

# Puzzling Parables

## *The Good Samaritan*

December 23, 2018

*Welcome to where we're learning how to give till it hurts!*

**Do you have compassion on those who cross your path?**

**How do you decide who to help and when?**

Thursday is garbage day in my neighborhood. It was also the big windstorm! As I left for work, I got my empty cans out of the road; and took my neighbor's cans across the street to *his house*.

Then I noticed, in both directions, all the cans in my *entire neighborhood* rolling around in the street! And **I wondered how many cans I'd have to secure to love my neighbors as myself.**

I was standing there thinking, "How many houses away, until they're not *neighbors*?" At that moment, I remembered making a joke last Sunday about a dunce trying to figure out how many blocks around his house constitute a neighbor. And *I* was doing *that exact thing for real!*



In our storyline, it's almost Passover (one year before the cross) and the markets are wall-to-wall people preparing for the big holiday feast. Meanwhile, Jesus reunites with His 72 junior disciples, and publically condemns three cities whose religious rulers had rejected them.



Then He calls the crowd to come and learn from Him, so He can give them rest for their souls. And, among those who come to listen is a Baal Torah (Lord/Master of the Torah: the first five books of the Bible), an expert in religious rules.

He gets a bad rap, but we don't know the posture of his heart.

"Teacher," he asked, [not to trap, but to question] "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [Remember, this is pre-cross] "What is written in the Law?" he replied. [Turning the tables] "How do you read it?" He answered: [perfectly] "'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. [This is the required perfect standard of the Law] "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" – Luke 10:25-29 NIV

What do you think: **is he seeking an excuse for his shortcomings; or clarification for his hopeless religious check list?** Either way, *he's sunk*. **Jesus often stresses the futility of rules-based righteousness to prep them for the grace-based One.**

Remember the rich, young, Jewish, religious ruler?



[Jesus said] “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” ... “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor ... [The man went away sad; and, Jesus said] “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” [Teachers have tried so many linguistic tricks to get that camel through! But] ... the disciples were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus ... said, “With man this is impossible, [like the camel; because, they try to enter by their own righteousness] but with God [having sent His Son] all things are possible.” [Be patient; we’ll cross paths again] – Matthew 19:17-26 NIV

Likewise to the Baal Torah, Jesus says, “You know what the Law demands; so, do it.”

“But, no one can.”

“So true ... but, give me a year and two weeks, and we’ll see what I can do.”

Under the law, we can’t love our neighbor enough to earn it.

But, under grace, we can gratefully do what we can do to live it.

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 [a sacred/separated Levite who offers sacrifices] 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, [Common Levites assisted the priests. Jesus puts the Baal Torah in the story; and you know the others glanced up at him and snickered] 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 [Know what he took?] when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, [with the clothes off his back] pouring on oil and wine. [Doing what he can with what he has] Then he put the man on his own donkey, [lit. beast of burden. Jesus just told them to lay down their burden and take His, which is, like this Samaritan’s, those who need mercy, compassion, and healing] took him to an inn [Unlike Jesus’ birth, there’s room] and took care of him. [Going out of his way despite inconvenience and delay, and settling him in, and spending the night taking care of him] The next day he took out two silver coins [two days wages (Mt 20:2)] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, [apparently on the third day] I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ [He’s not only kind, he’s trustworthy] Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” [Remember, Samaria neighbored Judah; they were viewed as “half-breed” Jews, and had their own rival temple; and, this Baal Torah can’t even bring himself to say their name] The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” – Luke 10:30-37 NIV



These are the remains of the Roman road that led from Jerusalem to Jericho in Jesus' day. And, it's the road He refers to. Sometimes a gang member would lie on the road and pretend to be hurt, to ambush travelers. In the story, Jesus offers **three codes of conduct**: some live by the **robbers' code**: "Give it"; some live by the **code of indifference**: "Keep it"; and some live by the **code of the merciful**: "Take it". **Which do you live by? Trick question. We can only actually live by that last one.**



He who does not love his brother abides in death. – 1 John 3:14b NKJ

Here's another: **Why did the Priest and the Levite cross the road?** You see, if *even* their *shadow* touched a corpse, it would defile their religious purity (not to mention their fragile dignity). So, in a remarkably religiously twisted way: it was **to honor God!**

**Our mind will always find a way to justify our heart's desire.** "Getting to the other side" of all that risk and inconvenience and cost and bother and delay was just ... *fortuitous*.

