

# The Parables of Jesus



By Pastor Mark Friedrich and Ken Chitwood

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## Study 2

*An Adventure in Missing the Point*  
*Luke 10:25-37*

Presented by Ken Chitwood on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

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ken.chitwood@hotmail.com

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## Preface

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This study will focus on a rather familiar proverb. It is one of the most often quoted proverbs of Jesus, along with the parable of “The Prodigal Son.” Often called the proverb of “The Good Samaritan” this proverb is a dangerous one to study. Because of its popularity and frequent interpretation and application we run the risk of coming to this text with too many presuppositions and not enough of an open mind.

Last time we established some basic principles for studying the parables and applied them to the three short illustrations Jesus shares about discipleship.

This time around we are going to apply them to the parable of “The Good Samaritan” found in Luke 10: 25-37. As always, our task will be to listen to the parable, identify and note the significance of the *points of interest* within a parable and finally understand the context to apperceive how the original hearers would have been challenged by Jesus’ teaching in this parable.

Thus, as we begin, may we all possess a humble spirit to look anew at this age old proverb and delve deeper into its story and its truth.

In Him,  
Ken Chitwood

## **An Adventure in Missing the Point**

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*And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” 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 neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”*

*Luke 10: 25-37*

It is interesting to hear what being a Good Samaritan means in today's consciousness. Using the website [www.newser.com](http://www.newser.com) I looked up various stories having to do with, or referencing to, a “Good Samaritan” story. There were a lot of interesting finds. From the story of the hero pilot who landed his commercial airplane on the Hudson River last year to a man from Nanjing, China who's single-handedly prevented 144 suicides this year through intervention, to a man who knocked out a would-be thief with a Jenny-O turkey, the stories were varied and always interesting. A couple articles in particular that provoked me were the ones where Good Samaritans were punished for their good deed. In one case a man was sued by the woman he pulled from a burning car for contributing to her paralysis. Another man was given a jaywalking ticket after rescuing two elderly women from being hit by an oncoming vehicle. You'd think they would be treated as heroes, instead they are punished.

These stories got me thinking, what exactly is a “Good Samaritan.” I mean, the term seems like it is loosely used for anyone that commits a good deed. The other day on my afternoon run a man making a u-turn at Broadway and Power in Mesa lost his tire and landed on his disc. Sparks flew in all directions and the tire came right at me. I stopped it before it hit me or a vehicle and then rolled it over to help the man who lost control of his car. He came to a safe stop and I helped him get his car jacked up and contact AAA. When I turned to continue my run he said, “Thank you, it was so nice to have a Good Samaritan like you around today.”

Is that the force of Jesus’ parable?

Do good to others and you too are a “Good Samaritan”?

Is there more depth to the meaning of this parable or does it simply implore us to do good to others?

To properly appreciate the parable recorded in Luke 10: 25-37 we are required to do a good job understanding the dialogue between the “lawyer” and Jesus, recognize the points of reference in the parable itself and also be able to apply it through the lens of Jesus’ greater ministry and to our current lives.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is presented in Luke’s Gospel following the return of the seventy-two disciples and Jesus’ rejoicing in the Holy Spirit. However, our pericope of study stands apart from the sections that precede and follow it. Typically, Luke uses time references in his narrative such as “After this…” (Luke 10:1); “As they were going…” (Luke 9:57); “In that same hour…” (Luke 10:21); “Now when Jesus returned…” (Luke 8:40); “In the meantime…” (Luke 12:1) to connect different stories, teachings and miracles.

However, with Luke 10:25-37 he does not use a time reference. Instead he initiates the narrative with the words, “And behold…” (*Και ιδου* in the Greek). Rather than serving as a time reference, this is Luke’s favorite way to mark a significant passage in his Gospel (e.g. Luke 24:49). The Greek word for behold (*ιδου*) was used frequently by Matthew and Luke as in imitation of the Hebrew *hinay* (הִנֵּה) and gave a vivacity to the style of the authors, bidding the reader or hearer to particularly attend to what is being shared and/or to introduce something new. Both uses are obvious here.

The Good Samaritan encapsulates two of Luke's major themes: 1) Jesus is LORD and Savior of all and 2) Disciples of Jesus are to reach out to the ostracized of society. Thus, to Luke, this parable is of paramount significance and deserves our full attention.

Many of the other pieces of background information and context will be revealed with the exposition of each individual verse. So with no further adieu let us begin with our in-depth, verse-by-verse study of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

*And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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 neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."  
(10:25-29)*

The first few verses of this pericope are the opening dialogue between the "lawyer" and Jesus, which sets the stage for the parable itself. Without understanding the opening closing dialogue we have no hope of correctly interpreting the parable.

