

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Luke's Gospel: Jesus rejoices and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:21-37)

Our portion today is from Luke 10:21-37. It gives us a delightful little parable. The actual details of what happened are a very vivid illustration of important spiritual and moral truths. Let us work our way through it.

We pick up the story where seventy disciples of the Lord were full of their own importance (see Luke 10:1-20). The Lord had commissioned them to go out, round and about, preaching on His behalf. They had been astounded at the results. To put it in their own words, "*even the demons are subject unto us*" (Luke 10:17).

The Lord looked upon His disciples, and rejoiced even more than them, in the power of the Holy Spirit. He pointed out to them the great privilege that was theirs. They were hearing what He said, and seeing what He did. Indeed, they were seeing things that had been the desire of godly men and women for many generations. Above all, they should have been rejoicing most of all in the joy of their personal, eternal salvation. They were ready for heaven while living on earth. While still spiritual babes themselves, they were being used for laying the basis for the preaching of the gospel to an ever-widening audience.

In a secondary, subtle way, the Lord was also giving them a warning against personal pride. Accepting that necessary warning to ourselves, we must move on.

You know, in the middle of the nineteenth century, one of the most well-known and best-read books in the world must have been "A Tale of Two Cities", by Charles Dickens. Today we are going to think about "A Tale of Two Cities"; not, on this occasion, London and Paris, but Jerusalem and Jericho.

It is an interesting fact that if you leave Jerusalem in any direction, inevitably you go down. Actually, there are not a few cities in the world which attract the title, 'The city built on seven hills'. Jerusalem is one of them. The city itself is relatively elevated, at just over 2,700 feet above sea level. In particular, if from Jerusalem you take the road east to Jericho, you rapidly descend from that elevated height. In a tortuous journey of about 15 miles, you descend about 3,500 feet. That is because the city of Jericho, or what's left of it, lies a little more than 800 feet below sea level.

It is also deeply significant that the Bible states quite clearly that, long term, Jerusalem is God's appointed centre on earth. From there, untold blessing will eventually be distributed to 'the uttermost part of the earth'. Jericho, on the other hand, warrants the infamy of being called the "city of the curse", because of the ungodliness and opposition to Israel of its citizens. This resulted in its destruction in the days of Joshua. It is clearly significant that if you choose to depart from a place of spiritual and moral blessing (e.g. Jerusalem) you must inevitably go down, spiritually and morally. You will eventually finish up at the place of the curse (illustrated here by Jericho). The fundamental lesson is this: God, in His mercy, freely offers us blessing; if we turn away from that, the only alternative is to be subjected to the righteous judgment of a Holy God.

Luke 10:25-29 gives us a verbal exchange between the Lord Jesus and a religious lawyer. In Luke 10:25, we are introduced to "*a certain lawyer.*" He was an expert in the application of the Jewish moral and ceremonial law; that is, The Law of Moses. The text says "*he stood up.*" He was undoubtedly high in his own estimation of himself, just like the seventy disciples. The way he stood was a commentary on how he felt; as we might say, feeling 'ten feet tall' in his own personal estimation of himself.

Next, we read that he was tempting Jesus. Who did the man think he was, putting Jesus, the Son of God, to the test? (see Luke 4:12). His first question gives the game away. "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" He wanted to deserve eternal life by doing something that would be worthy of commendation. He is not alone in that! In John 6:28-29 we read that there were those who came to the Lord Jesus and said, "*What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?*" Jesus answered and said unto them, "*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*" Not many works, but one, and that a work of faith, belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, as detailed in Romans 10:9-10. "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" Luke 10:28 says, "*This do, and thou shalt live.*" Actually, not a happy

prospect! Think of it! If you or I could keep every single jot and tittle of the Law of Moses, the best we could ever hope for would be, not eternal life, ultimately in heaven, but perpetual, natural life, mere continuing existence, on earth, in this sordid, sinful world. What a terrible prospect! In practice, any doing by us results finally in death. This is because we are sinful in nature and by practice. As Romans 6:23 says, *"the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

In Luke 10:26-27, the questioner finds that he is searched by his own question. The Lord Jesus turns his question round so that he is made to feel the sharp edge of the challenge. *"What is written? How readest thou?"* How do you interpret it? What do you think it means? Give the lawyer credit. His answer was word perfect. "Give what is due, first of all to God, and then, what is due to your fellow men."

