

## Research: The Good Samaritan

[Luke 10:25–34, 36, 37](#)

**Jesus is answering a lawyer who asks him the question, “Who is my neighbor?”**

“Jesus answered him in a very different manner from what he expected. By one of the most tender and affecting narratives to be found anywhere, he made the lawyer his own judge in the case, and constrained him to admit what at first he would probably have denied. He compelled him to acknowledge that a Samaritan—of a race most hated of all people by the Jews—had shown the kindness of a neighbor, while a priest and a Levite had denied it to their own countrymen” (Barnes 213).

**25**And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

“It was simply a test-question to see if the new Teacher was sound in His view of the ethical obligations of the Law.” (Ellicott’s Commentary)

“The Parable of the Good Samaritan.

**25.** *a certain lawyer*] A teacher of the Mosaic Law—differing little from a scribe, as the man is called in [Mark 12:28](#). The same person may have had both functions—that of preserving and that of expounding the Law.

*tempted him*] Literally, “*putting Him fully to the test*” ([Luke 4:12](#)); but the purpose does not seem to have been so deliberately hostile as in [Luke 11:54](#).” (Cambridge Bible)

**26**He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

“What is written in the law?... Christ, with great propriety, sends him to the law, to see and observe what was written there, what are the terms and conditions of life, as fixed there; partly, because this man, by his office and character, was an interpreter of the law; and partly, because his question was, what shall I do?”

“how readest thou? in the law, every day; referring to the "Keriat Shema", the reading of the Shema, i.e. those words in [Deuteronomy 6:4](#), &c, "Hear, O Israel, &c." morning and evening (i) as appears by his answer” (Gill’s Exposition)

27And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

“The love of God is the first and great commandment, and the sum of all the commands of the first table. Our love of God must be sincere, not in word and tongue only. All our love is too little to bestow upon him, therefore all the powers of the soul must be engaged for him, and carried out toward him. To love our neighbour as ourselves, is the second great commandment. There is a self-love which is corrupt, and the root of the greatest sins, and it must be put off and mortified; but there is a self-love which is the rule of the greatest duty: we must have a due concern for the welfare of our own souls and bodies. And we must love our neighbour as truly and sincerely as we love ourselves; in many cases we must deny ourselves for the good of others. By these two commandments let our hearts be formed” (Matthew Henry)

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart - The meaning of this is, thou shalt love him with all thy faculties or powers. Thou shalt love him supremely, more than all other beings and things, and with all the ardor possible. To love him with all the heart is to fix the affections supremely on him, more strongly than on anything else, and to be willing to give up all that we hold dear at his command,

“With all thy soul - Or, with all thy "life." This means, to be willing to give up the life to him, and to devote it all to his service; to live to him, and to be willing to die at his command,

“With all thy mind - To submit the "intellect" to his will. To love his law and gospel more than we do the decisions of our own minds. To be willing to submit all our faculties to his teaching and guidance, and to devote to him all our intellectual attainments and all the results of our intellectual efforts.

"With all thy strength" (Mark). With all the faculties of soul and body. To labor and toil for his glory, and to make that the great object of all our efforts." (Barnes Notes)

**28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.**

“do this, and thou shalt live; for the bare reading of it was not sufficient; though these men placed great confidence in reading this passage, or in reciting their phylacteries, of which this was a part, morning and night. Our Lord intimates by this, that, according to the tenor of the law, eternal life was not to be had without a complete and perfect performance of the duties of love to God, and to the neighbour, contained in these words; and this he suggests, in order to convict him of the impossibility of obtaining life by the works of the law, since such a performance cannot be made by man.” (Gill’s Exposition)

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

“Verse 29. - And who is my neighbour? The self-righteous, but probably rigidly conscientious, Jewish scholar, looking into the clear, truthful eyes of the Galilaean Master he had been taught to hate as the enemy of his own narrow, lightless creed, was struck, perhaps for the first time, with the moral beauty of the words of his own Law. Of the first part, **his duty towards God**, as far as his poor distorted mind could grasp the idea, he was at ease in his conscience. The tithe, down to the anise and cummin, had been scrupulously paid; his fasts had been rigidly observed, his feasts carefully kept, his prayer-formulas never neglected. Yes; as regards **God**, the Pharisee-lawyer's conscience was at ease! But his neighbour? He thought of his conduct towards that simple, truthful-looking Galilaean Rabbi, Jesus, that very day; trying to trip him up in his words, longing to do him injury - **injury** to that worn-looking, loving Man who had never done **him** any harm, and who, report said, was only living to do others good. Was **he**, perchance, his neighbour? So, vexed and uneasy - but it seems in perfect honesty now, and in good faith - he asks this further question, "Master, tell me, who do you teach should be included in the term 'neighbour'?" Luke 10:29

30 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.

“This story supplies a practical model for Christian conduct with radical demands and the approval/rejection of certain modes of action. . . . Crucial to the understanding of the story which Jesus tells are certain noteworthy details: 1) The privileged status of the priest and the Levite in Palestinian Jewish society—their levitical and/or Aaronic heritage, which associated them intimately with the Temple cult and the heart of Jewish life as worship of Yahweh. 2) The defilement considered to be derived from contact with a dead (or apparently dead) body. 3) The attitude shared by Palestinian Jews concerning the Samaritans, summed up so well in the comment ‘Jews, remember, use nothing in common with Samaritans’. . . . The point of the story is summed up in the lawyer’s reaction, that a ‘neighbor’ is anyone in need with whom one comes into contact and to whom one can show pity and kindness, even beyond the bounds of one’s own ethnic or religious group” (*AYB Luke x-xxiv.883-884*).

