PARABLES

The Good Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Introduction

This parable is part of a theological dialogue between the Lord Jesus and a specialist in Jewish religious law. Every interpreter is influenced by his or her own language, culture, economics, politics and military history. This parable is set in early 1st century Palestine. To strip away this context and substitute our own 21st century English culture weakens the meaning of the parable. There is a tendency to ignore the dialogue and focus just on the story. As a result you get an ethical exhortation to reach out to those in need. This is typical of many talks I have heard on this parable. This is sad because the setting makes a great difference to the interpretation of the story.

The Dialogue

This is between the Lord Jesus and the lawyer whose official business was to interpret the laws of the Torah showing the relationship of the laws to the life of the people. The dialogue is made up of eight speeches in two rounds. In each round there are two questions and two answers.

Round One

(1) The lawyer: (question 1) ***"What must I <u>do</u> to inherit eternal life?"***

(2) The Lord Jesus: (question 2) ***"What about the law How do you read/recite?"***

(3) The lawyer: (answer to question 2) ***"Love God and your neighbour."***

(4) The Lord Jesus: (answer to question 1) ***"<u>Do</u> this and live."***

So this section of the dialogue opens with **"do"** and **"live"**.

Round Two

(5) The lawyer: (question 3) ***"Who is my neighbour?"***

(6) The Lord Jesus: (question 4) the story that ends with, "***Which of these became a neighbour ….?"***

(7) The lawyer: (answer to 4) ***"The one who showed mercy."***

(8) The Lord Jesus: (answer to 3) ***"<u>Go</u> and continue doing likewise."***

So in each round there are two questions and two answers. Both rounds of the dialogue are focused on the question, ***"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*** In the first round the lawyer asks the first question. Jesus doesn't answer the question but asks another question. The lawyer answers the question Jesus asks and then Jesus answers the original question. The pattern is repeated in the second round.

The first round focuses on **doing** something to inherit eternal life and so does the second round – seeking to clarify who is the neighbour we must love.

Each round begins with an analysis of the motive of the lawyer:

1st round – he wants to test the Lord Jesus

2nd round – he wants to justify himself

Each round ends with instructions on what to **do**. In Semitic cultures (including Muslim peoples) the issue is not so much on what you know and therefore believe, but rather what you have to **do** to be a truly spiritual person and so gain the favour of God.

The Text of Round One

"And behold a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test saying, [Q. 1] '***Teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'*** [Q. 2] ***He said to him, 'What is written in the law? How do you read/recite?'*** [Ans. To Q. 2] ***And he answered, 'You shall 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 your neighbour as yourself.'*** [Ans. to Q. 1] ***And He said to him, 'You have answered right. Do this and you will live.' "***

Note the inversion – the first and fourth speeches are on the subject of **doing** and **life**. In the second and third the topic is 'the Law'.

Speech One

Note the built-in inner deception of this lawyer. In the Near East at that time teachers used to sit and instruct. Students would stand to answer a question. ***"So the lawyer stood up."*** It is a social courtesy. The lawyer gives the Lord Jesus a title of respect – teacher/rabbi – in affirmation that He is at least his equal. But his motive was to test/examine the Lord Jesus.

The word Luke uses is a very strong word – test/tempt. It is only used one other time in the Gospels when the Lord Jesus said to the devil, ***"You shall not test/tempt the Lord your God."*** Possibly the lawyer imagined he could trap the Lord Jesus by means of His answer and then take some trivial word and shape it into evidence Jesus' enemies could fashion into a denial of the Law of Moses. Yet the question he asked is perhaps the most important question that any one of us could ask! On the surface it is rather a pointless question for what can anyone **do** to inherit anything? Only the legal heirs inherit anything. You can't **do** anything to inherit. It is a gift.

In the Old Testament the idea of inheritance was applied to the privilege of the People of God in their inheritance of the Land of Promise. The land was given to the people as a gift from God. It was not earned or deserved. Inheritance isn't a payment for services rendered. [Israel didn't conquer the land herself. God gave Israel the land as her share – its boundaries.]

But by the inter-testamental period the phrase, ***"inherit the land/earth"*** had come to mean "the full salvation" – spiritual, economic, political etc. – intended by God for His people. In Is. 60:21 we read, ***"Your people shall all be righteous. They shall possess the land for ever."*** Over the process of time 'inheritance' had become '**eternal life**' – ***"the life of the world to come"***.