This man desired to receive eternal life as if it was something he deserved! Something he was due to inherit! Something to which he had a legitimate claim! Eternal life cannot be earned. It is the gift of God (Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8). The best The Law could ever bring is the continuation of natural life in this world.

The trouble is, only once in the history of the world has a perfect life been lived on earth in the sight of God in heaven. That was in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, during His life on earth. That was the only period when the full implications of the Law have been fulfilled. That is, only when Christ lived on earth was there a man living on earth in a way that gave full satisfaction and delight to God.

This was clearly prophesied in advance, as for instance the prophet Isaiah foretold in Isaiah 42:21, *"The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable."* The record of that life, and the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, is given in the four Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

After this summary of the way in which the Lord Jesus glorified God in every aspect of His life on earth, the lawyer was constrained to give a very telling and significant addendum; *"and thy neighbour as thyself"* (Luke 10:27). How right he was! This tells us that the personal faith of those who know God is intended to be the springboard for the way we act towards our fellow men. That is exactly what transpired when the Christian church was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost. The fulfilment of what the Lord called elsewhere 'the second commandment' was truly seen in the early years of the Christian church.

Putting all this together, we see in the four Gospels the fulfilment of the Law in the personal life of Christ on earth. Then, in the Book of Acts, we see how the features of that life were continued, in measure, in the lives of Christians in their daily lives on earth. Their Lord and Master had gone back to heaven at the Ascension. The continuation of features of that life were seen, and were intended to be seen, in the lives of those that are Christ's. The corollary to that is this: In our day, our lives are, and are intended to be, an exhibition of things that were demonstrated fully to the world in the life of Christ, personally, and then continued, in measure, after His departure, in the lives of the early Christians.

If we are saved by the precious blood of Christ, and on our way to heaven, these features are intended to be exhibited in the lives of you and me. A mighty challenge indeed! We must accept the clear teaching of scripture. Our eternal salvation is entirely a matter of grace and faith, and not based at all, or in any way, on anything that we can do. Nevertheless it is the will of God, and our own practical responsibility, that, having been saved, we should live in such a way as to meet our responsibilities, both to God and also to our fellow men.

Luke 10:29 tells us that the lawyer was *"willing to justify himself."* That was absolutely impossible! *"It is God that justifieth"*, as we are told in Romans 8:33.

The man raised another question. "Who is my neighbour?" The answer is clear. He that is in need! If I spot anyone who is clearly in need, it is up to me to act in a neighbourly way towards him, by helping him in whatever way I can. Then Luke 10:30-35 provides a graphic account of the parable the Lord Jesus told the man.

In Luke 10:30, we are told that a traveller fell among thieves. This is a picture of those who would rob you of the spiritual blessing God desires you to enjoy. He was stripped, robbed, severely wounded, and left half dead. Sadly, mugging is nothing new.

Luke 10:31-32 tell us that there were two men who fairly quickly came on the scene, but, oh, dear! What a response from them! Or rather, what a lack of response! A priest just happened to come by. The text records, *"and when he saw [the poor man], he [deliberately] passed by on the other side [of the road]"* (Luke 10:31). Likewise, a Levite came, and looked on him, and *"likewise ... passed by on the other side"* (Luke 10:32). Now, these two were officers of the Law - the Mosaic Law. They were equipped, and very willing, to tell others what to do. But the clear implication of the

text is that they passed by chance. It was never ever their intention to get involved. In a subtle way, this reminds us that neither The Law nor those who administer it can enable anyone to keep it.

