

“Who are you in this?” Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.”

Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

The Good Samaritan. This probably is one of the best-known parables of Jesus, and probably one of the most misunderstood parables as well. Christians often and quite mistakenly look at this parable as guidelines for our lives.

Let's see what exactly Jesus is teaching us.

So, there was this lawyer, this religious teacher and expert, and he asked Jesus: **“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”** This question, in one form or in another, drives our lives. “What shall I do to be a good person, to be a good Christian, to feel good about myself, to have a good conscience?” There is this assumption behind all religions and systems of morality that there is something one needs to do and then... you will get there. Wherever it is.

But where is the focus in this question? Of course, on me! What shall I do?

We all have this sense of accountability built into us; we all have this burning need to prove our goodness. The idea is that ultimately our standing before God depends on what we do, how we live. Jesus, as we can see, plays along. “OK, if you want to inherit eternal life by doing something, what does the Word of God tell you?” **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strengths, and your neighbour as yourself.”** “Good,” Jesus replies, “great answer, do this and you will live.”

But wait! Just think about what it means... You should love your God with all your being, without failing, and you should love your neighbour as yourself, without failing. Do this and you will live. Is that even possible?

The lawyer asked: "What should I do? How high should I jump to get to heaven?" And Jesus replied: "If you want to do it on your own, here it is – jump across this 30-foot high wall and you will get there." That puts things into a not so optimistic perspective.

The lawyer realizes that he can't jump that high, so he wants to lower the bar. But how to do that? He couldn't ask: "Can I love God a bit less?" What remains is the neighbour. He tries to lower the bar by narrowing down who his neighbour is.

"Who is my neighbour?" By asking this, he at the same time is also asking – and who is *not* my neighbour? He wanted to know which people he should love, so that he is free to ignore all the others. Isn't that how we all tend to think?

Answering Jesus tells this parable. **"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."**

We know that that road was quite dangerous, and robberies were not rare. Now the priest was going down the same road. Where was he going? Most likely to perform his services in the Temple in Jerusalem.

There was a long list of requirements for the priests if they wanted to be properly prepared for their service. Ritual purity was one of the most important ones. The man on the road was naked and half dead. Maybe he was already dead.

What if the priest touches the dead person and can't perform his duties anymore? What will happen with his family? Who will provide for them? What if he touches the man and then hides this fact and someone finds it out?

Then his future career can be in danger. Not an easy choice. And don't forget about the robbers; they could still be hiding and waiting for the next victim. What if that was a trap? The priest in the story was by no means a hypocrite. Just a sensible ordinary person ... as we all are. But what about the Levite? When you travel on the road like that you need to learn from the footprints who went before you. The Levite probably knew about the priest, maybe he even knew him.

He would see that the priest had passed by the man on the road. If the priest chose not to touch him, why would the Levite? And if he did choose to help this man, what light would it shed to the priest? Thus, the Levite passed by, and he was by no means indifferent, not a hypocrite by any stretch. The situation was very complicated.

Now the third character is introduced. Someone else travels on the same road. Jesus' audience would expect that the third one could be a Jewish lay person. An ordinary hero. Instead, Jesus brings in an unexpected plot twist – He introduces a Samaritan.

As you may know Jews hated Samaritans. Their history was messy. The fact was, they hated them and considered them to be lower-class people. How offensive would it be for them to hear that a Samaritan was the one who had compassion?!

Now we need to see how radical the actions of the Samaritan were. He saw that at least a few people had passed the half-dead man. Still, he chose to stop and check him. Then he spends a considerable time giving him the first medical aid; cleaning his wounds with wine and oil.

All this time he remains in that place, where robbers could show up again. He covers the naked man with his own cloth and puts him on his own animal and chooses to walk so that he could deliver this stranger back to safety.

Then he took him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.”

This is remarkable! Remember, Jews hated Samaritans, and in that culture blood vengeance was a part of life. Now, imagine – this hated Samaritan is bringing this heavily beaten, half dead man into a Jewish village.

In society where hatred reigns, there is not much room for reason. We can see it even today, whenever we debate some social issues. It is enough for someone to point a finger and cry out “bigots” or “haters” and the mob is ready to go after them.

