

PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

To a Jew of Jesus' day, the title of this parable would be an oxymoron. The Jews absolutely despised the Samaritans and would often travel miles out of their way to avoid going through their lands. This is all the more interesting, because basically the two nations were descendants of Jacob.

Historically, Samaria was the northern Kingdom of Israel, being that part of the land primarily given to the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. However, during the time of the Babylonian captivity, they stayed behind and eventually there was much intermarriage with other peoples and nations. When Nehemiah returned to re-build the walls of Jerusalem, he refused to allow the Samaritans to help, and thus much of his opposition and many of his problems came from them.

This hatred and bitterness grew over succeeding generations until by the time of Christ, the term Samaritan was used more often as a derogatory curse than as the name of a closely related group of people. Because of the intermarriage during the Babylonian occupation and the resultant modifications to their worship and religious ceremonies, the Samaritans no longer kept to all the practices the Jews still observed. Symbolically, Samaria speaks of compromise, worldliness and the conflict between brothers.

Strange, isn't it, how closely this reflects much of what is happening in the world and the church today. However, despite their many differences, the Jews and the Samaritans were essentially brothers.

4139 –plosion. Close by, near. Often translated neighbour. Refers to one of the same NATURE, or a member of the human family, as in ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. It also is used to describe one of the same faith, a fellow Christian as in its use in Romans 15:2.

Though the word ‘brother’ is not used in this parable, the implication of it, as illustrated by the possible definitions for the word translated ‘neighbour’, is that it does quite clearly relate to the message of true brotherhood found in scripture. This message, best summarised by ‘Am I my brother’s keeper’, to which the clear scriptural answer is YES, (see parable of the Prodigal Brother part one), is at the heart of the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Why do you think our Lord used a hated Samaritan as his example of a good neighbour? Was He perhaps making a very profound comment on the state of brotherhood in the world both then and now? What is its significance for the church today?

As an interesting, though related aside, consider Acts 1:8.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The disciples are instructed to witness in Judea, Samaria and then the whole world. If we equate Judea with their local environment; where they lived and were comfortable, what do we make of the specific command concerning Samaria, the hated nation? Surely this must speak to us of the need to witness to those we hate and despise, as well as those around us

near and far that we are concerned about. With so much animosity towards Moslems in the world today, perhaps they are our Samaritans? Think about it.

Let's turn to the parable:

Luke 10:

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

This parable operates on two levels; first it is a straightforward teaching about taking care of others, our brothers, our neighbours; secondly, it is an allegory for God's dealing with Man. Satan is represented by the thieves, the Godhead by the Samaritan, and society by those who pass by. Let us now examine this parable to see how this all fits together.

Luke 10:

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

As we have seen, there is very little distinction here between a neighbour and a brother. Thus as part of this series which has been considering the question 'Am I my brother's keeper', we have to address this key issue of just who is my neighbour, just who is my brother. Let us glean the answer together.

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

The man was on a journey, much as we are, the journey of life. It is interesting that he began his travels in Jerusalem. The name means 'founded by God'. It represents a place of beginnings, sometimes new beginnings; a place of birth, by and of God. We are born again for the new Jerusalem and our walk or journey as Christians begins here also. We are founded by God.

He never made it to his destination. Like many who begin a journey founded in God, all that he had was stolen from him by thieves and he was left for dead. Sin and Satan lie in wait for the unwary to rob them of their inheritance in God. Sin not only wounds us, but it wounds God as well. Satan readily sets traps for us to fall into as we journey through life. Given the chance, he will strip away the raiment, the protection that God has provided for us. He wants us dead and our new life in Christ destroyed. It often takes the ministering help of a brother to save us from this planned destruction.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

Why did they both pass by on the other side? Why did only one of them actually look closely at the man? Who or what do they represent in our society? These are the three most obvious questions we should be asking as we study these two verses. Let's begin with the third question.

The most likely answer, is that they represent the organised church or religion; the legal profession; and to some extent, the government. They are definitely what we, today, would call the establishment. They had power, authority and influence in all aspects of Jewish life back then, as these three groups do in our society today. I could further argue that they also were responsible for much of the formal teaching available in Jewish society. We need to be awake and aware of the parallels in our own lives.

