

The Good Samaritan

The Setting of the Parable (Luke 10.25-29)

It is possible that this 'parable' was spoken in the synagogue at Jericho. The Lord Jesus had set His path towards Jerusalem (Luke 9.51) and would shortly arrive at Bethany (Luke 10.38). Whilst in the Synagogue a lawyer stood up to 'tempt' the Lord. Lawyers were synonymous with the scribes. Their whole business was to show the relation of the law to life. If any person in society had a difficulty, they would seek out the lawyers to see what the law had to say about the matter. The word 'tempt' has the idea of 'putting to the test' something which Satan had sought to do to the Lord Jesus in the Wilderness (Luke 4.12).

The question the lawyer asked was flawed. Teachers of the word of God rightly believed that eternal life was contained within the law (John 5.39). In fact, the school of Hillel taught: *'he who gets to himself words of the law gets to himself eternal life.'* However, they also believed that eternal (full and complete) life was as a result of living a certain way of life, i.e. of personal merit. The lawyer was literally asking what course of conduct throughout his life would merit eternal life. However, eternal life is inherited and inheritance cannot be earned. It is a matter of kindness on the part of another!

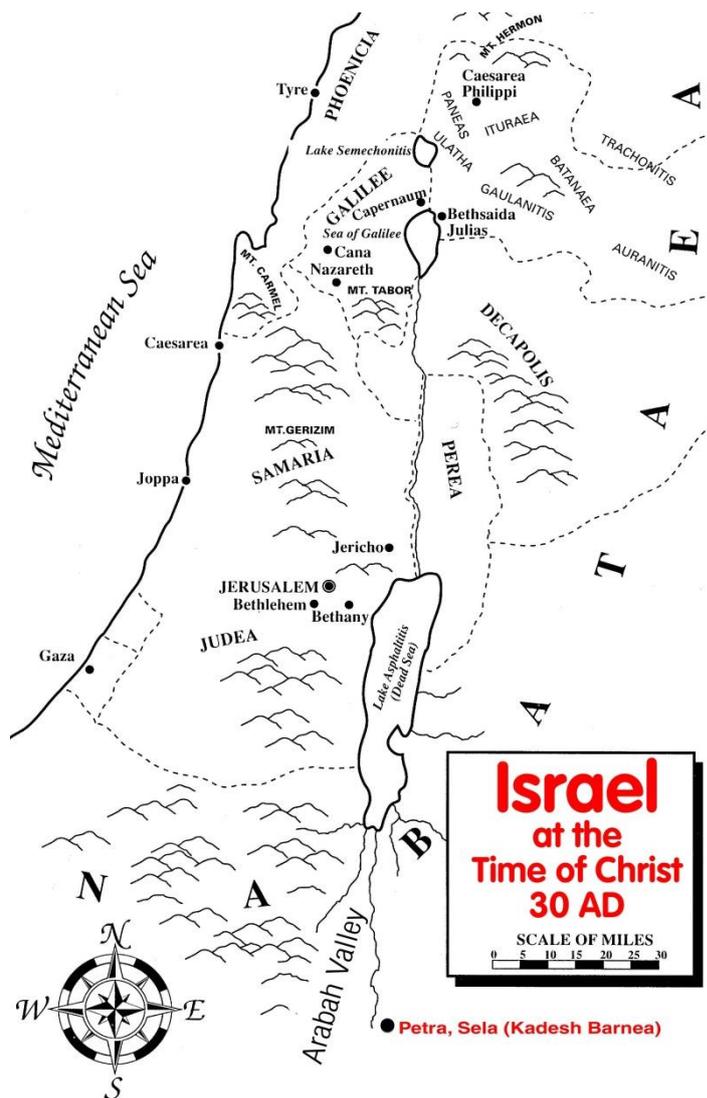
The Lord Jesus encouraged the lawyer to answer his own question (v.26) and he did so effectively, vv.27-28: *And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.* The answer of the lawyer was impressive. **Firstly**,

the main part of the quotation from Deuteronomy 6.5 was well known to all teachers of the law as it was part of the phylacteries, parchments containing four passages of Scripture which were bound on the forehead or left hand of men before morning prayers (cf. Deuteronomy 6.8, 11.18). However, the second quotation concerning 'thy neighbour' (Leviticus 19.18) was less well known demonstrating a deep understanding and knowledge of the law. **Secondly**, the Lord Jesus Himself gave the same answer on another, later occasion (Matthew 22.34-40, Mark 12.28-34). Truly enough these words contained within the law are the secret of eternal life. The lawyer had appealed to **love**, not a legal system to obtain eternal life.

