

The Good Samaritan

SCOTT HOEZEE

Enter the phrase “Good Samaritan” on Google and you will instantly receive just shy of 13 million hits; and yes, in the top two hundred or so you will find a few references to the *actual* parable of the Good Samaritan, but those may actually be in the minority. Far more frequent are references to Good Samaritan Hospital, Good Samaritan housing ministries, Good Samaritan medical transport, Good Samaritan School of Nursing, as well as numerous newspaper headlines like: Good Samaritan rescues woman from burning house; or Good Samaritan helps elderly Alzheimer’s man get back home. Some things take on a life of their own eventually, and Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan has surely done that; but the frequency with which we encounter that phrase makes most people think they know exactly what Jesus’ original story must mean, but do we? We will take up this parable today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is now our seventh and final program in a seven-part series on some of Jesus’ parables. There are about three dozen parables; we only have hit maybe...well, we combined a few in the second and third program, but we have hit maybe ten of them in this series; but we are coming now to one of the most famous ones; probably of all of Jesus’ parables two of the most famous ones are found only in Luke, and that is one we already looked at, the prodigal son; and now this one in Luke 10 on the good Samaritan.

DAVE BAST

Right; this phrase has taken on...definitely taken on a life of its own. There is even a...as you were going through those different examples, I thought of a... I think there is an RV group called the Good Sams or something like that, that cruise the highways and byways to look for people who need help; but yes, the story of the good Samaritan...if anyone is unfamiliar with the Bible they at least know that much—they know that part of it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A lot of the time when Jesus told parables he just sort of blurted them out. There was not always a context or a pretext of anything in particular; you know, the crowds gathered and he just started telling them about the parable of the sower. This particular parable, though, has a setup—it has a context; and we want to spend just a few minutes on that because the punch of the parable depends on seeing exactly what led Jesus to tell it.

DAVE BAST

Right; it really was told by Jesus in response to a question that he was asked one day; verse 25 of Luke 10: On one occasion, an expert in the Law stood up to test Jesus... So, right there maybe we should pause. Sometimes this guy is described as a lawyer...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that might be slightly misleading because expert in the Law is *Torah*, so he is a religious expert—he is a theologian. He knows the ins and outs and bylaws of the Jewish law, including all the extra commandments that had been developed as a hedge around the Law; and we are also told he is testing Jesus; so, this guy has a sneaky motive.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, he has an agenda...yes.

DAVE BAST

So:

^{25b}“Teacher,” he asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶“What is written in the Law?” Jesus replied. “How do you read it?” ²⁷“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 love your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” ²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, a lawyer—an expert in the Law is not somebody who litigates cases in front of a judge the way we think of it today, but as you also said, one thing that lawyers today may have had in common with the law experts in Jesus’ day is that they are really good at splitting hairs—really, really good at being clever with language. So, this particular law expert comes up and he asks what is probably the wrong question: What must I *do* to inherit eternal life? We know from the rest of Jesus’ teachings that it is not about what we do, it is about being saved by grace alone through what will be Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross; but Jesus grants this guy’s premise. He doesn’t correct him right away...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And anyway, this law expert gives the answer Jesus himself once gave when someone said: Teacher, what is the greatest commandment? In Matthew 22, I think; and Jesus gave, not a single commandment picked out here or there, he gives the summary of the Law: Love the Lord your God with everything you got and love your neighbor as yourself. So, this man gives Jesus’ own answer.

DAVE BAST

So, it is the right answer, obviously; it is a great answer. That is really all you gotta do. Now, of course, that might raise the very interesting question: Am I capable of doing that? Can I really love God with my whole being, and can I love my neighbor as myself; and that is where the Law maybe shows us how far short we fall, and how much we need grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We will never do that without the Spirit’s power in our hearts. We know that from the rest of the New Testament, too. Nevertheless, he gives the right answer; but then, the lawyer is not done. Luke tells us he wants to justify himself, right? He is looking for a loophole, right? So, he says: You know, I would just as soon get myself off the hook on this neighbor thing. So, who is my neighbor? As the writer Frederick Buechner once cleverly imagined, what the guy was looking for was maybe a legalese...a definition like this: The lawyer was hoping Jesus would say: Well, a neighbor, herein after referred to as the party of the first part is to be construed as a person of Jewish descent whose residence is within a radius of three statute miles of one’s own residence, herein after referred to as the party of the second part; unless another person of Jewish

descent lives between the party of the first part and the party of the second part, in which case the intervening person will be the neighbor to the party of the first part, relieving the party of the second part of any responsibility whatsoever; that is who is *not* your neighbor.

DAVE BAST

Right...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus does not say that.

DAVE BAST

Which is maybe the kind of answer he is looking for as a lawyer...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, absolutely.