So this type of discussion regarding 'eternal life' was taking place widely at the time of the Lord Jesus. The 'inheritance' became 'eternal life' and the way to achieve this was to keep the Law. A famous Rabbi Hillel who lived at the same time as the Lord Jesus said:

"Who has gained for himself words of the Torah has gained for himself the life of the world to come."

A non-canonical book – the Psalms of Solomon – written about 50 BC said:

"To them that walk in the righteousness of His commandments in the Law He commanded us that we might live, the pious of the Lord shall live for ever."

[So you are righteous if you keep the Law and you will inherit eternal life.] But in the same Psalms of Solomon it says,

"Therefore their (sinners) *inheritance is Sheol and darkness and destruction, but the pious of the Lord shall inherit life in gladness"*.

This is exactly what Islam teaches. In their case the law is the Shariah [The Taliban – meaning students – are experts in the law.]

What this lawyer expected was a **list** of all the things he should **do** and then he could begin to debate on all the finer points in an attempt to prioritise all the laws of Moses and decide what should be on the list and what should not.

The Lord Jesus had a choice of how He could answer. He could have:

1. Followed the Old Testament teaching and pointed out that the "inheritance of Israel" was a gift and you could do nothing to earn it. This would probably have led to a sterile debate.
2. Gone along with the typical opinion and concentrated on **the Law** in Scripture. This in itself indicates the high honour in which the Lord Jesus held the Old Testament – see Is. 8:20. This is the option Jesus chose. This is amazing to me! Why? We will see.

The lawyers were probably very uneasy about the attitude of the Lord Jesus to the Law. Did He or did He not believe that the inheritance of Israel was available through keeping the Law? The key was to discover the answer to this question.

Speech Two

The Lord Jesus doesn't answer except by asking a question! ***"What is written in the law? How do you read/recite?"*** Why did He refuse to answer the question? Possibly His refusal to give a direct answer is because He understands what the lawyer is trying to do. So the Lord obliges the lawyer to expose his own views on the Law of Moses. Don't always be in a hurry to offer advice! First ask questions and allow everything to come out into the open.

Speech Three

The lawyer gave the right answer, the only answer and a complete answer! For the lawyer answers with the Lord Jesus' own teaching! The Lord had combined Deut. 6:5 (love God) with Lev. 19:18 (love your neighbour). The Lord Jesus knows that any lawyer will affirm, "Keep the Law". This lawyer knew that, in a masterly way, the Lord Jesus had already brought these two parts of the Law together. This was a stroke of pure genius! So the lawyer quotes the Lord Jesus in order to get Him into a debate.

Normally lawyers will quote Scripture in the order in which it is given. The Lord Jesus quotes the Deuteronomy passage before the Leviticus passage. The order is important. We have all experienced that it is very hard to love some of our unlovely neighbours until our hearts are filled with a love for God. Then the overwhelming grace of God provides us with the energy and motivation for the hard work of loving our neighbours.

Often the recipients of our love and care misunderstand our motives and they respond with hostility rather than gratitude. So if we hope to be sustained by appreciative responses and they don't come, then we are sorely tempted to give up in frustration and disappointment. But if we are to continue in giving costly acts of love to others, then it must be out of sheer gratitude to God for His love, mercy and grace towards us.

Speech Four

"And He said to him, 'You have answered right; <u>do</u> this and you will live.' "

The lawyer has the right theology but his performance is still in question. The Lord Jesus evokes the right answer from the lawyer himself. He doesn't tell the lawyer what to do. Rather he gets the lawyer to tell himself!

But the Lord Jesus has widened the discussion. The lawyer asked about 'eternal life. Now the discussion is widened to **all** of life!

In the old Syriac and current Arabic translations, ***"you will live"*** is put into the immediate future, ***"Do this now and now you will live"***. Jesus is quoting what Joseph said in Gen. 42:18. Joseph is talking about the near future when his brother Benjamin is brought to him. The Lord Jesus does this in other places – shifts an exclusive interest in the future to an inclusion of the present (see Luke 18).

Finally the verb "do" is in the present imperative meaning "keep on doing". The lawyer asks, ***"What <u>having done</u>, I will inherit?"*** The answer the Lord Jesus gives is for an open-ended lifestyle that requires unlimited and unqualified love for God and for people.

