

Who Is My Neighbor?

Luke 10.25-37

The parable of the Good Samaritan is well-known, a story that pictures sacrificial concern and care for those in need. As a principle for living, its message is clear. But in the hands of theologians, its application is confusing! Why does this story matter? What's at stake for us?

Context: Jesus and the Lawyer

- *Kingdom-fever was pervasive in 1st-cent. Palestine*
- *Same question in many forms: How can I be ready?*
- *Was the lawyer sincere? We don't know, but...*
- *Our question: How can we prepare for the kingdom?*

The Good Samaritan

- *A perilous journey, well-known to every Jew*
- *Religious leaders are no help!*
- *Despised half-breed goes the extra mile*

The Moral of the story: *My 'neighbor' is anyone I meet in need.*

Echoes of deeper truth: *Jesus is the ultimate 'neighbor' for our need.*



1. The narrative context preceding Jesus' telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan is important to understand, in order to avoid bad theology. In verses 25-28, Jesus has a dialogue with a lawyer. How does this encounter differ from His meeting with the Rich Young Ruler (Mt 19.16-22; Mk 10.17-22; Lk 18.18-23)? We don't know if this man believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but Luke's statements in vv.25 and 29 suggest that he was at best confused. How would you describe him? Be careful: Don't assume his spiritual *condition* (saved or unsaved) based on his actions.
2. A very common error made by theologians and commentators is to understand the lawyer's question in v25 – *Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* – as if he was asking how to be saved (go to heaven when he dies). But this ignores the first-century Palestinian culture, and what they were thinking. The phrases “inherit eternal life” (Mt 19.27; Mk 10.17; Lk 10.25; 18.8), “enter into life” (Mt 18.8-9; 19.17), “enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19.23), “enter the kingdom of God” (Mt 19.24; Mk 9.47; 10.23-25; Lk 18.24-25), and “inherit the kingdom” (Mt 25.34) can refer to both eternal life, and to temporal blessing and kingdom rewards. What do you think the lawyer was asking about? What does the dialogue between him and Jesus suggest?
3. The lawyer asks Jesus (v19), *Who is my neighbor?* Note that Jesus does not answer this question. After telling the parable, Jesus asks, *Which one proved to be a neighbor to the man who was robbed?* What was the lawyer trying to do with his question? Do we do this today? What was Jesus emphasizing in His parable?
4. The most egregious misinterpretation of this parable is to make its message a requirement of salvation. Jesus clearly is admonishing His followers to feed the hungry, care for the sick, clothe those in need, etc., but our behavior does not determine our eternal destiny. What *does* our obedience show? How does it affect us now? How will it affect us at the Judgment Seat of Christ? (Read Romans 14.10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5.10.)