DAVE BAST

Give me this thing in ironclad, no uncertain terms with all the definitions spelled out; but the answer Jesus gives him is... You know, interestingly, the word for neighbor here is *plésion*, which means simply somebody who is close to you; one who is nearby or next to; and in that sense, a neighbor is simply a person who has plopped down in your vicinity—in your neighborhood. Somebody once said wisely that God tells us to love our neighbor and not our friends because we can choose our friends, but we cannot choose our neighbors. Our neighbors are simply those who are adjacent, or accessible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is exactly what it does mean, Dave; which means that no matter where you are...it doesn't have anything to do with where you live, it is where you are. You get on an airplane with two hundred other people, they are all your neighbors. That is what Jesus is going to say; but again, this man is looking for a loophole. He wants to get himself off the hook because over time that word for neighbor that you mentioned, *plésion*, means one who is close to you; but for many people, like this person, for many of the Jews in Jesus' day it had come to mean one who is close to you in socioeconomic status, religious practice, skin color, ethnicity; a neighbor is one who is just like you...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not *close* to you, but just *like* you.

DAVE BAST

Just like you, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if they are different from you, then you are off the hook; that is not your neighbor.

DAVE BAST

Then they are not your neighbor, and that is a radically different thing from what Jesus is trying to teach here; and you know, ironically Scott, in our time and in our society a lot of people have managed to make sure their neighbors are all people just like them...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right.

DAVE BAST

Fundamentally, by the socioeconomic level of their community—of their neighborhood; and people may look superficially different. They could have all kinds of different shades of skin, but they are really fundamentally all the same because they are all in the one percent; and that is *not* what Jesus means. He does not mean close to as like you...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He simply means the one whom God has put in your path; and we are going to see that as the story unfolds.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The lawyer wanted Jesus to give as narrow a definition as possible to get him off the hook often; as we are going to see in just a moment, Jesus gives as wide a definition of neighbor as possible; and we will take that up in a second.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and today, Dave, we are in Luke 10, the very, very well known parable of the good Samaritan. We just looked at the setup...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus is going to tell this parable in response to a question. First one question: What must I do to inherit eternal life? And then a second question: Who is my neighbor...

DAVE BAST

Who is my neighbor...right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus tells a story in response.

DAVE BAST

Well, you have a guy who is trying to sort of get himself out of the obligation of loving his neighbor as himself by narrowing what neighbor means to be somebody just like me—just the kind of person I would like; and Jesus will not let him get away with it, and here is the story:

³⁰In reply Jesus said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

SCOTT HOEZEE

³³“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him he took pity on him, ³⁴and he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Look after him, and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you

may have.’³⁶Now, which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’³⁷The expert in the Law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

DAVE BAST

So, this guy has started out by asking Jesus two different questions: What must I do to inherit eternal life? And who is my neighbor? Jesus tells him a story and then turns the tables on him and asks *him* a question: Which one of these three was the neighbor? The guy gets the point, at least to that extent.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, I hope so; but again, as we said, Dave, the expert in the Law wants as narrow a definition of neighbor as possible so that he can be excused when he ignores all kinds of people in society that he might run across. Jesus goes the other way; and he starts in the Greek. As he starts this parable, Jesus uses the word[s]: *anthropos tis*, which literally...so, in most translations it just says *a man*, but really what it literally means is some guy—just some guy. Jesus doesn’t say a...

DAVE BAST

Some person, even. It is kind of an indefinite. It doesn’t mean a male or a female—it is a person.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it could be anybody, and that is the point. Your neighbor could be anybody; in fact, your neighbor *is* anybody; and ultimately Jesus is going to say: Your neighbor is *everybody*.

DAVE BAST

Right; and interestingly, too, as we look at this story and dig into it a little deeper and notice these details, like details of language and vocabulary...So, a certain person. It is not the man who was beaten up and left lying by the side of the road who is described as the neighbor...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Jesus’ question is: Who was the neighbor to *that* guy?

SCOTT HOEZEE

To him.

DAVE BAST

So it is the Samaritan who actually is the neighbor acting as a neighbor, and that is part of the sting of the story—that is really a stinger, isn’t it, when Jesus says it is the Samaritan, not the priest, not the Levite.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; they passed by; and these were, interestingly, I am sure...I have this funny feeling that for this expert in the Law, if he ran into a priest or a Levite, he would say: Now, that is my neighbor and they should be a neighbor to me. I will be happy to be a neighbor to them. They are my kind of people; and they are the villains in this story because they crossed by on the other side; but not so the Samaritan; and as I think many people know, Samaritans in Jesus’ day were despised. Most Jews would not even travel through Samaria. They would take the long way around if they could avoid contact with these greasy, terrible, rotten Samaritans. Samaritans were not heroes. They were losers. They were not people to be respected, they were people to avoid; and yet, Jesus twists the knife here by making *this* Samaritan a hero.