Now the lawyer has set up a standard that **no one** can fully reach. By His answer the Lord Jesus is saying, *"You want to **do** something to inherit eternal life? Very well, just continually love your neighbour with the totality of what you are"*. There is no list of requirements.

The requirements are limitless! Paul would completely agree with the Lord Jesus – complete obedience to the Law of God is the way to be right with God, but we are totally unable to obey the Law totally! [Rom. 3:20; 7:13-20] It is as if, in answer to the question ***"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*** Jesus had said *"You must jump unaided over a ten metre high fence!"* It is impossible! The finest athletes can manage just over two metres!

So the first round of the debate closes. But the lawyer has not given up the hope of **earning** his own entrance into eternal life. The God he must love is known. But who is this neighbour he must love as himself? He needs a definition or a list!

Round Two

Speech Five

"He, desiring to justify himself, said, 'Who is my neighbour?' "

To be justified is to be saved and to be saved is to "inherit eternal life."

The lawyer is still hoping he can **do** something and gain eternal life. He doesn't understand that he can only live 'by mercy'. He doesn't want to live by mercy. He probably doesn't even know what it is. He is living by his own intention and ability to present himself as a righteous man before God. He put to Jesus the question, ***"Who is my neighbour?"*** in order to get a short list such as, 'Your family, relatives and close friends'. The lawyer can then answer, "I have fully loved these." He hopes Jesus will then praise him and say, "You have truly fulfilled the law." The lawyer can then leave basking in this praise of his good works before the listeners. He will enjoy his newly won honour based on this praise!

The lawyer was very surprised to be told a story! Lev. 19:17-18 defines a neighbour as one's brother and "the sons of your own people". The rabbis said this included all Jews. They were sure that no Gentiles were neighbours and many excluded proselytes as well. We are all tempted to read the Scriptures selectively for the passage in Leviticus (19:34) goes on to say, ***"The stranger who lives with you shall be to you as a native among you and you shall love him as yourself …."***

One rabbinical saying is that: *"Heretics, informers and renegades should be pushed into the ditch and not pulled out."*

There is a commentary on Ruth that says: *"The Gentiles, among whom and us there is no war, and keepers of sheep among the Israelites, we are not to contrive their death, but if they be in any danger of death we are not bound to deliver them. For example if any of them fall into the sea you shall not need to take them out, for it is said: 'Thou shalt not rise up against the blood of thy neighbour' but such a one is not thy neighbour."*

A friend of mine in war-torn Beirut, Lebanon was crossing the Green Line that separated the Christian and Muslim areas. It was always a place of danger from sniper fire. He saw a car broken down in no man's land and the driver was signalling them to stop. It was dark and raining, but my friend got out of his car and changed the other man's flat tire. The man stayed in his car! He offered my friend money but he refused. My friend gave the man some evangelistic literature. He asked if he was a priest and a foreigner. He replied that he was sort of both! *"Ah"* exclaimed the man, *"Only someone like you would help me here in the middle of no man's land."* He went on to say that Arabs do not concern themselves with strangers in the Middle East.

So the lawyer asked his question in the context where the oral law was not uniform and where there were a variety of views on who was really one's neighbour.

The Lord Jesus gives an immortal reply to this question in the story of the Good Samaritan. As in the first round, Jesus wants to solicit from the lawyer his own answer. But the question is really unanswerable and should never have been asked. Love doesn't begin by trying to define the objects to be loved. Love discovers them! The unanswerable question remains unanswered, but it is transformed in the response Jesus makes.

There are seven scenes in the story. The first three are dominated by the robbers, the priest and the Levites. In each scene the action is characterised by **come**, **do** and **go**. Each of them comes, does something and leaves. The Samaritan breaks this pattern. He doesn't go. He carries out seven actions on behalf of the wounded man. He does what the others didn't do. The climax of the story is in the centre with the unexpected compassion of the Samaritan.

It is another demonstration of the courage of the Lord Jesus. Would you tell a story in a crowded café in Hamas-held Gaza City about a kind and compassionate Israeli?