First, let us understand the man who is asking Jesus the question. The Greek word translated here as "lawyer" is **νομικος** and literally means "pertaining to the law." However, it was often used to refer to one learned in the Law. This isn't like our nephew or niece who is studying law at ASU right now. No, this person is knowledgeable in the Torah Law, the law of the Old Testament, the Mosaic law that even today guides the Hebrew people dispersed throughout the world. Whereas today the Torah Law encapsulates all Jewish law contained in the Torah itself, the Hebrew Scriptures, the Mishnah, the Midrash, the Talmud and even some commentaries such as the Tosefta; in Jesus' day the Torah Law was simply the Law as it was recorded in the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. All-in-all it entailed 613 prescriptions (these were known as the *mitzvot* or the Mosaic Law) in the time of Jesus and governed the life of every living Jew.

This expert in the Law was from the class of Jewish hierarchy known as the Scribes (or Pharisees, there is a lot of debate here about whether

Scribes and Pharisees are the same things are not. They may have come from different social strata, but their job was no less the same.). The Scribal tradition existed for centuries before the time of Jesus. Its official genesis was during the time of the return of Israel from exile in Babylon during the time of Ezra (ca. 458 B.C.-300 B.C.), although there were royal scribes who wrote down information and kept monarchy records for the kings of Israel and Judah (2 Samuel 8:17, 1 Kings 4:3, Proverbs 25:1, Jeremiah 52:25). The scribes of Ezra's day were those who copied the Pentateuch and interpreted the Law of Moses for the people. According to Jeremiah they boasted in their learning (Jeremiah 8:8). They were known collectively as the *sopherim*, or "men of the scroll."

This tradition petered out with the death of Simon the Just in 300 B.C. and from there developed a new class called the *tanaim*, or "repeaters" and teachers of the Law. These men were solely responsible for the exposition, understanding and interpretation of the Law for the Hebrews in the New Testament era until A.D. 70 at the destruction of the Temple, when more than half of the *mitzvot* became irrelevant.

We cannot picture these men as pastors or preachers. Their prime goal was to think through the various predicaments of life in light of the Law and take what was already binding and make it universally so through the use of reasoning. Therefore, with a simple commandment like "honor your father and mother" they had to expound upon what honor means, who your father and mother are, what if one dies...is the "and" continuous or does the death of one negate the loss of honor for the other, what if they are dishonorable to you etc. Due to this theoretical development of the Law, which moved past its simple prescriptions and instead developed an intricate system of applications and interpretations, Jewish Law in the time of Jesus was a complicated science. In order to make these augmented *mitzvot* universally binding on all Jews, the Scribes reasoned together in oral dialogue known as *midrash*. They would begin with a verse of Mosaic Law or a question and then proceed by asking each rabbi present how they "read" it or "interpreted" it.

Therefore, when this man stands (a social courtesy designed to show respect) and asks Jesus "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he is initiating some rabbinic/midrashic dialogue in order to test Jesus. Jesus properly responds by saying, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" Whereas the man sought to catch Jesus answering on his own, Jesus brings it back to God's Word – the Torah. Which is interesting

enough, since Jesus himself *is* the Living Torah, God's Word in the flesh (John 1:1-14). Because of this, Jesus could have responded with a discourse on the inheritance of eternal life, about the adoption of the saved as sons and daughters of the Everlasting and about the land of promise that we shall all inherit in the time to come. Instead, he turns the question back on the enquirer himself and in doing so comes to expose some of his misunderstandings and prejudices. He does not respond to the man's question because this first question is inherently flawed.

When the Scribe asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" we must all ask, "what can anyone do to inherit eternal life?"

In Jewish Law people received an inheritance as a gift based on who they were, not on what they had done. To do something to inherit eternal life implies that someone has done something dishonest as to "steal" or "coax" an inheritance from someone else (e.g. Genesis 25: 29-34, 27:1-46). An inheritance is not something you can earn, it is something given to a person that has done nothing to deserve it.

The most obvious case is the Hebrew nation itself, who inherited the land of promise from Yahweh by doing nothing to deserve it.

From the postexilic period and to the time of Jesus the "land of inheritance" was interpreted as eternal life and oddly enough the way to achieve it was through keeping the *mitzvot*.