In a different, but related vein, these two represented the force of OT Law, and the bindings it placed on men and society. In that regard, it can then be shown that the Samaritan is an example of Grace; God's NT alternative. This aspect helps our understanding of how to answer the first two questions.

Possibly the most generous thing we can say about the Priest, is that he may have thought the man was dead. If that is the case, then under the Law he would have been defiled if he had touched him. Assuming that he was on his way to the temple in Jerusalem, his reluctance to involve himself can be understood, though not excused. An outward, legal purity will never excuse an inward defilement. As a priest, he had a ministering responsibility to one of his own people. Unfortunately, then, as now, the outward show was more important than the inward condition. No wonder God only looks at the heart. Perhaps James had something like this in mind as well when he wrote that often misunderstood line, 'Faith without works is dead'. We need both.

What other motivations for the action, or non-action of the Priest there may have been, are not really that important. What is key, is the simple fact that he did pass by on the other side of the road without even bothering to look. This total indifference to the plight of both our brothers and our neighbours, is NOT acceptable to God.

The Levite, however, is even worse. He, is without excuse. By taking the time to walk over and look at the man, he removed any concern about being defiled by touching a dead body. He knew the man was alive and in need of help. In fact, he could probably tell that if help wasn't

forthcoming, the man would indeed soon die. If that is the case, then he is actually a murderer. The Law condemns; the Law puts to death; it kills.

I remember as a child reading this story and wondering how anyone could do such a thing, yet almost every day in America you read about people left to die in the streets because others don't want to get involved. Not much trust in God there I'm afraid. Obviously, this man had important, possibly urgent things to do, but so too would the Samaritan. This, then, is not an acceptable reason for his behaviour either. We must never think ourselves, or what we are doing, too important to help those who are in need. We are still our brother's keepers.

In summary then, the Priest represents the religious establishment, the church as opposed to the Church. The Levite represents the Law; both religious and secular, including the Mosaic Law and all it stands for as well. Together they represent society today; indifferent, uncaring, more concerned with self than with God and His laws and principles.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

The first key point here, is to recognise that the Samaritan is a type of Christ. Note again how God uses the things the world despises for His purposes. Without reading too much into it, consider John 8:48-49.

John 8:

48 Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?

49 Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me.

Yes, the Jews were making derogatory remarks, but note that while Jesus denied He had a devil, He did not deny the accusation of being a Samaritan. The man beset by thieves, was hurt, wounded and I believe if no-one had come to his assistance he would have died. The Samaritan was his saviour, as Jesus is ours. He binds up our wounds, rescues us and, (as symbolised by the inn), takes us to safety, as did the Samaritan.

Consider verse 34 for a moment. Wine, oil and grain represent the covenant blessings promised by God to Israel for obedience and withheld for disobedience. This provision of God can be seen in such places as Deut 28-29; Joel 1:10; and Hos 9:2, 2:21-22 Here, the Samaritan pours in the symbols of God's blessing, just as Jesus does for us, when we come to Him. He takes care of us. Again, the well known poem 'Footprints' springs to mind.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

God is no man's debtor. He looks after His own and showers them with His blessings. The Bible commands us to become like Christ. We need to be ministering Samaritans. The world may hate us, but so what. The Bible warns us that will happen. Much of the world has fallen to Satan,

has *'fallen among thieves'*. Who is therefore our neighbour, our brother? Jesus asked the same question.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

It's interesting, that even at this point, the man couldn't give a direct answer; he was unable to say "the Samaritan". However, he did have to acknowledge two things. First, that it was neither the Priest nor the Levite; the two groups who SHOULD have shown mercy and compassion. Secondly, he admits that mercy was shown by the Samaritan; quite an admission.

It is important to remember that the Jews hated and despised the Samaritans. The world we are told will hate and despise us as it hated and despised Christ. Our response is to emulate the Samaritan (Christ). Note verse 37 of Luke Chapter 10; 'Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.' How simple to say, how difficult to do.

God has shown great mercy on us, now it is our turn to do likewise. Let us show mercy this week, to all those in the world and those who claim to be in the church, even though they hate and despise both us and what we stand for. If Jesus could forgive them all from the cross, can we do anything less.