Are you wondering what I did with those 200 garbage cans? It was *way easier* to just throw *mine* back in the street! No. Here's a hint: it looked a *bit more* like the Priest and the Levite than the Samaritan. And, by "a bit more," I mean *exactly*.

Now, the fact that this Baal Torah doesn't say "Samaritan" when he answers Jesus, makes me think he's looking to *excuse* himself. "And who is my neighbor?" "What's the **worst answer I could give?**" "Well ... as long as it isn't *certain* *someones* whom I *won't* mention, I'm golden." "Yeah, it's *who you're hoping it's not.*" So, **who might God be calling you to show mercy to?** *Because ... yeah ... in all probability it's who you're hoping it's not.*



If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head ... – Proverbs 25:21-22 NIV

We're learning to give till it *hurts* ... *them!* Actually, **this heat is meant to melt hard hearts.** Practical kindness will confound your foes.

**They'll have comebacks and counterarguments for every quarrel; but not for mercy and love.**

**Love is the one-and-only offensive weapon you have.** So, give 'em something this Christmas they can't contend with. But, keep *this* balancing act in mind: **we can help to the hurt of someone.** It's called *enabling*. And, **we can hurt to the help of someone.** It's called *tough love*. God wants us to live with that tension and balance. He wants us to wake up and say, "Soften my heart, and open my eyes and ears, and give me discernment. Lead me and guide me."

Jesus left some wanting healing, and others wanting bread. (Mt 8:18; Jn 6:15, 26) And, the "neighbor" in *this* story is unconscious and half dead. And, the law being quoted is about the Twelve Tribes of Israel treating *each other* as neighbors, and treating the gentiles among them as *Jews*.

You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall *judge your neighbor*. ... You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself ... And if a stranger dwells with you ... [He] shall be to you *as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; [one of your own]* for you were strangers in the land of Egypt ... *[Remember that? Did you like how they treated you? Then, don't be like that.]* – Lev 19:15b, 18, 33-34a NKJ

### Be the polar opposite of anyone who's ever abused you.

All I'm saying with all this, is that there are layers.

Consider others better than yourselves. ... look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. – Philippians 2:3b-4 NIV

If anyone does not obey our instruction ... Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. – 2 Thessalonians 3:14 NIV

Love your enemies ... – Matthew 5:44b NKJ

Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is upon you. – 2 Chronicles 19:2b NIV

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. – Luke 6:30 NIV

If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. – 2 Thessalonians 3:10b ESV

Bless those who curse you ... – Luke 6:28a NIV

You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever. – Deut 23:6 NKJ

Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these ... you did it to Me. – Matthew 25:40 NKJ

There you go. Balance all *that*. **It's situational, relational, nuanced, subjective, geographical, and contextual.** Is the neighbor an enemy or a friend? A stranger? A hypocrite? Lazy? Wicked? Living among you? Unconscious? Half dead? We're not going to unpack *all* of this ... *or any of this*.

*Merry Christmas!* That's my gift to you. **We're not going to get all tangled up in the details.**

At Christmas we focus on giving ... *to a fault*. "We could wrap those two gifts together, and then they'd both have seven!" And, **the more we calculate and quantify it, the less we feel it.** We just need to step back and remind ourselves of the big picture.

### You know when you're being loved and showing love.

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. – Matthew 7:12 NIV

I think Jesus' point is to just **stop looking for loopholes.** When you identify a true need along your path, and you can help, **get off your donkey and make sure there's room in the inn.** And, if you encounter an old Scrooge or two along the way, **be sure to give 'em some coal for Christmas.**