Rabbi Hillel (a master of the post-Jesus Jewish rabbinic tradition) says that those who gain for themselves words of Torah gain for themselves the life of the world to come. An anonymous rabbi once said, "Great is Torah, for it gives to them that practice it, life in this world and in the world to come." Furthermore, in the non-canonical book Slavonic Enoch it is written:

*This place [Eden], O Enoch, is prepared for the righteous, who endure all manner of offense from those that exasperate the souls, who avert their eyes from iniquity, and make righteous judgments, and give bread to the hungry, and cover the naked with clothing, and raise up the fallen, and help injured orphans, and who walk without fault before the face of the Lord, and serve him alone, and for them is prepared this place for eternal inheritance.*



To the Scribe the answer to his question was obvious (keep the words of the Torah), but the question is posed anyways in order to test Jesus. The Scribe sadly misses the point. The Torah was, and is, not a religious “how to” book about earning God’s favor. It is a book about God’s gracious election and constitution of his people despite their sin. Therefore, Jesus does not answer the question directly and instead leads the Scribe with another question, to which the Scribe responds by combining the words of Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5 into one seamless *mitzvoth* (and with the added words, “and with your whole mind” likely a Scribal interpretive addition emphasizing the importance of understanding and interpreting the Torah – the Scribe in question’s job). The words he quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 are the words of the *Shema*, the motto and lynch-pin of Judaism, which the faithful were to recite twice daily. Jesus links these two passages as well (Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12: 28-34).

*“The answer assumes that the way of Torah is the way of life. All the teaching of Jesus stays aloft on the two wings of these two commandments.”*

***-Ephrem the Syrian***

Jesus seemingly affirms his answer by responding, “You have answered correctly…” but the punch line comes with his next words, “…do this and you will live.” The teacher of the Law can indeed give the right book answer, even one Jesus himself taught, but can he live it out?

Jesus is beginning to expose the hypocrisy evident in the lawyer’s line of questioning. Knowing the man’s heart, he commences by bringing to light the fact that the Scribe may know the right answer (*orthodoxy*) but he does not put it into right practice (*orthopraxy*). In the way of Jesus orthodoxy and orthopraxy are not two opposing forces, but instead form a mutual symbiosis whereby one supports the other and likewise. In the rabbinical school of the New Testament era there was far too much emphasis on orthodoxy and little care for orthopraxy.

*“With these verses belongs the text that exposes those who seem to themselves to be experts on the law, who keep the letter of the law but disregard its spirit.”*

***-Ambrose***

This point is soon divulged by the Scribe himself when he enjoins, “And who is my neighbor?” The very fact he asks this question implies that there are some people who are *not* his neighbor.

Now, this lawyer most likely thought he kept the Law in this respect. His understanding of neighbor, as we shall see, was a little different than ours or Jesus’. Today, we think of a neighbor as the person living next to us, someone in our community, a person in our nation or just anyone in the world. Sometimes our definition of neighbor is narrow, but most often it is fairly broad (at least in understanding, if not in practice). However, in those days the definition of neighbor that guided a person’s practice of Leviticus 19:18 was quite narrow. Listen to the words of the apocryphal book Sirach 12:1–7 (a book of intertestamental Judaic importance):

*If you do good, know to whom you do it, and you will be thanked for your good deeds. Do good to the devout, and you will be repaid, if not by them, certainly by the Most High. No good comes to one who persists in evil or to one who does not give alms. Give to the devout, but do not help the sinner. Do good to the humble, but do not give to the ungodly; hold back their bread, and do not give it to them, for by means of it they might subdue you; then you will receive twice as much evil for all the good you have done to them. For the Most High also hates sinners and will inflict punishment on the ungodly. Give to the one who is good, but do not help the sinner.*

The Scribes and Pharisees prided themselves on their generosity and their alms-giving. In their minds they not only “loved the LORD” with all their heart, mind, soul and strength but also exhibited Leviticus 19:18. However, their understanding of who exactly was a neighbor was foundationally flawed. And Jesus was going to expose that prejudice for all its terrible glory in the words of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

*“For all people are our neighbors, not only our brothers and relatives but also strangers.”*

**-Jerome**

*Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. (10:30)*

This unnamed man is traveling along the well traveled, and often dangerous, 17-mile road from Jerusalem to Jericho. There are many sources that describe this road as being one of the most dangerous in the ancient world. It was not only difficult for navigational reasons, but it was often plagued by thieves waiting in ambush for solitary or wayward travelers.

The road continued to be so dangerous that even in the Middle Ages the crusaders built a small fort at the halfway mark in order to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land.

Unfortunately, the man traveling this road is attacked by robbers and is left “half-dead”. This word implies that the man, without proper medical care, would soon die. He was almost dead when the robbers left him.

So here he lie, beaten, robbed, abandoned and left for dead.

*Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. (10:31)*

Here, we meet the second principal character in the parable and one of three key points of reference – the priest.