The structure of the story: A parabolic ballad/poem

A. ***"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho***
and he fell among robbers. COME
And they stripped him and beat him DO
and departed leaving him half dead. GO

B. ***Now by co-incidence a certain priest was going down that road*** COME
and when he saw him DO
he passed by on the other side. GO

C. ***Likewise also a Levite came to the place*** COME
and when he saw him, DO
he passed by on the other side. GO

D. ***And a certain Samaritan, travelling, came to him*** COME
and when he saw him, DO
he had compassion on him. DO

C.* ***He went to him*** DO
and bound up his wounds DO
pouring on oil and wine. DO

B.* ***Then he put him on his own riding animal*** DO
and led him (it) to the inn DO
and took care of him. DO

A.* ***The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the manager***
and said, 'Take care of him and whatever more you spend, on my return
I will repay you.' " DO

The list of actions carried out by the lone Samaritan is long because he must make up for the failures of the others in the order of the parabolic structure:

- The Levite could have given first aid.
- The priest was riding and could have taken the man to safety.
- The robbers took his money and his clothes and the Samaritan made up for this.

We need to look carefully at these seven scenes – remember seven is the perfect number.

Scene One: The Robbers

Jerusalem was the city of history and the temple – the great centre of the privileged. Jericho was in a beautiful situation – a city of fruit trees and palms. In the 1st century it had become a priestly city since it was warmer in the winter than Jerusalem where it can snow.

It is a 17-mile walk down the hill from Jerusalem to Jericho. It is a drop of about 5000 feet and it goes through sparsely populated wilderness country. It has always been a dangerous journey:

- Pompey (the opponent of Julius Caesar) had to wipe out 'a stronghold of brigands' on this road.
- The crusaders built a fort at the halfway mark to protect pilgrims since brigands were a serious threat.

- In the mid-19th century a group of British tourists travelled over the same road with a large armed guard. One tourist fell behind and was attacked, robbed and stripped naked!

So this road was the perfect setting for this story. [The Roman road still exists although now there is a wider modern road near it.]

The story leaves the identity of the man undescribed. The audience probably assumes the traveller is a Jew. He is beaten, stripped and left "half dead". The beating means that he struggled with his attackers. This is still common in the Near East. If you passively hand over money you won't be beaten. Resistance results in a beating. The rabbis identified different stages in death. 'Half dead' means that he was at the point of death. The next stage is 'just expiring'. Clearly the man is unconscious and can't identify himself; nor can any onlooker ascertain his identity. So he is stripped and unconscious. This creates the heart of the drama.

Palestine then and now is made up of various ethnic people groups. A traveller can identify them in two ways. He can talk to the person and identify him from his speech and dialect. [Dialects tell you where people are from. Remember 'My Fair Lady'.]

At that time in Palestine there was an extraordinary number of languages and dialects including classical Hebrew, late Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Ashodian, Samaritan, Phoenician, Arabic, Nabatean, Latin etc. The country had many settled pagans. No one travelling on a road in Palestine could be sure any stranger he met would be a Jew. A few quick questions and his language/dialect would identify him. But what if he was unconscious?

The second way to identify a person would be to look at his clothes. Today in the mountain villages of Lebanon you can easily tell the difference between Sunni, Shi'a, Druze and Maronites by the clothes they wear. Paintings on the walls of tombs in Palestine show distinctive Hellenistic clothes that are very different from Jewish clothes. So in 1st century Palestine it is highly probable that different ethnic groups could be distinguished on sight. A hundred years ago you could tell which town people came from by their clothes. In Jordan you can distinguish between someone from the East bank and someone from the West Bank by his kuffiyah.

But this man was stripped! It wasn't possible to discover which ethic or religious community he belonged to. He was just a man in great need! Who will turn aside to help him?

Scene Two: The Priest

The priest is almost certainly riding a horse. Why? Priests were among the prestigious elite of their society. In the Near East no one with any status takes a 17-mile walk through the desert on a dangerous road! Only the poor walk. Everyone else rides on a donkey or, in the case of the upper classes, a horse. Without this basic assumption the story loses much of its meaning. If the priest had been walking, what could he have done besides offering a bit of first aid and hoping someone with an animal would pass by and really be able to help? The story assumes that the priest didn't do what the Samaritan later did. If this was the case we would have to conclude that the Samaritan should help just because he was the only one who could help. The story pre-supposes that there was equal potential for all three men to help.