Is this law demanding? According to Deuteronomy 6.5 we should love God with **all** our:

Scripture	English	Hebrew	Meaning
Deuteronomy 6.5	Heart	<i>Lebab</i>	The totality of man's inner nature. Encompasses man's emotions, thoughts and will.
	Soul	<i>Nephesh</i>	Original meaning was 'to breathe', 'the breath of life'. Can refer to 'appetite' and 'hunger'.
	Might	<i>Me'od</i>	Expresses the idea of something being 'exceeding' or 'abundant'. A superlative degree of total commitment to God.

To paraphrase, if I am to love God as the law demands then: All of my emotions should be centred in God, all of my thoughts should be focussed on God, all my decisions should be made with Him as the central focus. Every breath of my life should be for His glory. My inner desire and appetite should yearn after God. This is a superlative degree of total commitment to Him. It requires my whole mind, my whole soul and my whole heart with nothing lacking.



Is this law demanding? A thousand times **yes**. In fact, mankind cannot keep or fulfil this law. Its purpose was to direct us as a school master to Christ (Galatians 3.24), the One who alone was able to fulfil the law and impart eternal life. He is the One who could obey these commands and love His Father in this way.

The lawyer had said right (v.28), but was he able to meet the standard? Interestingly, he sought to justify himself (v.29). Why? No one had **condemned** him, in fact the Lord **commended** him. Perhaps it was his own **conscience**. Here he stood in the presence of the One who is truth and light knowing that he fell far short. He did not love God like this. Eternal life was not his. Rather than condemn himself, he sought some solace in trying to clarify who his neighbour was. Perhaps he could claim to having accomplished something of *this* requirement rather than the first! Indeed, this was a real problem amongst the Jewish Rabbis of the day. Some claimed that the term 'neighbour' could only apply to those of the nation of Israel, certainly not Gentiles, neither Samaritans! The practical answer given in the parable is: 'Whenever we come across somebody in our pathway in great need, we are to have compassion on them and help them as we would like them to help us if we were in need.' The real shock comes when we realise we cannot keep this law either!! This however, is the secondary thrust of the parable. Its primary purpose was to seek to further convict the lawyer as to his need of salvation by emphasising the love of God.

What do we learn? What should the lawyer have learned? **Real Christian life, in fact, eternal life is not about head knowledge of God. It is all about the heart. To what extent do we love God? What place does He hold in our affections? Everything else will flow from this.** *1 John 4.19-21: We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

The Story of the Parable (Luke 10.30-35)

Luke does not employ the normal Greek word 'to answer' in v.30. Rather the word has the idea of 'catching' or 'taking up' (cf. Acts 1.9). The Lord Jesus was going to speak concerning the whole matter of eternal life and loving God. In so doing, He would also address the question of the lawyer's eternal destiny and his 'neighbour'.

Background: The 'certain man' (v.30) 'went down' (quite literally) on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This road was 20 miles long and descended 3,000 feet from the heights of Jerusalem to the Jordan river. The road was dangerous as it passed through a rocky gorge known as the 'Ascent of Blood'. The road connected the city of privilege (Jerusalem) to the city of commerce (Jericho). Jericho was also called the 'city of palms' (Deuteronomy 34.3, Judges 3.13) and had a beautiful climate, receiving only 8 inches of rain a year. It was one of the main residences of the priesthood, with over half of them located there during the earthly days of the Lord Jesus. It is possible the priest was on his way home (v. 31) after temple service which lasted for two weeks of every year. This was initiated by David after he divided the priests into 24 courses or divisions (1 Chronicles 24.3-19, cf. Luke 1.8).

As the certain man travelled he fell among 'thieves' (*lestes*). The Greek differentiates between a 'thief' (*kleptes*) and a 'robber' (*lestes*). Thieves were those who stole by stealth, e.g. Judas Iscariot (John 12.6). Robbers were those who violently and openly plundered what they wanted, e.g. Barabbas and the two crucified with the Lord Jesus (Matthew 27.38, John 18.40). These robbers first stripped the man of his raiment (clothing was valuable), then 'laid blows upon' or 'wounded' him. Finally they departed, leaving him 'half dead' or 'hovering between life and death'.

Interpretation: This 'certain man' represents the **lawyer**. Although he couldn't see it, this was his position before God. Satan and sin had left him battered, bruised and nigh to death (cf. Isaiah 1.5-6). This man had been travelling down from the presence of God in Jerusalem to the city of the curse (Jericho, Joshua 6.26). *Galatians 3.10: For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.* The lawyer was under the works of the law and therefore cursed. In fact, this applies to the whole of mankind: 'Man's course has been retrograde ever since the catastrophe in Eden' (WW Fereday). As believers, it is possible to take backward or downward steps in our Christian lives. Abram (Genesis 12.10) and Naomi are good examples (Ruth 1.1). Perhaps occasionally we need the arresting influence of the robbers! Someone or something to stop us in our tracks and cause us to submit to the Samaritan's compassion. We need a realisation of our own weakness to encourage us to submit to His strength. *2 Corinthians 12.10: Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*