As shown in appendix 1 (p. 22) the priests were responsible for the cultic activities having to do with Jewish Temple worship. They were highly respected members of the Jewish high class and lived a structured life dictated by various stringent rules of purity so that they could rightfully perform the tasks of the Temple.

Most likely, the priest of this parable is riding a donkey, due to his high standing and wealth. As he comes “down the road” he is faced with a disturbing multi-faceted predicament; either this man may be a non-Jew or even if he is a Jew, he may be dead. The choices were few for the priest.

In Jewish purity law a priest is prohibited from coming in contact, or even within four cubits (about twelve feet) of, any one of the five sources of

defilement (unless the source of a defilement was a dead relative, in that case the priest was commanded to perform the ritual duties of burial). Two of the sources of defilement were dead bodies or a non-Jew (others were women in menstruation, defiled women or those with skin diseases). Even to discern the condition of the man he would have to get closer than twelve feet and risk defilement.

With his responsibilities of collecting, distributing and eating the ritual sacrifices and tithes of the Hebrew people weighing on his mind the priest made, in his culture's estimation, a fine decision – he passed by on the opposite side of the road. For, if he were to defile himself he would have to then face a rigorous process of restoring his purity that was costly, humiliating and time-consuming (it took a week). Most likely this priest was on his way to Jericho following his temple service in Jerusalem (Zechariah was a priest and served his two weeks as recorded in Luke 1:5-9). Many priests would serve their two-week stint at the Jerusalem temple but live in Jericho (like living in Mesa and commuting to Phoenix, this begs the question: which do you think is more dangerous, the 60 or the road between Jericho and Jerusalem?). If he defiled himself he would have to return to Jerusalem to complete the process of restoring purity and most likely would not complete such a process by the time for his next turn in the temple.

Even if he risked defilement to help another man for the sake of God, in his mind he could actually risk angering God who, according to passages like the one from Sirach, hated sinners.

In the priest's mind there was no apparent reason to help this man.

*So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (10:32)*

Levites were not bound by the same requirements that a priest was. A Levite could come in contact with a dead body since he was only required to observe ritual cleanliness while performing his cultic activities. This was done so that he would not defile the priests that he was working with.

If it was not risk of defilement that kept this Levite from helping the man, then what was it?

There are three possibilities.

1) He simply did not care or did not notice. Either of these explanations lacks veracity due to the very truth of human nature. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is too narrow to not see such a thing and human nature is such that there is always some reaction to a person bleeding, abandoned and dying. Even if it does not lead to action, there is still the primary *feeling* of pity.

2) Another possibility is that he feared being robbed as well. What if the robbers beat, stole from and abandoned this man simply to set someone else up as their next target. Was the fact that this man was lying there a trap? Indeed, he could've helped, but in helping he risked getting himself hurt.

3) A third possibility is that he saw the priest ahead of him and acted according to what he saw the priest do.

Still today there are traces of the Roman road between Jericho and Jerusalem. Those traveling on the road can see for a great distance ahead or behind them. Anyone familiar with the road would assume that the Levite could see the priest ahead of him in this parable. And just like travelers today people in transit are often interested in who else is on the road. As Harry Wendt shares, "their life might depend on it."

There is a strong chance that the Levite did not want to act in a way that was contrary to the priest's actions and therefore the priest's interpretation of the Torah. Kenneth Bailey proposes that, as one of lower rank, the Levite would not want to challenge the priest's decision and actions in regards to the man on the side of the road. Wendt suggests that he thought, "If the priest did nothing, why should I act differently?" Seemingly, the priest could see him just as the Levite could see the priest. Acting in the opposite manner of the priest could mean great trouble for the Levite upon his return to Jerusalem and his tasks at the Temple.

Whatever his reasons, this Levite, like the priest before him, did not "love his neighbor as himself."

*But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. (10:33)*

I can envisage in my mind Jesus taking a break after sharing the priest's and the Levite's decisions to not help the man. At this point we can

imagine what the lawyer would be thinking in his head. *“Of course, who would expect anything different from priests and Levites. They know cultic Law, not the mitzvot of daily living. The next character will surely be a Pharisee or Scribe who will help the poor man and live out the Torah.”*

To his shock it was not a Pharisee, not a Scribe, nor even a Sadducee or common Jew; no, horror of all horrors, it was a Samaritan that had compassion on the man left beaten and half-dead on the side of the Jericho road.

Bailey notes the artful narrative progression of the story. First, the priest comes only “down that road” and then the Levite “to that place.” It is the Samaritan who “came near him” or “came to him.”

And this is shocking.