DAVE BAST

And there may be a little bit of a twist, too, in that phrase: They passed by on the other side; a little bit of a dig at what we know to be the case of so many of the Pharisees and lawyers of Jesus' day...or theologians; overly scrupulous about the ceremonial law and ignoring the deeper requirements of love and mercy. So, they passed by on the other side, presumably because they were afraid this guy might be dead—he *looks* dead—and if they touch a corpse according to the ceremonial law they are unclean—they are defiled so they cannot go into the Temple and perform their service. I can just hear...in fact, I often have thought of this story when I was hustling to go somewhere on Sunday morning to preach...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And you see a car broken down on the side of the highway, and I am thinking: Oh no, am I passing by on the other side?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; by the way, that is why in another place Jesus once called the Pharisees “white-washed tombs;” he was saying: You look good on the outside, but on the inside you are dead. Your heart is not in the right place; your heart is dead. If you have a heart, you are going to see this poor guy in the ditch and you are going to reach out to him and you are going to do what needs doing, whether or not it makes you ceremonially unclean, it is the right thing to do because he is your neighbor, and God's Law says you have to love him.

DAVE BAST

Or even if you have to do it on the Sabbath. I mean, one of the things that most got their dander up against Jesus was his habit of healing people on the Sabbath—of reaching out to those who were broken and bleeding, or crippled, or...you know, the man with the withered hand; the list goes on and on. It seems like he almost went out of his way to heal on the Sabbath in order to make this same point. Look for your neighbor, love your neighbor, serve your neighbor, deliver your neighbor from the trouble that he is in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But here is another thing that might be interesting that this expert in the Law might have thought about later, and that I think we should all think about: Suppose you as the expert in the Law, suppose any of us listening to this parable, imagine *ourselves* as the one who got mugged. We need to be willing to accept ministry from anybody, including a Samaritan; because a lot of people in Jesus' day would say: I don't even want to be touched by a Samaritan! I wouldn't even want their help. No, Jesus is saying; we are all neighbors to each other, and so sometimes it can be as hard to accept a neighbor's help as to give help as the neighbor yourself.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is a great point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But it goes both ways.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is a great point, Scott. Can you imagine this guy groaning and opening one eye; the other one is caked with blood; and he sees this Samaritan coming and he says: Oh, no, no, no; don't touch me. Wait...I'll wait for a Jew to come along, thank you very much! No, absolutely not. Jesus is saying it goes both ways. It hits on so many levels, this story...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it does.

DAVE BAST

Who is my neighbor? Your neighbor is the one in need. Your neighbor is the one who reaches out. We need to be open to receiving help from any and all. It is literally everybody—literally anyone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But what that means, Dave...and again, you know, with Good Samaritan Hospital and Good Samaritan medical transport...all those associations we have with this, and the way it gets used in newspaper headlines, as we said earlier, we tend to think this parable just means: Oh, you see somebody who has had an accident on the side of the road and you stop and help: Strangers helping strangers, that is the good Samaritan. No, no, no; I mean, that is part of it, but Jesus is saying you have to have a realignment of your whole perspective on every single person you meet. It is your neighbor, and you need to let them be a neighbor to you if need be as well. So, it is not just: Oh, I should stop and help. It is a complete realignment of our perspective on our fellow human beings; and that has a lot of implications we should explore before we close this program and this series, and we will do that next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are exploring the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus...one of his best-known parables certainly; a parable with many levels and layers of meaning; it really repays careful and close attention. Now we want to talk about the way the parable ends, and often Jesus sort of just stopped—he stopped at the end of the story. In fact, as we saw in an earlier program in this series, the parable of the prodigal son, he actually intentionally left it kind of dangling...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, left it wide open.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; as if we had to sort of ask the questions and think about what this might mean for our lives; but in this case today, perhaps because it is part of a conversation with this would-be self-justifying lawyer, Jesus ends it with a rather pointed statement—a command. So, the guy says: Well, the one who showed mercy to him is the neighbor, and Jesus says to him: Okay, go thou and do likewise, as it says in the older version.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That does not mean that it works righteousness after all—that we are all working our way to heaven and God is grading on the curve, and you know, if your pluses exceed your minuses you get in. No, it is still all grace; Jesus makes that clear. We only get saved through Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross and God's raising him from the dead. We cannot chip into our own salvation; we cannot meet God halfway, or a tenth of the way, or a micro-millimeter of the way. No, it does not work that way; however...