So the parable gives us a picture of the priest riding by, seeing the wounded man and steering his mount to the far side of the road.

A re-construction of the worldview of the priest and his possible choices

In inter-testamental Jewish literature called the Sirach (written by Ben Sirach about 200 BC), we read in 12:1-7, *"If you do a good turn, know for whom you are doing it, and your deeds will not go to waste. Do good to a devout man and you will receive a reward, if not from him, then certainly from the Most High…. Give to a devout man; do not go to the help of a sinner. Do good to a humble man. Give nothing to a godless one. Refuse him bread, do not give him any, it might make him stronger than you are; then you would be repaid evil twice over for all*

the good you have done him. For the Most High detests sinners and will repay the wicked with a vengeance. Give to the good man and do not go to the help of a sinner."

So those who offer help to sinners are working against God Himself who detests sinners. Clearly Ben Sirach cautions against helping **any** strangers. The priest may have been influenced by such a current idea of his time.

The rabbis taught, *"How do we know that if a man sees his fellow drowning, mauled by beasts or attacked by robbers, he is bound to save him? From the verse, you shall not stand by the blood of your neighbour."*

So the poor priest is in a dilemma since he didn't see what happened and he can't tell if the man is a neighbour. He is paralyzed. There are four options:

- He gets off the horse and finds the man dead
- He gets off his horse and finds that the man is alive but he is not a Jew
- He finds that the man is a Jew and is alive
- He can pass by on the other side

If the man is dead any contact with him will defile the priest. A tithe of a tithe – called a 'wave offering' – is given to the priests. This is what his family and servants eat. If he defiles himself he won't get any 'wave offering' and neither will any of his family. The Law lists five sources of defilement. Contact with a corpse is at the top of the list.

Contacting ritual impurity is a serious matter. The priest is struggling to be a good man by avoiding sin and keeping himself pure. Like the robbers' victim he was travelling **down** from Jerusalem to Jericho. Priests served in the temple for two weeks. We can presume that this priest had fulfilled his period of service and was on his way home to Jericho where the weather was warmer.

During a daily sacrifice all the ritually unclean had to stand at the East Gate in front of the altar in order to shame them. This poor priest would have to endure this shame. Then he would have to go through the process of restoring ritual purity. This was costly and time-consuming. He would have to find, buy and reduce to ashes a red heifer – a ritual that would have taken at least a week.

So, according to the Law, the priest can't get closer than about 2 meters to the wounded man to see if he is dead. If he is dead he has to rend his garments. But this action is against the Law, "Do not destroy valuable things." Also the commandment not to defile was unconditional while the commandment to love his neighbour was conditional.

So the priest has a **legal obligation** to pass by. All the other priests as well as his family and the Pharisees would have applauded his decision! The priest was the victim of the system – a rulebook of man-made religious rules – a codified system of 'dos' and 'don'ts'.

This is very common today among Christians, Jews, Muslims and many other religious systems for it gives security in that it provides quick answers to all of life's problems and questions. When confronted by an unconscious man on the road, we often find our agenda has shifted from 'reaching out in freedom to the one in need beside the road' to 'maintaining status within the supporting community'. This 'power' seems to have overtaken the priest and he passes by on the other side. But fear of defilement may not have been his strongest motive. It may have been fear of the robbers! Self-centredness is the leading characteristic of the majority of people.

Scene Three: The Levite

"Likewise also a Levite came to the place	COME
and when he saw him	DO
he passed by on the other side."	GO

Both the Levite and the priest fall into the 'come-go-do' pattern established by the robbers. The priest and the Levite contributed to the wounded man's suffering by their neglect.

Probably the Levite could see the priest ahead of him on the road going down as he was going down. The traces of the old Roman road are still there and you can see the road ahead for a considerable way. On this road, with the frequent robber attacks, any traveller is probably very interested in who else is on the road. His life may depend on it!

The Levite is not bound by as many regulations as the priest and he could have allowed himself more latitude than the priest. He only needed to be ritually pure while in the course of his duties – not all the time as in the case of the priest. So the Levite could have given help and if the man was dead or died in his hands then he too would have been defiled. The priest saw and passed by, but the Levite **came to the place** – i.e. he went up close – closer than 2 meters – to get a closer look. Then he decided against giving any help and passed by.