For the Jews concerned with purity of descent (cf. 8:19-21), the Samaritans were considered unclean sinners who did not conform to the ideal of the Torah. They claimed to worship the Lord at the heathen Mt. Gerizzim and were impure people. G. Feeley Harnik remarks,

*The worst of these groups [the commoners, the “people of the land” ‘am ha’aretz] were the Samaritans. According to Scripture (2 Kings 17) the Samaritans were once Israelites of the former northern kingdom of Israel. Because they despised the Lord’s covenant, they were exiled to Assyria, where they “went after false idols and became false…Their children likewise, and their children’s children as their fathers did, so they do to this day.” (2 Kings 17:15, 41). Therefore they were no longer Israelites. The Greek word describing the Samaritan in Luke 17:18 means “stranger in the land” “no blood kin” (Jeremias [Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus] 1969: 355). Samaritans were considered unclean. Marriage with them was prohibited. It was said in connection with the prohibition on marriage: “He who eats the bread of a Samaritan is like one that eats the flesh of swine” (ibid.: 256-7, n. 19).*

Jews vilified the Samaritans to the greatest degree. They would publicly curse Samaritans in their synagogues and public discourses, and prayed that the Samaritans would not be given eternal life. They felt justified in this vitriol because of words like that of Sirach 50: 25-26, “Two nations

my soul detests, and the third is not even a people. Those who live in Seir, and the Philistines, and the foolish people that live in Shechem.” (Seir was the chief mountain range of Edom, Shechem the “home-city” of the Samaritans).



Here, we can identify the position of Samaria in relation to Judea and Jerusalem to Jericho.

Jesus did not share this view of Samaritans; and in fact mentioned Samaria as a key place in his programmatic mission statement for the early church (Acts 1:8).

Yet, in the lawyer’s mind there is no reason that this Samaritan should help. Like the priest he should not take the victim to safety on his donkey. Like the Levite he should not offer first aid. Samaritans likewise despised Jews. Upon seeing that this beaten man was a Jew the Samaritan should react in disgust and walk away, perplexed by the actions of the priest and Levite, but determined not to help a Jewish pig.

Logically it should be a Pharisee, or at least a Jew, that rescues this man, but it is, of all people a Samaritan who has compassion!

The word for compassion is the word *splagknizomai* (σπλαγχνίζομαι) and it literally means “a pouring out of the bowels.” In Jewish mind emotions were linked with the bowels and the stomach, not the heart. To

have compassion was to have a gut-level reaction to the needs of another, like the Samaritan does here.

To catch the full significance and shock of a Samaritan being the one to come to the aide of this man in light of the other characters in this parable, let me share this modernized and adapted version of Douglas Stewart's modern re-telling:

*A family of disheveled, unkempt individuals was stranded by the side of Apache Trail on a Sunday morning. They were in obvious distress. The mother was sitting on a tattered suitcase, hair uncombed, clothes in disarray, with a glazed look to her eyes, sores on her face, holding a smelly, poorly clad, crying baby. The father was unshaved, dressed in coveralls, a look of despair on his face as he tried to corral his other youngsters. Beside them was a run-down old car that had obviously just given up.*

*Down the road came a car driven by the local church president; he was on his way from church where he'd just heard a good sermon, attended a wonderful Bible study, sang songs, gave his offering and ate some baked goods. And though the father of the family waved frantically, the man could not be bothered to stop, there was a football game on, so he acted as though he did not see them and changed lanes to avoid making eye contact.*

*Soon came another car, and again the father waved furiously. But the car was driven by the president of the Rotary Club, and he was late for a statewide Rotary meeting in Scottsdale. He, too, acted as though he did not see them and kept his eyes straight on the road ahead of him.*

*The next car that came by was driven by an outspoken atheist, who had never been to church in his life. When he saw the family's distress, he took them into his own car. After inquiring as to their need, he took them to a local motel, where he paid for a week's lodging while the father found some work by begging on the side of the interstate exits. He also paid for the father to rent a car so he could look for work and bought the mother and children some new clothes and checked the mother into a re-hab center.*



Perhaps, this short modern parable stings our hearts, or at the very least piques our interest. If it does, then it has the intended impact on the heart of the lawyer of Jesus' parable as well.

*He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. (10:34)*

The Samaritan, Christ's surprising exemplar of uncompromising discipleship in this parable, helps the healing process begin with the man's wounds. He cleans the wounds with oil, disinfects them with wine and binds them up.

Interestingly enough, oil and wine were used as sacramental elements in Temple worship. The very term "pour" (**ἐπιχέω**) is from the language of worship and has to do with libations in connection with sacrifices (cf. Genesis 28: 18; Leviticus 5:11).

This Samaritan is treating this man to priestly service; the priestly service that should be offered by a priest or the servant of a priest – a Levite! It seems the Samaritan understands *true* worship and the priest and Levite do not (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:1-8).