DAVE BAST

We might say it this way, Scott. Good Samaritans do not get to heaven by being good Samaritans.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; they get to heaven by being saved by grace, and then going with God's flow; letting Jesus, who was a good neighbor to everybody he met, so fill you that this will just kind of come naturally out of you. You know, in terms of being saved by grace, it shows that you get it when you go out and be gracious yourself to everybody you meet. It is just kind of going with God's flow. That is what Jesus is talking about when he says go and do likewise. Not go and do likewise so that you will earn God's love, but if you know you have God's love, go and act like you are happy about that. You know, do as Jesus did.

DAVE BAST

You know, salvation really is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Maybe at this point it is good to remember theologically how this all happens. Even our faith is not a good work, as scripture itself teaches us. Our faith is not something we do to earn God's favor. It is the fruit of the Spirit's work within us; and if the Spirit is working within us, it is also going to be a transformative kind of work. He is called the Holy Spirit, and holiness is his business, and that is another word for being like Jesus: Christ-likeness.

So, as you said, you know, if we have really experienced grace, if we have really tasted of the work of the Spirit in our own heart and life, it is going to be transformative, and it is going to make us want to do what Jesus did, and become more like him; and frankly, for him everyone was a neighbor.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, thanks be to God that he was the way he was, because we said at the end of the last segment of this program, Dave, this is not just about doing nice things for strangers...you know, being a good Samaritan by helping somebody pump up their flat tire on the highway. It is that, but it is about a transformation of how we see other people. We get a new...we get an eye transplant, you know, when we become Christians. When we get baptized, we get an eye transplant, and we see people differently; and you know, Dave, tucked into this parable, therefore, and into the dynamic of what Jesus is recommending here, is the fundamental truth of the Gospel, which was even when we were as unlovable, as smelly, as stinky, as loathsome as we could be, God looked at us and could still love us. It was while we were yet sinners, Paul writes, that God sent Jesus. It wasn't after we had cleaned up our act or gotten a little bit better, and then God said: Okay, now I will send my Son. No, it was while we were at our worst that God had a set of eyes, and was able to see what was good in us yet, and savable in us. Thanks be to God, God did that or we would have no Gospel—we would have no salvation. Now it is our chance to do the same thing for others.

DAVE BAST

You know, that verse you just alluded to, Romans 5:8: But God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us...that is a little bit of a similar tack to this story of the good Samaritan because Paul says there a little bit earlier: You know, it is possible that for a good person one would dare to die. So, you see somebody who is appealing and attractive to you and they are the one with the flat tire by the side of the road, you might stop and help them out because you feel that neighbor bond—that similarity; but when it is somebody totally different from you—when it is somebody undeserving—clearly undeserving—that is real love. That is how God demonstrates his love or proves his love for us, because we did not deserve it when he came and tented among us, as the Bible says about Jesus; becoming our neighbor, coming next to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, that is just it; and we said earlier, Dave, that the expert in the Law was looking for a restricted definition of neighbor, and that a lot of people in Jesus' day had come to define neighbor as somebody who was just like you. Well, if you are the incarnate Son of God, there is nobody just like you on the planet. You are the only one—God's one and only. You are God's Son. There is nobody like you; but thankfully, we know what happened. No matter who Jesus encountered, he encountered them with boundless, fathomless love. He was the neighbor to everybody he met. Even though everybody was sinful and he wasn't, nevertheless, he was able to be a neighbor. So again, when we are friendly and helpful and loving toward anybody we happen to run across, we are just doing what Jesus did. Yeah, no, they are not like me. This person is *extremely* different from me. We hardly speak the same language, or we have so little in common. Well again, Jesus could have said that about his every disciple—every person he met—and yet, we know what he did.

DAVE BAST

So, we begin to see people differently; we begin to look with the eyes of Jesus and see across all of the things that divide us—all the things that tend to separate human beings into tribes and families. One of the saddest things I think about humankind is our tendency to...here is a big word, but...xenophobia...the fear of the

stranger or the hatred even of the stranger...the one who is the outsider, the one who is the foreigner, the one who is not part of our tribe; and Jesus embraced all people as one. As you pointed out, Scott, all of them were different...all of us were different from him, as different as we possibly could be. He was perfect, we are sinful, and yet he saw us all as his neighbors; and so, we begin to see with his eyes, act with his love, and be transformed by the power of his Spirit. Really, there is no *good Samaritan*, if you think about that. None of us is good, really, in absolute terms, the way he is; but we can begin to live the Jesus life as he did.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the challenge is to see other people the way Jesus saw them; and when by the Holy Spirit we can do that, then we are indeed really, really able to, as Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope that you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Please connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and suggest passages and topics for future *Groundwork* programs.

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Printed on November 23, 2024