

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

by Rev. John C. Cheek



"The Good Samaritan" 1890 by Vincent Van Gogh

Prayer

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in God's word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for morning,
more than those who watch for morning. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

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

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ 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 neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ 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. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He 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. ³⁵The 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.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

**The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.**

Introduction

This passage includes a parable told by Jesus. We need to understand what a parable is and what it's not. A parable is not a news account. It's a story that is told to communicate some kind of truth. Those listening to Jesus, including the expert in the Law, would have recognized the story for what it was.

This passage also makes reference to three particular kinds of people, and we need to understand who they are for the story to make sense. Those hearing Jesus would know all this, but we need to have it as background.

Remember that, in Luke's gospel, Jesus overturns the understanding of who was in honor and who was in shame, who was to be admired and who was to be hated.

- One person in the parable is a priest. The priest would have responsibilities of leading in the Temple and of assisting with offerings of sacrifices. The priest could only do these things if he was ritually clean.
- Another person is a Levite. The Levites were the people who were responsible for setting things up in the Temple. They were responsible for maintaining the altar and all the other Temple furniture and equipment. They too would only be able to carry out their responsibilities if they were ritually clean.
- A third important person in the story is a Samaritan. The Samaritans were from the central highlands of Israel, an area between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. When the Northern Kingdom was defeated by the Assyrian army in 721 BCE, Assyria took many of the people as prisoners and transported them to other nations that Assyria conquered. Similarly, Assyria settled peoples from other conquered nations in the area of the Northern Kingdom. Over time, these foreigners intermarried with the remaining Israelites and the faith traditions of the Israelites in that area became intermixed with those of the foreign nations.

At the time of Jesus, these Samaritans, the resulting people from the mix of nations, were hated by the Israelites in the southern part of the country. They were regarded as the worst kind of people, traitors and pagans, hardly even human. Please hold that idea in mind as we continue.

SERMON – Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

- A. (v. 25–29) On one occasion an expert in the Law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
1. (v. 26) "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" *[Jesus appears to be giving the expert in the Law an easy layup.]*
 2. (v. 27) 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 neighbor as yourself.'" *[Here the expert in the Law quotes, first from Deuteronomy 6:5 and then from Leviticus 19:18. He must have been thinking, "Ha! How's this rabbi from out in the sticks going to be able to argue with that?" He probably thought that this was a slam dunk.]*
 3. (v. 28) "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." *[Have you ever had the experience of thinking you are on the lowest stair and then stepping out on nothing at all? This is sort of what happened to the man disputing with Jesus. Jesus doesn't argue with him at all.]*

4. (v. 29) But he *[the expert in the Law]* wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" *[Another way for him to ask the question would be, "And who do I have to love, and who can I ignore or hate?"]*

- B. (v. 30–35) *[Here Jesus does something which is very much in the style of a rabbi: he tells a story to make a point.]* In reply, Jesus said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho *[At this point, the people listening would have kind of held their breaths. Downtown Tucson is now a vibrant nightspot. There are apartments and clubs and restaurants and lots of people on the streets. But it wasn't always like that. In the 50's and 60's especially, one of the most dangerous places in the city, especially at night was Meyer Street. It was a tough, dangerous place. This was the reputation of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. There were plenty of spots where a traveler could be ambushed and there were robbers who lived in the caves and gullies, preying on anyone who came past, especially if the person was alone.]*, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.
 1. (v. 31) A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.
 2. (v. 32) So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. *[At this point, those listening to Jesus might have guessed that this story was intended to criticize the religious leaders in the Temple. They probably thought the hero of the story was going to be an ordinary person who did what the clergy wouldn't.]*
 3. (v. 33–35) But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; *[This throws the story in a completely unexpected direction. What might a hateful, disgusting Samaritan do? There's no limits with those people! Might he desecrate the man in some way? Might he eat the man's body? There's no telling.]* and when he saw him, he took pity on him.
 - a. (v. 34a) He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. *[This is the equivalent of providing first aid.]*
 - b. (v. 34b) Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
 - c. (v. 35) The next day he took out two denarii *[One denarius was about a day's wages.]* 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.'

- C. (v. 36 & 37) Which of these do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"
 1. (v. 37a) The expert in the Law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." *[It may be that he can't bring himself to say the word "Samaritan" but he gets the point clearly.]*
 2. (v. 37b) Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

What can we take away from this morning's text?

In my household we have an expression that goes, "Well, this has taken an ugly turn!" This is what happens to the expert in the Law. In a few words he went from an easy win to a dumbfounding result. Jesus wasn't as easy to trap as he thought. But here's a question for us this morning: Who are our Samaritans? Who are the ones we assume the worst of? Who is it that we hate on sight? Whom do we hold in contempt?

And related to that question is this one: On what basis do we hold those attitudes? What gives us the right to hate them, to disparage them, to desire the worst for them? And here's the difficult, uncomfortable truth. If we follow Jesus as our savior, we have no right whatsoever to hate others. And why is that so?

The simple reason is intimately familiar to all of you, and it's this: God has loved you extravagantly. God loves you extravagantly today. And God will love you extravagantly throughout eternity. And it isn't because you're so inherently lovable. I'm honored to be serving among you, and I know you're wonderful. But... I have the backstage view of my life. I know what my thoughts are. I know what at least some of my prejudices are. I know the mess that I am, and I rejoice in the truth that my salvation is the result of Jesus' extraordinary love for me, not the result of me being good enough or moral enough or loving enough. I believe that you know these same things about yourselves, and I believe that you know that your salvation is by God's grace.

And, if we are redeemed by God's grace, despite who and what we are, we simply have no standing to hate another. We may hate things that have happened. We may hate the ways our lives have been impacted. But we simply don't have standing to hate another person.

And here's the other side of that coin: when we let go of our hatred, when we relinquish that, it's good and healthy for us. It's been said that hating another person, regardless of the basis, is like taking poison and hoping the other person will get sick. Hatred is unhealthy for us. It keeps us from being the persons God has created us to be. Friends, I'm asking you to take a serious look into your hearts. I'm asking you to find who, if anyone, you hate, you assume the worst of, you desire to suffer. I'm also asking you to seek God's help and blessing in setting yourself free from that burden of hatred. Will you do that? Will you try to do that?

May it be so. Amen.

Sermon Art: "*The Good Samaritan*" 1890 by Vincent Van Gogh"

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