Furthermore, the Samaritan offers that which the priest and Levite did not. The Levite, who was only walking, could offer first aid but nothing more. The priest could offer first aid and a ride on his beast of burden, but he does neither. Here, the Samaritan administers first aid (doing what the Levite did not) and offering his animal for a ride (what the priest should have done).

It mentions that he put the wounded man on "his own animal" (**ἐπιβίβασαυ δε αυτον επι το ιδιον κτηνος**) inferring he had more than one. As he places the man on his animal he takes the role of a servant. Instead of continuing to ride on his own animal (the best beast as it were) and putting the wounded man on a pack animal he instead gives the abandoned Jew a spot on his own ride, and leads the beast instead. In that culture an owner of an animal would never lead it while someone else was riding it, that was a servant's job! This potentially wealthy Samaritan, already far surpassing the actions of the priest and Levite, goes one step further becoming a servant to this beaten, bloodied and abandoned soul.

The unselfish nature of these actions cannot be overshadowed, nor can their bravery.

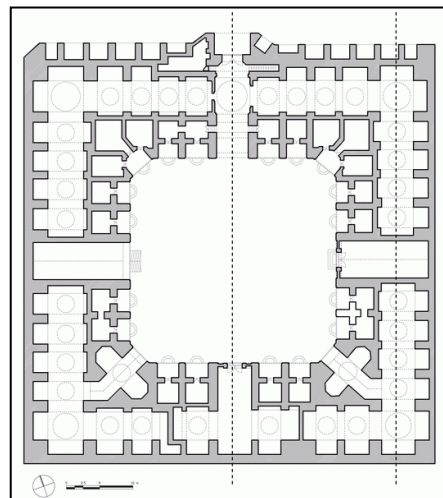
Already, the Samaritan has put himself at grave danger by stopping to help this man on the road. He could be robbed himself, or the wounded Jew, if he were conscious, could insult and push himself away from the Samaritan.

Why? You might ask.

First of all, this Jew could harbor the same prejudices as most other Jews did towards Samaritans at the time. Second, oil and wine emanating from a Samaritan were considered unclean. Thus, the man half-dead would be unclean being anointed and healed with the oil and wine of this Samaritan merchant. Not only are they unclean, but the tithe was not paid for them. That means that by accepting them the wounded man is now obligated to pay tithes for them in Jerusalem to a priest (much like the one who passed him on the road).

Wendt comments that the Pharisees would applaud the man if he said, "Get away from me, you abomination! I will have none of your oil or your wine!"

After putting himself in such danger of injury and insult he puts himself at the risk of death by taking this wounded man into a nearby village or roadside inn.



(Above left) The interior of a *caravansary* in modern day Iran. (Above right) A common *caravansary* floor plan .

The law of retaliation, which is still alive and well in the Middle East, states that you may kill the killer or any member of the family's killer or clan. If someone brings a victim to a place for help, the locals may assume that the person carrying the wounded may be the same person who caused the injury. In this instance the locals may turn on the Good Samaritan, especially if they are each from opposed racial groups. Even so, the Samaritan takes the wounded man to an inn (a *pandokeion* – a public house to receive strangers, commonly known today as a caravansary, khan or manzil it was a roadside building or series of tents with a central courtyard where travelers were given an opportunity to rest, refresh and be safe). He could have left the man and ran away, procuring anonymity, but in making contact with the innkeeper and promising to return he exposes himself to the danger. Despite the risk, the Samaritan stays with the man overnight and cares for him.

*And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'* (10:35)

After caring for the man (literally devoting his all to the man's well-being – *epimeleomai*), binding his wounds, carrying him on his own animal and staying with him overnight (reversing the negative actions of the robbers [who abandoned], the priest [who did not offer a ride] and the Levite [who did not care for him]) the Samaritan pays for the care of the man from his own pocket with no hope of recompense.

He gives the innkeeper two denarii. A denarius was the average day's wage for a common laborer. Today, it would mean that the Samaritan gave the innkeeper approximately \$112 for the care of the man (based on \$7.25 minimum wage for 8 hours a day at a 2.88% AZ income tax rate). And we can assume he doled out even more upon his return!

*"A good steward is also one who spends over and above."  
-Ambrose*

Could you imagine spending that much on a person you did not know at the drop of a hat? Most of us struggle with providing an apple or a meal for a homeless person let alone two days' wages!

Wendt remarks on the actions of the Samaritan and says, “[I]n going to the help of his Jewish neighbor, the Samaritan expends time, effort and money, and exposes himself to personal danger. We might add: Just like God does in Jesus Christ!