Of course if the wounded man was alive and was a Jew, then if the Levite did what the priest had refused to do and rescued him, the action of the Levite would have been highly critical of the priest's hardness of heart and his interpretation of the Law.

The Levite is a lower social caste than the priest and may well have been walking. If that was the case, he couldn't have got the wounded man to safety. If he stays robbers may well attack him too. So he too passes by on the other side.

Scene Four: The Samaritan

"A certain Samaritan, travelling, came to him	COME
and when he saw him,	DO
He had compassion on him."	DO

So the audience listening to the story saw a progression in these three characters – the first a priest – the second a Levite. They probably thought the third was going to be an ordinary Jew. Much to the shock of the audience the third man was **a hated Samaritan**!

Ben Sirach again (speaking on behalf of God):

"There are two nations that my soul detests
the third is not a nation at all;
The inhabitants of Mount Seir (the Edomites) *and the Philistines*
and the stupid people living in Shechem." (Samaritans)

There is a Mishna saying, *"He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to the one who eats the flesh of swine."*

There was great bitterness between the Samaritans and the Jews. According to Josephus, a short while before the ministry of the Lord Jesus the Samaritans invaded the temple during the Passover and defiled it by scattering human bones in the Temple Court. Samaritans were publically cursed in the synagogues. Daily petition was offered up in prayer to God that the Samaritans might not have eternal life. We read in John 4:9 that the Samaritans had no dealings with the Jews.

It is hard to imagine the shock and horror of the audience as Jesus tells a story that makes a hated, despised Samaritan appear to be morally superior to the religious and moral leadership of the Jewish people!

The word **'compassion'** has the root word for 'gut' (*'splanchnon'*). A Samaritan is not a Gentile. He is bound by the same Torah as the Jews. He is travelling in **Judea** and there are robbers around. He is the least likely person to stop for he was hated more than the Gentiles. In spite of this, the Samaritan has a 'gut level reaction' to the unconscious wounded man and he is the man who **acts**. The priest goes down the road. The Levite comes to the place and the Samaritan **comes to the man**.

In the life of the Lord Jesus there are five occasions that evoked a feeling of compassion. This word is only used either about Jesus or by Jesus about others – as in this case of the Samaritan. Compassion is the inspiration for keeping the Law.

- **Hunger**: When Jesus realised the multitude hadn't eaten for 3 days He was moved with compassion. This led to the feeding of the 5,000. (Mt. 14:14)
- **Sickness**: the blind in Mt. 20:34 and the sick in Mt. 14:14.
- **Social alienation** – lepers: Jesus ***"moved with compassion stretched out His hand and touched him" and*** healed him. (Mk. 1:49)
- **People like sheep without a shepherd**: Those who were harassed, helpless and a prey to every sort of wolf. (Mt. 9:36)
- **Death**: The widow had lost her husband and now her only son had died, ***"And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her"***. He brought the young man to life again. (Lk. 7:11)

The Samaritan is probably a merchant with a string of donkeys loaded with goods. He is a prime target for robbers. They might have some respect for the priest and the Levite as 'men of religion' but would have no hesitation in attacking a hated Samaritan. The Samaritan isn't influenced by the action of the priest and the Levite. He could have said, *"This unconscious man is probably a Jew and two other Jews have abandoned him to die, why should I get involved?"*

There is an additional reason we will explore later and that is liability. He will risk heavy retaliation from the man's family if he helps the wounded Jewish man and the man dies. But in spite of all this, deep compassion motivates him into action.

Scene Five: First Aid

The language the Lord Jesus used is deceptively simple:

- Clean and soften the wounds with oil
- Disinfect them with wine
- Bind them up

But this isn't the language of the text! The text says he bound up the wound and then poured. Why? In Hosea 6:1-10 God is speaking and the following phrases are used:

√ He has torn
√ He will bind us up
√ He will revive us
√ He will raise us up that we may live before Him
√ He will come to us
√ Your love is like … dew that goes away early
√ I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice
√ They transgressed the covenant
√ Robbers lie in wait for a man
√ Priests … commit villainy
√ In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing

God will come to us! God will bind us up! God will revive us! God will raise us up! The symbolism is clear and strong. God acts to save this man unconscious on the road and He chooses the Samaritan to act as His agent! The Samaritan is a rejected outsider. There are theological implications in this!

