

Jim Martin  
P.O. Box 291962  
Dayton, Ohio 45429

## September 2022 “JESUS: THE GOOD SAMARITAN”

Dear Friends,

Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31, and Luke 18:18-30 all record the story of “the rich young ruler.” In this story, a wealthy young man of prominence asks Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus made reference to various commandments which the man declared he had kept. Then Jesus told him to sell all he had, give to the poor, and follow Him. The young man, greatly challenged by that instruction turned, and walked away.

But this wasn’t the only time someone asked Jesus what was necessary to inherit eternal life.

***<sup>25</sup>And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? <sup>26</sup>He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? <sup>27</sup>And 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 neighbor as thyself. <sup>28</sup>And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. <sup>29</sup>But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:25-29)***

When asked about how to inherit eternal life, Jesus again made reference to the law, including love thy neighbor as thyself. This time the person asking the question agreed with Jesus, but to justify himself in the eyes of others that he was honored before God and guaranteed eternal life, he asked Jesus, “and who is my neighbor?” No doubt this man expected a reply that his neighbor included people he had already treated with kindness. However, the answer Jesus gave most likely shocked him, and we now refer to His answer as “The Parable of the Good Samaritan.”

In those days a lawyer (Greek: nomikós) was someone considered an expert in Mosaic Law. Generally speaking, lawyers, were also scribes and some of them were Pharisees. Typically, they wore phylacteries on their forehead or wrist, small leather pouches in which portions of the Law had been written on parchment. This lawyer knew the Law and he knew exactly what the religious leaders taught would guarantee a person eternal life.

Furthermore, the Jewish religious leaders had developed some very strange traditions regarding the definition of “neighbor” and who you could and couldn’t help. Very often, the definition of a neighbor was based totally on the perspective of the person doing the teaching and his opinion of others. Some taught that certain fellow Jews did not qualify to be a true neighbor. Others even taught it was illegal to help a Gentile woman during childbirth, her moment of greatest need. If you helped her at that moment, you were guilty of bringing another Gentile into the world.

All this being so, it helps explain why the lawyer in the story was tempting Jesus: He was hoping Jesus would say something that would contradict the Law and traditions concerning how to

receive eternal life and who to call a neighbor, thus opening the door for His ministry to be discredited. This is precisely why Jesus began telling the story of the “good Samaritan.”

*<sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, <sup>34</sup>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. <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? <sup>37</sup>And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke 10:30-37)*

The Jericho Road ran from Jerusalem, about 2,300 feet above sea level, to Jericho, about 1,300 feet below sea level. Thus, in approximately 20 miles, the road dropped 3,600 feet. For the most part, it was very narrow with rocky hills on either side and there were numerous twists and sharp turns. All of this made it an excellent route for thieves and violent attacks. It was considered immensely foolish to travel that road alone. At one time it was called “The Bloody Way.” Even into the 1930’s people were warned not to be on the road after dark: Abu Jildah, a well-known marauder, would often stop cars to rob travelers and tourists. So when Jesus told the story of a man being violently attacked on the Jericho Road, it was nothing new to the listeners.

The first person to find the victim of that brutal attack was a priest. In the context of this passage, it is referring to a high priest, not just a person who was a descendant of the tribe of Levi. Jesus said this priest saw the bloodied, beaten, and unconscious man, but crossed over to the other side of the road and didn’t even check to see if the man was alive. Why would a high priest do such a thing? Because according to the Law, ***He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days (Numbers 19:11)***. If he had checked on the condition of that man and discovered he was dead, he would have been unclean for seven days and could have lost his turn of duty in the temple. To that priest, the liturgy and ceremonial rites of religious service, along with the accompanying public recognition, meant more than the life of another human.

The next person to come along was a Levite. A Levite was a descendant of Levi, just like the priest. But in this story, Jesus is making a distinction between the priest and the Levite. As mentioned, the priest was a high priest, not just a descendant of Levi, but also a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest. According to the Law, only the descendants of Aaron could fulfill the duties of a high priest as described in scripture. The other male descendants of Levi had the responsibility to assist the high priest (reading Exodus through Deuteronomy reveals the duties of the Levites compared to those of the high priests). The life of a Levite was consumed with the busyness of construction maintenance in the temple, serving as guards for the priests and the temple, washing linens, butchering animals, processing grain offerings, and much more.

When the priest saw the overpowered and battered man he never broke stride, he just kept on walking. But at least the Levite stopped, walked over and looked at the person. Even so, he just shook his head at the sad misfortune and pathetic condition of the man, crossed the road, and continued on his journey. It's very possible he, too, was concerned about being unclean for seven days. Had he become unclean, he would not have been able to fulfill all his commitments and responsibilities in service to the priesthood and temple. The religion of doing was more important than the ministry of helping.

Interestingly, priests, Levites, Pharisees, scribes, lawyers and others hearing what Jesus said may well have thought, "All of this makes perfect sense. It's what any of us would do to maintain our proper standing before God."

Lastly, along comes a Samaritan. Samaritans were considered lower than dogs; Jews had absolutely no dealings with Samaritans, and there was great animosity between the two. The very fact that a Samaritan would show compassion to anyone was counter to what a Jew would expect. The more Jesus spoke, the more the listeners were captivated by His words. A person the Jews considered to be among the dregs of society was willing to touch the bloody wounds of the brutalized man, apply the sanitizing blend of oil and wine, and wrap the wounds with bandages. He then put him on his own method of transportation, took him to an inn and tended to him the rest of the night. In the morning, he told the innkeeper to do whatever was necessary to nurse him back to health, and that he would repay him for whatever it cost.

