



He Qi - The Good Samaritan

THE GOOD SAMARITAN (can be read in Luke 10:25–37)

The story of the Good Samaritan is a wonderful example of Jesus the story teller, telling us that in God's kingdom, sometimes the right are wrong. Sometimes the bad are good. And, sometimes those who we thought were on our side are not, and those we thought of as our enemies turn out to be our friends.

The background to this story goes a long way back in Jewish history. By the time of Jesus, Jews and Samaritans had hated each other for a thousand years. When king Solomon died in 931 BCE, the united monarchy split into two factions. Jereboam led a revolt of ten northern tribes and established a new capital in Samaria. The two remaining tribes of the southern kingdom of Judah maintained a capital at Jerusalem. The legacy of this split resulted in a

thousand years of political rivalry, ethnic hostility, and religious bigotry.

Jews and Samaritans despised each other. The Samaritan woman at the well was shocked that a Jewish rabbi would even speak to her. "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"

When a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, James and John wanted revenge: "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" It's not clear why, but one time Jesus told his twelve apostles not to go into any Samaritan village, but "only to the lost sheep of Israel."

But the parable of the Good Samaritan turns all these tables. Two religious professionals neglect a fellow Jew who was almost beaten to death, while a Samaritan was "moved with mercy" to help him.

Jesus shocks us with this story. He does the same thing when he makes a Samaritan leper the hero in Luke 17: "Was no one found to return and give thanks to God except this foreigner?"

But that's not all Jesus intends. He doesn't merely shock us.

There's no purpose in that. He wants to show us what living the life of God is like.

Luke writes that the religious expert "stood up to test Jesus" with a question. What must he do to inherit eternal life? This wasn't an honest inquiry; he wanted to trap Jesus.

When Jesus asks him what the Scriptures say, the expert in the law quotes the two "greatest commands" — Deuteronomy 6:5 about the love of God and Leviticus 19:18 about love of neighbour.

His answer was spot on. "You have answered correctly," said Jesus. Which is a scary reminder that being religiously right is a far cry from showing mercy. Knowing the good isn't good enough without doing the good. If you want to truly live, if you want to inherit eternal life, said Jesus, show mercy to your neighbour.

The expert deflects Jesus's response. Luke says that "he wanted to justify himself." He tries to limit his responsibility by defining who is or is not his neighbour. In that context, Jews and Samaritans would have treated each other as enemies and not neighbours. This effort at self-justification is a close cousin to self-righteousness; they're a recipe for spiritual death.

In telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus turns the man's question. The right question is not, "who is my neighbour?" Rather, the right question is, "who acted like a neighbour?" Once again, the expert knows the right answer: "the one who had mercy." But the story ends here and we never learn if he moved from being right to showing mercy.

In his speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Martin Luther King, Jr. put it this way. "The priest and the Levite ask, 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But then the Good Samaritan came by, he reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

Jesus concludes: "Go and do likewise." Show mercy.



The Good Samaritan (1907) by Paula Modersohn-Becke