### **Conclusion**

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*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.” (10:36-37)*

In the final dialogue we see that the lawyer clearly understands the point of the story, although he cannot yet bring himself to speak the word “Samaritan” (instead referring to him as “the one…”).

The Scribe sees that it is the one who did the “merciful thing” that embodies the *mitzvoth* he challenged Jesus with. His adventures in missing the point are over. The expert in the Law now understands that the whole point of the parable is this: **compassion and mercy**. And after the Scribe’s response, Jesus finally gives an answer to the lawyer’s original question as he commands, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus rephrases and reverses the questions of the lawyer. In telling the parable he transforms the question from “who is my neighbor?” to “to whom must I be a neighbor?” Jesus removed all limits to who the neighbor is and the limits to how we can serve others.

As the scholar Gerhard Kittle writes:

*If a man wants to know precisely whom he is to love and not love he is asked concerning this supposed love he doles out so economically when it should burst forth with irresistible force. By nature love is not primarily act but being…The love that springs forth from being loved is quite incapable of asking about any limits…The parable shows that one cannot say in advance who the neighbor is, but that the course of life will make this plain enough. One cannot define one’s neighbor; one can only be a neighbor.*

*“The Son of God encourages us to do things like this. He is speaking not so much to the teacher of the law as to us and to everyone when he says, ‘Go and do likewise.’”*

**-Origen**

Jesus leaves all who hear this parable shocked, deflated and challenged after grossly missing the point. Jesus teaches all of us what is at the heart of the Torah law – mercy and compassionate love. The lawyer is challenged to cease his legal maneuvering and instead do as the Samaritan does. The lawyer, and us as well, leave confused. How, indeed, can we do as the Samaritan did?

The Gospel lesson teaches us that such compassionate actions flow only from the LORD's mercy. Not that the Samaritan (or in the modernized version – an atheist) are righteous in God's sight because of their actions. No, such compassionate mercy is shown to come only from God in the flesh, Jesus himself.

Arthur A. Just Jr. writes this:

*The lawyer says, "I will act to love my neighbor as myself; tell me who he is." But Jesus answers, "You cannot act, for you are dead. You need someone to love you, show mercy to you, heal you, pay for you, give you lodging, revive you. I am the one you despise because I associate with sinners, but in fact I am the one who fulfills the Law, who embodies the Torah, and who brings God's mercy. I am your neighbor and will give you the gifts of mercy, healing, life. As I live in you, you will have life and will do mercy – not motivated by laws and definitions, but animated by my love."*

Indeed, the parable teaches us that merciful acts come from having received mercy. Just as Jesus reached out to Samaritans, this Samaritan reaches out to the man half-dead on the side of the road when others would not. Thus we make no progress until we realize that we must first receive the compassion of God before we can ever hope to show compassion to others.

We hear the words of Gerhard Kittel afresh; we who receive the mercy of Christ in gracious amounts are now called to be a neighbor to all we encounter in life's journey, meeting their needs and healing their wounds as Christ did for us.

This commandment, to love the LORD your God and love the neighbor as yourself, is commonly known as the Golden Rule. It is limitless in its possibilities and all-encompassing in terms of its application to our lives.

In South Africa (and indeed the majority of sub-Saharan Africa) there is a life axiom that connects to this parable known as the *unhu-ubuntu-botho spirit*.

Multiple African people groups ascribe to a proverb akin to the Zulu saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through others).

African theologians like Susan Rakoczy (RSA) and Claude Nikondeha (Burundi) appeal to this spirit of unity and proclaim that “we cannot live our lives independently of the needs of others.” Furthermore, as we are “bound together in the Spirit; when one is in need, the Body suffers. Where there is joy and wholeness, the Body grows in strength.” We are all called to show compassion to one another. This means more than just tithing and giving a donation to the local food bank. This means living out compassion in transforming ways by supporting one another, praying for one another, serving one another, rejoicing with one another and weeping with one another. This is compassion that transforms, compassion that brings blessing, compassion that binds up wounds, compassion that heals hearts, compassion that cares for others and compassion that brings life.