However, when we come to Luke 10:33 we come to a tremendous change. A change of heart, and, because of that, a resulting change of action! It is introduced by a little word, the little word "but". **But** - it is one of the big buts of scripture. *"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him."*

Here we have the heart of the matter. Circumstantially, it was merely a place by the roadside. Morally, it was a place and situation requiring immense compassion. The Samaritan was so very different to the priest and the Levite. He was on a journey. He was travelling that way by intent. Even though he did not know the details until they happened, there was a definite purpose in his going that way. This was not said of the priest or the Levite. They just happened to be passing by. Then, the Samaritan *"came where he was"* (Luke 10:33); again, by intent. He was minded to help. Finally, *"he had compassion on him"* (Luke 10:31). He entered feelingly into the circumstances and desperate condition of the poor man.

What a beautiful picture this is of the Lord Jesus Christ. He left heaven's highest glory and came down into this world of sin and woe. That was in order to take that specific journey which ended in His going to the cross of Calvary. In total compassion, He, the Sinless One, came right down to where we were in all our sin and misery. His compassion brought Him down for the express purpose of saving us from the judgment we so righteously deserve. It was no mere chance that He happened to be coming that way. He saw us in all our hopeless condition. His love led Him to come down to where we were in order to bring the love and kindness of God into a world that had been marred and ruined by sin. Then, in virtue of His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, He is able and willing to supply everything that is needed to remedy our lost condition.

The fact that the man was a Samaritan should have spoken to the lawyer's conscience. The Jews despised the Samaritans. They were infiltrators, unwelcome immigrants into Israel's Land of Promise. Remember the words of the Jews to the Lord Jesus in John 8:48. *"Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?"* This was intentionally insulting and abusive language. Racial discrimination, indeed, as many would say nowadays! In longsuffering grace, the Lord Jesus accepted the taunts and rejection of the Jews. They should have acclaimed Him as their long-promised Messiah. It was all part of that journey that He took to bring the grace of God to us.

Luke uses the word "compassion" three times in his Gospel. It is always significant. Here, in Luke 10, it tells us how deeply moved the Samaritan was by the hopeless, pitiful condition of the poor traveller. A beautiful picture of the love of the Lord Jesus for us, you and me!

For your interest, the two other examples of the particular use of the word 'compassion' in Luke's Gospel are found in Luke 7:13 and Luke 15:20. They are well worth consideration when you have time.

Luke 10:34 continues to outline the compassionate care of the Good Samaritan. *"And he went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on His own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."* The Samaritan had with him everything that the poor man needed. Having experienced the painful treatment of the thieves, how that man must have appreciated the tender care of the Samaritan. The healing and soothing power of the oil and the wine for the wounds that he had received! *"He poured in oil and wine."* I have a very good friend who applies that in a very simple way. "Wine for the inside, oil for the outside!" Well! That's alright, but I prefer to regard what the Samaritan carried as a simple but very effective first aid kit. Wine to cleanse, a ready-made antiseptic, and oil to heal. Another picture of the comprehensive care the Saviour provides for His own.

The Samaritan picked up the poor man. He put him on his own beast. We are not told how far it was to the inn. We do know that the Samaritan took him all the way to a safe haven. Having taken the man to an inn, he provided, at his own expense, for proper care for him until he returned. How right the old saying about the Lord Jesus, "He is an 'all the way home' Saviour". As Peter says, so simply, *"He careth for you"* (1 Peter 5:7).

Overall, then, and primarily, we have here a picture of the Lord Jesus. He came into this poor world, to rescue us from harm and danger, and from those who would rob us of the blessing of God. He has made arrangements for us to be cared for until He comes again, to take us to His own home, to be with Him and like Him for evermore. At the judgment seat of Christ, He will reward those who have been serving Him in His absence by caring, looking after, those who have been rescued from the clutches of sin, the world and the devil.

Luke 10:36-37 bring the resulting challenge, first of all to the lawyer, and through him, then to us Christians in our day.

However, the last touch is by no means an anticlimax. *"Go, and do thou likewise!"* (Luke 10:37). What does that teach us? I will tell you what it teaches me! Christianity is essentially practical. Let us never ever forget that. If we

really appreciate what the Lord Jesus has done for us, we will be glad to help, however and wherever possible, those we meet day by day who are in evident need. And then, not merely mechanically, but with real, true, Christian compassion. May this be our constant prayer!

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