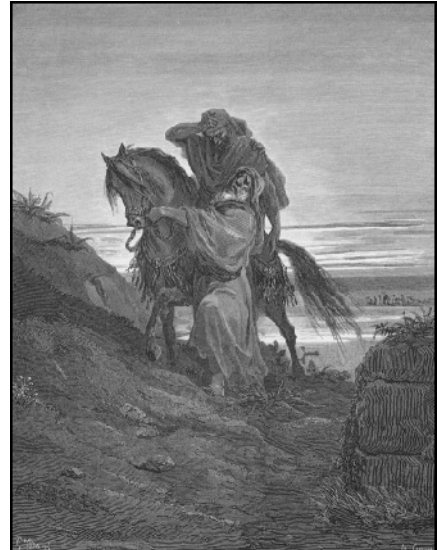


The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

BACKGROUND

- The “Levite” was probably a Temple functionary.
- “The question [‘and who is my neighbor?'] seems to have been often debated in Judaism, especially in scribal schools. The problem was to determine the implications of the precept contained in Lev 19:18, which has just been quoted in Luke 10:27, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Who exactly was this neighbor?” In Leviticus, “neighbor” included strangers as well as Israelites; see Lev 19:34: “You must count him [the stranger] as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself.” Scribes included proselytes in this category and saw them as the proper object of neighborly love. “The case was different for pure and simple non-Israelites as well as other categories of strangers, among whom Samaritans were sometimes classified—as they are by Luke himself in 17:16-18.”¹



The Good Samaritan, Gustave Dore (1832-1883)

QUESTIONS

1. Lawyers don't come off too well in Luke: In 7:30 we see that both lawyers and Pharisees rejected John's baptism and God's plans for them; in 11:45-52 Jesus condemns lawyers for heaping burdens on others, and for having the “key to knowledge” but hindering others while not entering themselves.

Luke says that this lawyer wanted to test Jesus with his first question and justify himself with his second. How?

2. What motivated the Samaritan?
3. Read 2 Chr 28:1-15 (which has a parallel passage in 2 Kings 16:1-4). What parallels does this account have to Jesus' parable? What was Oded's message, and what chord would Jesus' parable have struck in those who recalled their OT history?
4. Many commentators (e.g. *Jerome*) believe the priest and Levite avoided the “half-dead” Jewish victim for fear of corpse contamination (Num 19:11-13, Lev 21:1-4, 11),² elevating purity law above mercy.

Tony Campolo used to start speeches by saying:

I have three things I'd like to say today. First, while you were sleeping last night, 30,000 kids died of starvation or diseases related to malnutrition. Second, most of you don't give a shit. What's worse is that you're more upset with the fact that I said shit than the fact that 30,000 kids died last night.³

What do we do (or avoid) in trying to be pure? What laws do we elevate above mercy?

¹ Michel Gourgues, “The priest, the Levite and the Samaritan revisited: A critical note on Luke 10:31-35”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, pp. 709-713 (1998).

² However, Gourgues (ibid.) thinks it's a stretch to say that a “half-dead” man posed any risk. He argues that Jesus uses these three because it was typical in post-exilic OT writings, as well as in Josephus and the Qumran and rabbinic literature, to refer to the religious composition of Israel as the “priests, Levites and the people”, or variants of this. (See, e.g., 1 Chr 28:21; 2 Chr 34:30; 35:2, 7, 18; Ezra 2:70; 7:7, 13; 8:15; 9:1; 10:5, 18-22, 25-43; Neh 7:72; 8:13; 10:1, 29; 11:3, 20.)

³ Quoted in *Christianity Today*, Jan 2003, p. 34.

5. There is a tendency in the U.S. to surround ourselves with an insulating layer of people who resemble ourselves and keep out any “Samaritans”. What strategies do you use to minister beyond this insulating layer?
6. In Jesus’ day, Jews were as distasteful to Samaritans as Samaritans were to Jews. In trying to identify modern equivalents, commentators have pointed to Irish protestants and Catholics, as well as black and white South Africans. Marian Ronan, in her article “The Guy in the Ditch” (*The Living Pulpit*, Jul/Sep 2002), writes:

...The equivalent of the person left in the ditch in Luke 10:25-37 must be those we ourselves would bypass today on the road to Jerusalem. The cast of candidates is extensive, but my vote goes to... men and women whose sexual lives so repel us that we push them beyond the bounds of what we consider to be real humanity.

Ronan includes in this category the “young gay man left to die tied to a fence post outside Laramie, Wyoming”, sexual predators, and pedophilic priests.

Do you agree? Who do we find as distasteful as Samaritans and Jews found one another?

7. Gary DeLashmutt has the following insight on this passage:

[Jesus’ main point] is not that we should help people who break down on the freeway, but that the lawyer does not keep God’s Law, and therefore he does not qualify for inheriting eternal life.

This is why Jesus taught two ways to go to heaven. Sometimes, he taught that eternal life was a free gift from God to be received by simple faith (Jn 3:16; 6:29; etc.). Sometimes, he taught that you have to earn your way to heaven by doing good works. He didn’t embrace two contradictory soteriologies—he spoke to two different kinds of people.

Whenever Jesus teaches the “earn your way” approach, it’s always to people who think they can (Mt 5:17-48; Mk 10:17-22; this lawyer). And it’s always so they’ll realize they can’t earn it and humble themselves to receive it as a free gift...

Whenever he teaches the “free gift” approach, it’s always to people who realize they can’t earn it (Samaritan woman; etc.). There is no need to convince them of this, so he goes straight to the good news.⁴

What do you think?

When is your self-talk works-based and when is it grace-based? How well is this working for you?

8. Compare Luke 10:25-37 and its message to 1 Jn 3:11-18.

Fun Fact: Modern descendants of the Levites are referred to as *cohanim* (pl. of *cohen*), sometimes also having the last name Cohen (or Ashkenazy). “The cohanim still often play a special role in worship services, such as being the first to read from the Torah. They also may recite blessings at Jewish festivals. ...The priesthood’s few remaining privileges are countered by obligations. Cohanim cannot get married to widows, divorcees, or anyone from outside the Jewish faith, even converts. Moreover, they can’t attend most funerals, because contact with the dead would contaminate their religious purity” (John Travis, “The Priests’ Chromosome?”, *Science News*, 10/3/98).

⁴ <http://www.xenos.org/teachings/nt/luke/gary/luke10-2.htm>.