Claude Nikondeha says this:

*The spirituality of transformation has ubuntu as the foundational understanding of persons. “We are set in a delicate network of interdependence with our fellow human beings and all of creation” Tutu states. This is a foundational understanding for our humanity, as one connected to others. In Africa we call this ubuntu, We are persons through other persons. Our humanity is all bundled up together – yours, mine, those outside this camp, even those across the world. We are interconnected, and we are affected by the well-being of one another. When someone is humiliated, I am humiliated. When another is going to bed on an empty stomach, I am not satiated. When you are broken-hearted, my joy cannot be complete. I am diminished when you are not well. We are connected.*

Our own spiritual father, Martin Luther, speaks of something very similar through the lens of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Drawing on Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10: 16–17 Luther states:

*The Holy Sacrament...makes us brothers [and sisters] and fellow heirs of the LORD Christ, such that it makes us one cake with Him;*

*the other that we also become common and one with all other people on earth and also become one cake...When we eat the bread, he says, we all have one food. You have that which I have, and it makes no difference that you are man or woman. In that which we all have in common in the Sacrament, we all receive what Christ has and is.*

And

*We become one cake with the LORD Christ; we walk in the fellowship of His benefits and He in the fellowship of our misfortune. For here are thrown together His godliness and my sin, my weakness and His strength, and thus all is held in common. What is mine becomes His. What is His, I also have. This is a high unspeakable grace...We all become one cake and partake of each other...many small kernels of grain become one loaf of bread, just as in the same way when one makes wine, each grape mixes its juice with that of the others and each forsakes its form. From all comes one drink. Thus it should be also with us. I give myself for the common good and serve you, and you make use of what is mine and of which you are in need...Therefore when I help and serve you in all need, I am your bread.*

Luther alludes to what he does not know is the *ubuntu* spirit of compassion and unity that we are called to through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We who have received the merciful compassion of Christ are called and enabled by his Spirit to show mercy to others in our daily walk regardless of who they may be or what they have done.

*“He shows mercy to us because of his own goodness, while we show mercy to one another because of God’s goodness. He has compassion on us so that we may enjoy him completely, while we have compassion on another that we may completely enjoy him.”*

**-Augustine**

## Appendices

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### *Appendix 1:*

#### **Table of Positions within the Jewish Religious Hierarchy in the Time of Jesus**

<b>Position in Jewish Hierarchy</b>	<b>Greek Word Used</b>	<b>Responsibilities in the Jewish Culture</b>
High Priest	Αρχιερευσ	The supreme religious representative of the Jewish people. However, their status was disputed by other members of the Jewish society, most notably the Pharisees.
Priest	ιερευσ	Responsible for all the cultic activities of Jewish religious life based on the observances of Temple worship. All priests were Levites. Of a higher social class.
Levite	Λευιτησ	Not all Levites were priests. Some Levites, referred to as “Levites”, served the priests in terms of minor cultic activities such as music. Lower social class than priests.
Sanhedrin	συνεδριον	The Jews highest tribunal that met to decide in affairs of religious significance. The term could also be used to refer to lesser tribunals. It was composed of Sadducees, Pharisees and Scribes. The High Priest served as president of the tribunal.



Jewish Council	συμβουλιον	Most often a smaller gathering of Jewish teachers and priests meeting to discuss and decide upon, rather than judge, a case of religious significance.
Sadducee	σαδδουκαιος	A conservative religious and political group of high class Jews. Their main differences with the Pharisees were on the Jewish calendar and on whether or not there was eternal life. They believed there was not, nor was there any divine activity in the world.
Pharisee	φαρισαευς	Balanced interpreters of the Law, the Pharisees exerted a great influence on the Jewish society of Jesus' day. They believed in the afterlife, upheld the Mosaic Law in their community and put an emphasis on alms-giving.
Scribe	γραμματευς	Scribes were readers, preservers and interpreters of the Law. They were rabbis. Most of them, after they interpreted the Law, would be classified as Pharisees.

*Appendix 2: Wendt's Comparison of Versions of the Golden Rule*

The so-called Golden Rule exists in many of the world's major religions:

**ISLAM:** "None of you is a believer if he does not desire for his brother that which he desires for himself." (Sunna)

**JUDAISM:** "That which you hold as detestable, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole law; the rest is but commentary." (Talmud, Shabbat, 31)

**BRAHMANISM** (Orthodox Hinduism): "Such is the sum of duty: do not do to others that which, to you, would do harm to yourself." (Mahabharata, 5, 1517)

**BUDDHISM:** "Injure not others in a manner that would injure you." (Udana-Varga, 5, 18)

**CONFUCIANISM:** "Here certainly is the golden maxim: Let us not do to others that which we do not want them to do to us." (Analects, 15, 23)

**TAOISM:** "Consider that your neighbor gains your gains and loses that which you lose." (Tai Shang Kan Ying Pian)

**CHRISTIANITY:** "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you." (Jesus in Matthew 7:12 NRSV)

A careful comparison reveals a significant truth. While the first statements call the faithful to refrain from doing harm to others, Jesus calls His followers to devote life to doing good to others! Furthermore, Jesus removed all limits as to who the neighbor is and how far one should go in serving that neighbor.

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