“The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho was about 18 miles through ‘desert and rocky’ country. Reference would be to the Roman road through passes and the Wadi Qelt; one would descend from over 2500 feet above sea level (Jerusalem) to 770 feet below it (Jericho)” (*AYB Luke x-xxiv.886*).

“The old road, even more than the present one, curved through rugged, bleak, rocky terrain where robbers could easily hide. It was considered especially dangerous, even in a day when travel was normally full of hazards” (*EBC 8.943*).

“*fell among thieves*. These were highwaymen, and not merely took property, but endangered the life. They were robbers. From Jerusalem to Jericho the country was rocky, mountainous, and in some parts scarcely inhabited. It afforded, therefore, among the rocks, a convenient place for highwaymen. This was a very frequented road. Jericho was a large place, and there was much traveling to Jerusalem. At this time also, Judea abounded with robbers.

Josephus says that at one time Herod the Great dismissed forty thousand men who had been employed in building the temple—a large part of whom became highwaymen” (Barnes 213).

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

“*a priest*. One who probably had been serving in the Jerusalem Temple and was making his way home after the end of his course” (AYB Luke x-xxiv.887).

“Priests served in the temple; their highest duty was to offer sacrifices. Levites assisted in the maintenance of the temple services and order. It has been suggested that the priest and the Levite refrained from helping the man because he appeared to be dead and they feared ritual defilement” (EBC 8.943).

“It is said that not less than twelve thousand priests and Levites dwelt at Jericho; and as their business was at Jerusalem, of course there would be many of them constantly travelling on that road” (Barnes 213).

“*passed by on the other side*. The implication of his passing by is to avoid contamination by contact with or proximity to a dead body” (AYB Luke x-xxiv.887).

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

“*a Levite*. The name originally designated a member of the tribe of Levi, a descendant of Jacob’s third son (Gen. 29:34)” (AYB Luke x-xxiv.887).

“*came and looked on him*. It is remarked by critics here, that the expression used does not denote, as in the case of the priest, that he accidentally saw him, and took no farther notice of him, but that he ‘came and looked on him more attentively,’ but still did nothing to relieve him” (Barnes 213).

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

“*A certain Samaritan.* The Samaritans were the most inveterate foes of the Jews. They had no dealings with each other. It was this fact which rendered the conduct of this good man so striking, and thus set in such strong contrast the conduct of the priest and the Levite. They would not help their own afflicted and wounded countryman. *He*, who could not be expected to aid a Jew, overcame all the usual hostility between the people; saw in the wounded man a neighbor, a brother, one who needed aid; and kindly denied himself to show kindness to the stranger” (Barnes 213).

“*Took pity. (esplachnishte)* implies a deep feeling of sympathy, a striking response that stands in contrast, not only to the attitude of the priest and the Levite, but also to the usual feelings of hostility between Jew and Samaritan. This pity is translated into sacrificial action. The Samaritan probably used pieces of his own clothing to make the bandages; he used his own wine as a disinfectant and his own oil as a soothing lotion. He put the man on ‘his own donkey’ and paid the innkeeper out of his own pocket, with the promise to pay more if needed” (EBC 8.943).

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.

“*pouring olive oil and wine* over them. They were the provender that the Samaritan had with him on his journey” (AYB Luke x-xxiv.888).

“If this He does not merely say in general that he showed him kindness, but he told *how* it was done. He stopped—came where he was—pitied him—bound up his wounds—set him on his own beast—conducted him to a tavern—stayed the night with him, and then secured the kind attentances of the landlord, promising him to pay him for his trouble—and all this without desiring or expecting any reward. had been by a *Jew*, it would have been signal kindness. If it had been by a *Gentile*, it would also have been great kindness. But it was by a *Samaritan*—a man of a nation most hateful to the Jews, and therefore it most strikingly shows what we are to do to friends and foes when they are in distress” (Barnes 213).

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

37 Go, and do thou likewise.

“Love should not be limited by its object; its extent and quality are in the control of its subject. Furthermore, love is demonstrated in action, in this case in an act of mercy. It may be costly: cloth, wine, oil, transportation, money, and sacrifice of time. There is a striking reversal of roles here. The Jewish ‘expert’ would have thought of the Jewish victim as a good person and the Samaritan as an evil one. To a Jew there was no such person as a ‘good’ Samaritan” (*EBC* 8.943).

“True religion teaches us to regard every man as our neighbor; prompts us to do good to all; to forget all national or sectional distinctions, and to aid all those who are in circumstances of poverty and want. If religion were valuable for nothing but this, it would be the most lovely and desirable principle on earth. Nothing that a young person can gain will be so valuable as the feeling that regards all the world as one great family, and to learn early to do good to all” (Barnes 214).

“Here is a constant note in Jesus’ ethical teaching and probably the most characteristic. One hears it again and again in the Sermon on the Mount, where we are told to love our enemies, to go the second mile, to give our cloak, too. Many of the parables sound it—as when the employer pays all his laborers the full wage though some have worked only for an hour, and a father rewards with gifts and a great feast an utterly unworthy son. So here again we find the hallmark of Jesus: the fact that the neighbor was so completely a stranger, being of all things a Samaritan; the extravagance of his compassion, pouring on oil and wine, binding up the man’s wounds, setting him on his own beast, bringing him to an inn and taking care of him. He could have stopped so much sooner than this and still have more than fulfilled any possible rule about one’s duty to a wounded stranger. But he did not stop even then—leaving money to pay for the man’s further care, and insisting that if more were needed, he should be allowed to pay the account on his return.

“The good Samaritan is not trying to do his duty. The point is that he is not aware of duty at all—any more than we are aware of duty when we act generously toward ourselves. We act so toward ourselves because we want to; so the Samaritan acts toward the stranger. He loves his neighbor as he loves himself” (*IB* 6.8)