When Jesus asked the question, *Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves?* the only logical answer was the Samaritan. Then Jesus says, "Go, and thou likewise." I have no doubt that the pious, sanctimonious religious leaders present were at a loss for words; angry because Jesus had exposed their hypocrisy, yet shamed because down deep, they knew He was right.

As I was meditating on this story, the Holy Spirit began to use it to illustrate some strong principles for Christians in this day and hour.

The world is filled with lost people who are walking the Jericho Road of life in this fallen world. On the outside, some appear to have successful lives, while others are devastated by drugs, alcohol, poverty, and more. Regardless of how they appear on the outside, inwardly they are bloodied, distressed and brutally beaten by the death of their sin nature.

Jesus is the Good Samaritan who pours in the oil and the wine of salvation to all who call upon His Name. He gives them beauty for ashes, takes away their mourning and gives them the oil of joy, clothing them with a garment of praise that dispels the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61:3).

***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)***

He becomes the “beast” – the Lamb – Who bears their burdens. Once Jesus has delivered them from their devastated condition on the Jericho Road, He proceeds to take them to the inn. What is the inn? It is the local church. Who is the innkeeper? We are the innkeeper. We are responsible for taking care of those who Jesus has rescued: feeding them the Holy Manna of God’s Word, making sure their cup runneth over with water from the river of life, ministering to them in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, bathing their lives with the love wherewith God loves us, and being a witness unto Jesus to them. This is to be done no matter their background, skin color, past life, or if the world considers them to be the dregs of society.

The only way we can truly be the innkeeper Jesus desires is if we are pressing into God and maturing spiritually, growing from glory to glory into a reflection of the image of Jesus. The only way this can happen is if we are spending time in His presence, sowing His Word into our lives, praying (especially in the Spirit), worshiping (both privately and congregationally), and even fasting. Nothing else is revealed in scripture as having a direct, functional impact on our spirit for growth.

However, too many innkeepers (pastors) are like the priest in Jesus’ story. They are more concerned with building their church than their own spiritual lives. Many are operating their church like a business instead of a sanctuary of discipleship and a house of prayer. All too often there is an exaltation of denominational teachings or the latest theological fad over the tradition-destroying, unaltered Word of God. Some look for the next, best way to increase offerings. They are ignoring the true needs of the rescued of Jesus by “restoring” them with doctrine that is essentially world-based psychotherapy instead of life-changing truth.

Other innkeepers are like the Levite. They are so caught up in the busyness of service that they fail to spend adequate time sitting at the feet of Jesus. Untold hours are spent developing an audio and visual presentation that will “enhance” the worship service and sermon when all it’s really doing is distracting people with sensory stimulation. Worship teams work so hard on learning the newest “hit” song. Outreach programs are meticulously and laboriously planned out. This must be done, that must be accomplished, etc, etc, and everybody is doing these things “for the Lord.” I agree there are a great many tasks which must be accomplished in our lives and churches, but not at the sake of our spiritual growth.

We are to be an innkeeper who works in agreement with the Good Samaritan. He wants us ready and able to care for those He brings in. Furthermore, read again what was said to the innkeeper,

***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. (Luke 10:35)***

The Samaritan gave the innkeeper two pence, which to us may not seem like much, but back then it was the equivalent of at least a full day’s wage at a very good rate. This would have been far more than enough for a few days of lodging, meals and medical attention. Moreover, the Samaritan promised to reimburse the innkeeper for any additional expenses. This meant the innkeeper was not responsible for figuring out how to get more money to care for his new guest; all he had to do was tend to his needs. The Samaritan had promised to meet the need.

When we are pressing into God for the purpose of being His innkeeper, and then focusing on taking care of those our Good Samaritan brings in, He will provide the “two pence” we need. It will come in the form of money, supplies, and facilities, and He will continue to supply as the need arises. This does not mean we’re guaranteed to have opulent church facilities that resemble exclusive vacation resorts. But it does mean that when the desires of our Good Samaritan become our own, He will bless us for the purpose of fulfilling His ministry here on Earth.

Becoming an innkeeper for the Lord is absolutely a key to experiencing a latter-day outpouring of God’s Spirit and subsequent revival. It’s not just the lost who are in need on the Jericho Road; it’s also backslidden Christians and Believers who are worn out and beaten down by weak, theologically twisted teaching and starving for life-transforming truth. We must be ready to minister to all who come into our churches.

Jesus is our Good Samaritan; will we be His innkeeper?

In His Grace,

*Jim*

P.S. – I have a sermon that could be considered as a part two to the teaching in this letter. It is titled, *Cleansing Today’s Leper*, and you can receive a CD of this sermon by sending in the form below.

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\_\_\_\_\_ Check here to receive a CD of a sermon that parallels this letter, *Cleansing Today’s Leper*.”

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JIM MARTIN MINISTRIES  
P.O. Box 291962 • Dayton, Ohio 45429 • USA  
www.jmmgrace.com • PastorJimGCC@gmail.com