Oil and wine were not only first aid remedies. They were also used in Temple worship. The verb 'pour' is the language of worship. For centuries past God has spoken through the prophets:

Hosea 6:6 ***"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."***

Micah 6:8 ***"He has told you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"***

Here in this story we have the same shift to a call to sacrificial service motivated by self-giving love. In Phil. 2:17, Paul said, ***"Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith."*** In Romans 12:1 he calls us to be, ***"Living sacrifices"***. So for the prophets the language of sacrifice is a concern for self-giving love.

The priest and the Levite were religious professionals who knew all the precise rituals of sacrifice. They officiated at all the sacrifices and the pouring out of oil and wine on the altar, but they failed miserably to be a 'living sacrifice'.

It was the hated Samaritan who poured out the libation on the altar of this man's wounds. The response of the Samaritan to this man's need is a profound expression of the steadfast love for which the prophets were calling. So it is the Samaritan who pours out the true offering acceptable to God.

If the wounded man had recovered consciousness, the Pharisees would have expected him to insult the Samaritan! The oil and the wine came from an unclean Samaritan. On top of that, no tithe had been paid on them so the wounded man would be obligated to pay the tithe on them. But he had been robbed!

Scene Six: The Transport to the Inn

"Then he put him on his own animal
and led him (it) to the inn
and took care of him."

The Samaritan did what the priest should have done. The implication in the tense is that he had other animals. This animal is his own animal. The old Syriac says it is a donkey. Near East donkeys can easily carry two people. Probably the Samaritan is riding with the wounded man in front of him. Or perhaps the wounded man was on the donkey and the Samaritan acted out the role of a servant in leading the animal to the inn.

If the second is true, this is a further humiliation by the Samaritan. Remember the surprise and humiliation of Haman who expects to be the rider but finds himself leading the horse on which his enemy Mordecai is riding (Esther 6:7-11). These same social attitudes remain unchanged through the centuries. So here we have a middle class merchant with a number of animals and goods who takes on the role of a servant and leads the donkey to the inn.

His willingness to go to the inn and remain there overnight caring for the needs of the wounded man is a further act of self-giving love because of the custom of blood vengeance.

The Mosaic Law established cities of refuge for people under threat of death from blood vengeance retaliation. Evidently the Law was not able to eradicate this extremely strong custom. Today these are called 'honour killings'. There are hundreds of people in Jordanian prisons who have not done anything against the law. They are in prison in order to protect them! If they were set free they would immediately be killed in blood vengeance.

In Jordan, if you accidently knock someone down when driving – especially a child – you must not stop! You must drive as fast as you can to a police station and report what has happened. They will go to the scene of the accident, find out what happened and will then negotiate 'blood money' – i.e. what you have to pay in compensation for the accident.

If you stop and the person's arm is broken, your arm will be broken by a relative of the injured man. An American Christian was asked to pay damages caused by an American in an Arab country because he 'belonged to the same tribe'!

The Samaritan allows himself to be identified and so runs a grave risk of the family of the wounded man seeking him out and taking out vengeance on him. The Samaritan could have left the wounded man at the edge of Jericho and then disappeared. A Samaritan would not be safe in a Jewish town with a wounded Jew on the back of his donkey. Community vengeance would be exacted even if he has saved the life of the Jew.

People are just as illogical today. If a stranger gets himself involved it is assumed he is responsible! This was even more likely since he was from a hated minority community. His act of kindness would make no difference. When he stays at the inn through the night and promises to return, in effect he is saying, 'I am responsible for what happened to this man'.

Scene Seven: The Final Payment

"The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the manager and said, 'Take care of him and whatever more you spend, on my return I will repay you'."

Two denarii would cover the bill for food and lodging for at least a week – perhaps two. So the story comes full circle. The Samaritan reverses the actions of the robbers.

The Robbers	**The Samaritan**
rob him	pays for him
leave him dying	leaves him being taken care of
abandon him	promises to return

The wounded man has no money. If he can't pay the bill when he leaves, he will be arrested. We know people were imprisoned for bad debts and even sold as slaves if they couldn't pay. (Mt. 18:23-25) This Samaritan helps the man to get well and also helps him to leave. The Samaritan had no hope of re-imbursement. In spite of the cost in time, effort, money and personal danger he freely demonstrates unexpected love to one in need.

