Jesus told. The wounded man knew he was helpless and needed a saviour.

But there is another layer to this story as well. In another parable, this time from Matthew's gospel, Jesus famously said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."<sup>11</sup> So could we also see Jesus as the wounded man? Did the expert in the law start having an inkling that the way that the priest and Levite treated the wounded man was revealing his own attitude to God? The way we treat others is the way we treat God.

There are so many layers and possibilities in this parable, but let's think a bit more about what it can mean for us today by picking up on a traditional interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

Let's imagine for a moment where we might fit into the story that Jesus told. Are we broken and bruised by life, hurt, betrayed and abandoned by those we trusted, and left behind to cope on our own? Even if our situation is not that bad, can we imagine ourselves in the position of the man who had been robbed and left half-dead?

What about those that we thought would help us, but walked on by? Who or what do we rely on? Perhaps if we were super fit and strong enough, we might be able to get up by ourselves. If we were rich and famous, we could pay someone to come and collect us, but alas no mobile phones in those days, but the robbers would have taken it anyway. What if we just worked harder, meditated more, had extra good positive feelings ... would the nightmare just go away? These are all good things, but are they enough?

No. In a desperate situation, we need someone to rescue us.

Enter the Samaritan. He didn't look a very likely saviour. The wounded man's people had treated the Samaritan's people so badly. To use an Australian expression, "they hated their guts" and no doubt the Samaritan would return the favour. He was the enemy. But this unlikely looking hero stopped and rescued the wounded man.

Is the Samaritan a picture of Jesus for us?

The wounded man could have reacted in fear, or resentment, or pride and told the Samaritan to go away, he could do without the help of someone like him "thank you very much." And we can do the same. When Jesus comes to offer to rescue us, we can tell him, "No thanks. I'm OK. I can manage on my own."

Or we can respond with genuine relief that someone cares enough to stop and help. We can thank him, say "Yes please," and let him clean up our wounds, bind us up and take us to a safe place. And Jesus won't leave us damaged and broken, he will make us new if we let him.

In Jesus, God has been a true neighbour to us - finding us wounded on the road, stooping down to bind up our wounds, paying the cost of our healing. Jesus has walked the costly road to the cross to rescue us. We just have to ask him to forgive us and invite him in.

So, this is how we enter the kingdom of God. It's not by being good enough, or by earning our way in by doing lots of good things. But once we are part of God's kingdom, everything is

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 25:40 Part of the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>12</sup> E.g., see a reproduction of a Byzantine icon at <https://www.etsy.com/listing/900175723/jesus-christ-icon-the-good-samaritan> in which Jesus is shown with a halo rescuing the wounded man. "O omega N" means "He Who Is".

different – different values, different priorities, different expectations. Love, compassion and care for all is the order of the day. Jesus is now our saviour, our leader, our guide, our example. And it is Jesus who gives the forgiveness, the healing, the strength and the power to make us whole. And he gives us all that we need to be able to live this way, because we certainly can't do it in our own strength. This is what it means to now be part of the kingdom of God, his family, the "Body of Christ".

And when we still get things wrong from time to time, we can ask Jesus for forgiveness once more, and know that his sacrifice on the cross makes us right with God again, so we can get up and keep going.

When we have a group of people today who have asked Jesus to forgive them, have invited him in and are now part of God's kingdom, who are justified by faith in Jesus' death to rescue them, not by trying to keep the law<sup>13</sup> ... we have the church. So, how does this parable apply to us collectively now?

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>14</sup>

There are to be no divisions and distinctions in the Body of Christ.<sup>15</sup> No one should think they are better than anyone else. There is to be no division, hierarchy or hostility based on ethnicity, family background, education, language, gender, skin colour, strength, physical beauty, disability, political affiliation, wealth, or anything else that our society uses to judge, discriminate, separate and engender fear. We are all one in Christ Jesus and are precious to him. We have each other's backs.

And Jesus expects us to love and treat "the outsider" this way as well. As we practise this in the church, we will be able to be a better neighbour to those around.

Let's take some time to reflect. Who is the neighbour that we're neglecting who needs God's compassion? Let's set our heart to pray for that person regularly. Plan how we might reach out to them in compassion. And ask God to open our heart so that we might see the world as they do. Ask him to give us his heart of compassion. Ask him to remind us that we only stand because of the grace of Christ. Then our first movement toward others will always be one of grace and we will be open and ready to act when we meet the stranger on the way.

So, if Jesus has rescued, healed and restored us, his challenge to us today remains the same as his challenge to the expert in the law – "Go and do likewise."

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Let's pray. Father, thank you that you loved us enough to send Jesus to rescue us, and that you invite each of us to be part of your family, the "Body of Christ", the church. Thank you that Jesus was like the Good Samaritan and took the costly road to the cross to rescue us when we couldn't do it ourselves. Help us each to truly thank him and invite him to be our saviour, leader, guide, healer and Lord.

Help us then to follow and obey him, and live by your Kingdom values of love, care and kindness. Help us to do this as individuals and as a church.

We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, your Son and our Saviour. Amen

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 5:1-2

<sup>14</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:(12-)27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.