It would have sufficed for someone to cry out “murderer”, and the Samaritan could be attacked, beaten or even killed – no one would even know of his compassionate actions. Still, he took the risks.

He went into the village. He stayed with this man, and because the man was robbed, he also paid for the inn. He gave to the innkeeper two denarii, which would be a sufficient payment for at least a week.

Then he added that if the innkeeper spends more, he will repay when he comes back. Why, isn't that too much? Because if the man could not pay what he owed, he could be sold into slavery, and the innkeepers were not exactly the nicest people out there.

How about this as an example of how we should love our neighbours? If someone asks, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life” – Jesus answers: “Do this!” Are we ready to risk our health or even our life for someone who we don't even know?

Are we ready to get involved in dangerous situations where other good and sensible people, the best people, have chosen to keep the distance? Are we ready to face hostility serving with our possessions to someone who probably will never repay you?

Are we ready to do all of this for someone, who may even consider you to be their enemy? Are we ready? Are we capable of doing something like that? For this is how high the bar is, if we want to merit eternal life by our actions.

With this parable Jesus is not giving advice on how to get into heavenly Kingdom by being a caring person. Instead, He teaches that it is completely impossible for us to do it on our own. Even the best among us will inevitably fail.

Then Jesus asks this one question. **“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?”** Up to this point Jesus’ audience, including us, may have tried to figure out which of the three characters we would need to identify with. This is what people naturally tend to do. “Who am I in this parable?” With this last question Jesus gives us His answer.

In this parable we are not the priest, we are not the Levite. By this time, it should be obvious that we are not the Good Samaritan either. Who are we then? Who is left? Yes... we are the half dead man, beaten and robbed, naked laying in the middle of dessert, helpless and hopeless, until someone comes, who is ready to sacrifice everything to save us.

That’s us. We all are beaten so many times, by humiliation, injustice, rejection, loss, violence, betrayal, sickness, our own failures and so on. We are robbed of so many things – we are robbed of our ability to trust, by daily worries we are robbed of our joy and gratitude for all the good things that still daily happens to us, we are robbed of our peace and security, as we never know what to expect from the future, as it becomes more and more uncertain.

How often are we in situations where we are as vulnerable as if we were naked? How often our closest people, good people, pass us by for they have their own worries, they can’t bind our wounds, and we remain laying beaten and desperate for help.

Jesus Christ is the Good Samaritan. He is your Good Samaritan. He is the Good Samaritan for every human being. Whatever your situation, He cares, and He has compassion on you. He passes by no one. He steps down and kneels next to us amid our misery, mess and wounds, even as we may be unconscious about it.

He stops to bind up your wounds, whatever they are, even if we are hostile to Him. He is ready to take any risks so that only He could save you. No price is too high for Him, if only He can bring you in safety.

In fact, our Good Samaritan Jesus was murdered doing exactly this – saving us, rescuing us from the most dangerous robbers of this world – from sin, death and devil, He was crucified by that hateful mob as He was bringing us to safety in His Father's heavenly inn.

This parable is the Good News for us. You don't have to be the Good Samaritan. You don't have to jump that 30 feet high wall to inherit eternal life. Jesus is your Good Samaritan. He has done everything so that you can have eternal life. As a gift.

Our task is different. Not to resist when He comes to help us and to bring us to the Father's house. To gladly receive Him and to allow Him to love us and to bind our wounds, to receive His care and to rejoice in it, knowing that whatever our wounds are, He can and desires to take care of them.

This is what Jesus teaches with this parable. We are hopeless and helpless, and there is nothing we can do to improve our situation, when it comes to eternal life, but Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has sacrificed everything to bring you into His Father's Kingdom. Just receive eternal life from Jesus' hands. As a precious gift. Trust in Him and it is yours. This is the Good News. The Gospel.

Keep this message in your heart. "What should *you do* to inherit eternal life?" Nothing. For Jesus has done everything, eternal life is yours already. We are not sent to save the world; we are sent simply to proclaim that it is already done.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding may keep your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ.

Amen.