

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Good Samaritan

Part 1 - April 29, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Today we're talking about the Good Samaritan, and we're starting a new series on Jesus' most popular parables. I've titled it: Jesus' Greatest Hits - Parables that strike a chord. Parables are simple, memorable stories. And the significance of the parables Jesus told can't be overstated. His greatest teaching themes were all struck in parables.

After 34 months of verse-by-verse expository examination through the theology of the Apostle Paul, I'm in love with the idea of spending our Sundays listening to Jesus tell stories! Each week we'll read a full, unedited parable, examine its context and characters, and then apply its truths to our lives.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 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.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins 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.'" "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." - *Luke 10:25-37 NIV*

THE CONTEXT

The Good Samaritan has been called the most perfect short story ever told.



The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is 15 miles long, drops 3,600 feet, and runs through the Judean wilderness, a treacherous, desolate wasteland. Only a fool would travel through without the protection of a caravan. So, what happened to this guy was really his own fault.

Parts of the Roman road are still visible. Jesus walked this way to get between Jerusalem and Galilee; takes about seven hours.



Remember when Mary and Joseph traveled for a day with their caravan before discovering that 12-year-old Jesus had stayed in Jerusalem (to reason with the teachers in the temple)? (*Luke 2:41-46*) This is the road they likely took to retrieve Him.

Jesus and His audience were very familiar with this road. They knew that gangs of bandits would ambush people, sometimes by having a gang member lie on the road and pretend to be injured.

In the story, the first two people to pass by are a priest and a Levite. The Levites assisted the priests in the temple duties. For priests and Levites alike, holiness (i.e. being set apart and cleansed), was their chief distinguishing characteristic. In fact, to get within six feet – or to even let your shadow fall upon a dead body – would defile their purification and cost him his dignity. In a religiously twisted way, they passed by to *honor* God.

Q: Why did the priest and the Levite cross the road?

A: To get to the other side of a situation that was too risky, too inconvenient, and just plain out of their jurisdiction.

Now, using a Samaritan as the hero is brilliant. Samaritans were despised as half-breed Jews (they'd intermarried with pagans). 120 years earlier the Jews tore down the Samaritan's temple. And the Samaritans had just recently defiled the Jewish temple (in Jerusalem) by scattering dead men's bones in it.

A stock formula in Jesus' day (for telling teaching stories about common-sense godliness), was to progress from a priest, to a Levite, to a Jew. His listeners anticipate a Jewish layman to do the right thing. The Samaritan catches everybody off guard.

It's like someone saying: I was visiting your church once and a woman passed out and fell on the floor. The pastor just stayed in his seat; and the worship leader just kept playing music. But a Christian-hating, church-desecrating, militant cult member ran up the aisle and tended to her needs. Go and do like the Christian-hating, church-desecrating, militant cult member did.

- Parables just weren't told this way!

[The Samaritan] went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. – *Luke 10:34 NIV*

He had some wine, so he applied it to cleanse the wounds. He had olive oil, so he poured it on as a soothing salve. He had a donkey, so he chose to walk.

Q: But the bandages ... where would he have gotten the bandages?



Jesus says the victim was stripped. I think He's implying that the Samaritan took the clothes off his back to dress the wounds and cover the victim. He accepted the risk, the inconvenience, and the cost. That's a lot of miles, walking in the direct sun, up 3600 feet!

And then, he not only gives the Inn-keeper the equivalent of two day's wages, but he basically swipes his credit card, and says I'll cover any additional expenses. And he does this for someone who would've spit in his face under any other circumstances.

Q: Isn't Jesus taking this just a bit too far?!

Q: Or, is He highlighting the three basic approaches to life?

- There's the outlaw's attitude: What's thine is mine
- There's the passersby's attitude: What's mine is mine
- There's the Samaritan's attitude: What's mine is thine

Q: Which philosophy do you live by?

STAR OF THE SHOW

Q: You know who the most interesting person in this passage is?

A: It's not the Samaritan ... it's that expert in the Mosaic Law.



This is how I picture the priest (good guy, wrong priorities). This is how I picture the Samaritan (no-nonsense, down to earth). But this is how I picture the expert (slick and weasely).

When he asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, he wasn't looking for salvation; he was testing the Lord, and looking to put Him on the spot.

Jesus turns the table and says, "You're the expert, you tell me." And all of a sudden it's the lawyer who's being tested!

And when Jesus tells him to take his own advice, he panics.

But he wanted to **justify** himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
- Luke 10:29 NIV

The only way he can fulfill the command is to reduce the definition.

Q: But, who is he trying to justify himself to?

1. Maybe it was to his own guilty conscience.

Perhaps in his mind, there lurked a suspicion that rejecting and condemning an entire segment of society wasn't so excusable.

2. Maybe it was to the people in the crowd.

Perhaps they knew him to be a hypocrite. And he knew that they knew that he didn't live according to his own beliefs.

- He's trying to reduce the definition, but Jesus expands it.

Q: Did you notice that he couldn't even bring himself to utter the despised word, "Samaritan"?

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "**The one who had mercy on him.**" - *Luke 10:36-37 NIV*

And then Jesus says: "Go and do likewise". And then the expert realized (as each of us should), that he couldn't live up to the example Jesus gave.

This parable was designed, not only to show us how to live as Kingdom Ambassadors, but also to puncture self-righteousness, by exposing our inability to measure up to God's "gold" standard.

Jesus' purpose in this parable was to bring the expert to a sense of conviction and sorrow for his sin, and prepare him to accept and receive the mercy of the ultimate Good Samaritan.

- His love is our inspiration and motivation to love others.

Let's see how well you've been listening. I want you to answer out loud: "True" or "False". This parable teaches us that:

1. It's okay to ignore people in need, because a Good Samaritan will eventually come to help them.
2. We must be responsive with compassion to the people who cross our daily path.
3. It's okay to withhold kindness from the ones we don't like.
4. We should help if we can ... unless it's an inconvenience.

Q: Given the way Jesus defines our neighbors in this parable, who might God be calling you to love this week? (Here's a hint, it's probably the one you're hoping it isn't!)