This is a picture of the Lord Jesus and the kind of love God offers us. He appeared suddenly and unexpectedly from the outside and acted to save. It is interesting that the Jews taunted Him with the words, ***"Are we not right in saying you are a Samaritan…?"*** (Jn. 8:48)

The traditional religious leaders fail, yet God's representative arrives. He finds sinful man utterly helpless – unable even to call out. He 'binds up the wounds'. The overtones of Christology are in the parable. It is easy to see the Lord Jesus' understanding of His own ministry as the Suffering Servant come to save. He humbled Himself in order to restore wounded mankind. He paid a high price. The Samaritan promised to return and so does the Lord Jesus.

Round Two

He (the lawyer) desiring to justify himself had asked (Q. 3), ***"Who is my neighbour?"*** The Lord Jesus tells the story and then asks, ***"Which of these do you think became a neighbour to the man who fell among robbers?"***

The lawyer answered, ***"The one who showed mercy on him."*** Jesus answered him, (Q. 3) ***"Go and you do likewise."*** He gave the Lord Jesus the right answer but he didn't say, 'the Samaritan'. He couldn't take that name on his lips.

So the Lord Jesus will not give the lawyer a list of those who are neighbours and those who are not. The question is, **"To whom must you <u>become</u> a neighbour?"** The answer is **not** just a general statement to encourage us to do good works. It is an answer to the lawyer's question about self-justification. The lawyer wants to know how many people of which sort he must love to achieve a state of righteousness by his own efforts. Jesus is clearly saying that unless we show love to all humanity we cannot claim to have received eternal life.

The problem is: Who can meet this standard? The clear answer is, "This is beyond me. I can't justify myself, but all things are possible with God." (cf. Lk. 18:27)

So the lawyer understands: I must **become a neighbour to anyone in need**. To fulfil the Law means that I must reach out in costly compassion to **all people** – even to my enemies. The standard remains even though I can never fully achieve it. I cannot justify myself and earn eternal life.

Nevertheless we must love all people and be kind to all whenever the occasion requires it. For the whole of mankind is our 'neighbour'. Yet, sadly, even among believers there is an enormous amount of stinginess, meanness, ill nature and suspicion.

Summary of the Theology of the Parable

1. All attempts at self-justification are doomed to failure. The standard is too high. Eternal life can't be earned. It is a gracious gift from God.

2. The parable holds up an ethical standard to strive for even though it can never be fully achieved. Like the command, ***"Be perfect"*** (Mt. 5:48) it remains the standard even though it is impossibly high.

3. A code book/system approach to ethics is always inadequate. The goal is not being diligently 'religious' – frenzied exactness in keeping rules and doing incessant good works. God's standard is not achievement but commitment – not activities but attitudes to people – not quantity but quality. Our neighbour is anyone in need regardless of language, religion or ethnicity. The priest and the Levite did not discover their duty by just examining their code books!

4. The Samaritan – a hated outsider – demonstrates compassionate love. This is a sharp attack on communal and racial prejudices.

5. Love is something you feel that leads to doing.

6. There is a dynamic concept of our neighbour. Our 'neighbour' is re-shaped into the question, "To whom must I **become** a neighbour?" The answer is then everyone in need – even my enemy.

7. God's authority is not bound just to the official leadership of believers. When that leadership fails, God is free to choose others for an expression of His salvation as He did with Amos.

8. Two types of sin and two types of sinner appear in the story. The robbers hurt the man by violence. The priest and the Levite hurt him by neglect. All three are guilty. The failed opportunity to do good becomes an evil.

9. Salvation comes to the wounded man in the form of a costly demonstration of totally unexpected love. The Lord Jesus, the rejected outsider, seems to have cast Himself into the role of the Samaritan who appears dramatically on the scene to bind up the wounds of the suffering man. He is God's representative who gives a costly demonstration of unexpected love. It is a demonstration of the meaning of the Cross. It could have cost the Samaritan his life. It **did** cost the Lord Jesus His life.

10. The skill of the Lord Jesus as a teacher is evident. He doesn't answer the man's question. He simply raises other questions. He allows the lawyer to answer his own questions and in the process the Lord Jesus expands the lawyers understanding of the faithfulness required of him.