

The Parables in Luke's Gospel

Volume 1

Introduction

When Luke wrote his Gospel he tells us he had undertaken some careful research so as to give an accurate account of the life of Jesus (Luke 1:1-3). Among the benefits from his careful work is the large number of parables that we find in his Gospel. This was certainly a favourite means of teaching used by Jesus. Therefore, there is much for us to learn from them. In this study booklet we shall look at them in the order in which they are found in Luke's Gospel. We shall look at seven parables in this study booklet. The remaining parables will be dealt with in succeeding volumes.

a. What is a parable?

The word 'parable' literally means 'a placing of one thing by the side of another'. So it can refer to comparing something with something else, like an illustration. Sometimes it can be a simple short descriptive story. On occasions the parables Jesus told were only a few sentences. Other times they were longer. In them Jesus used things that were very familiar to his listeners, such as the weather, farming, the family, and even objects such as a lamp or a coat.

b. Why Jesus used parables

Jesus used parables so that the listener would draw out important spiritual truths from familiar everyday facts.

Very often only one main truth is taught by a parable, but on other occasions more than one truth is presented. However, not every detail in a parable has spiritual significance.

We can say three things about the use of parables:-

- i. they make understanding the truth easier,
- ii. they make remembering the truth clearer,
- iii. they call the listener to respond to Jesus in a particular way.

This last point is important, because they are not just stories or illustrations for their own sake. They always have this purpose, to make the listener respond to God's truth. A parable presents spiritual truth in a graphic way, and this will have an application sometimes to this life and sometimes to the life to come.

This booklet is based on the series of 'Sound Words' Bible-teaching programmes which looked at the parables in Luke's Gospel. I am indebted to Ron Low, the pastor of Providence Baptist Church, Wetherden, England, for his help with these programmes.

You will profit most from this booklet if you read it with your Bible by your side so that you can follow the references. May God speak to your heart as you prayerfully study these parables.

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Chapter 1 Luke 5:33-39: New cloth and old coat, and new wine and old wine skin

1) The setting of this parable (v33-35)

Some people came to Jesus with a question about fasting. John the Baptist, who came to prepare the way for Jesus, and the Pharisees, who were a strict religious group of Jews, had disciples who fasted, but Jesus' disciples were continuing to eat and drink. So the question asked the reason for this difference (v33). (Luke does not tell us precisely who these people were, but Matthew 9:14 indicates they were some of John's disciples. See also Mark 2:18.)

Fasting is going without food for a spiritual purpose. The Bible often links fasting with prayer as here in verse 33, where food is not eaten and, instead, the time is given to seeking God in prayer. It indicated the earnest, serious, genuine heartfelt concern of the person fasting for a variety of matters. The Law of God in the Old Testament part of the Bible actually required only one fast in a year, on the Day of Atonement. (See Leviticus 16:29-34, where fasting is described as 'denying yourselves', or 'afflicting your souls' - Authorised Version.) But as time passed, voluntary fasting occurred a number of other times in the Old Testament. Here are some examples:

- i. during afflictions (2 Samuel 12:16; Psalm 35:13; Daniel 6:18),

- ii. approaching danger (Esther 4:16),
- iii. confession of sin (1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1-2; 1 Kings 21:27; Daniel 9:3-4; Jonah 3:5-8; Deuteronomy 9:18),
- iv. bereavement (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12),
- v. seeking God's guidance and help (Exodus 34:28; Ezra 8:21-23).

Fasting was never to be considered a means whereby someone could earn or merit God's special favour. Instead, it indicated the sincerity of the worshipper and their total dependence on the Lord. Sadly, some did think it automatically gained God's favour (Isaiah 58:3-4), and they were rebuked for it (Isaiah 58:5-12; Jeremiah 14:11-12; Zechariah 7).

However, by the time of Jesus the Pharisees had gone to the extremes of fasting twice every week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays (Luke 18:12). When they did so they made a great fuss about it, powdering their faces and looking miserable, so that everyone would notice them and see how spiritual they must be! This was something Jesus condemned clearly in Matthew 6:16. It was not an indication of their humble dependence on God, but their arrogant pride and desire for men's praise – and was not true fasting at all!

We are not told precisely why John's disciples fasted and two possible reasons have been suggested. They may have been mourning over their sin, as repentance was a central

theme in John's ministry. Or they may have been mourning over John's death. However, the point in question is that both John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples fasted in accord with the teaching or example of their leaders, whereas Jesus' disciples did not. Therefore, the question Jesus was asked was, "Why was there this difference?" In reply Jesus told this parable:

2) The parable itself (v33-39)

"No-one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no-one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'"

This parable contains two illustrations. Firstly, no one tears a patch from a new piece of clothing to sew on to an old garment. The result would be that you would spoil the new garment, and the new patch would not match the older material. Secondly, no one pours new wine into old wine skins. The wine skins were made of skin from a sheep or goat. As the new wine matured it would burst the old wine skins because they could not stretch any more. The result of such would be that the wine would run out and be lost, and the wineskins would be ruined – literally 'perish'. Rather, the new wine must be put into new wineskins

which are more elastic and will stretch as the wine ferments.

3) The parable explained

Jesus precedes the parable with an illustration to help his questioners. It is in the form of a question to which the only answer that can be given is "No". *"Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"* The picture is that of a wedding with the bridegroom and his special guests and the joy they share – a wedding was a time for feasting. By his question, Jesus outlines that fasting at such a time and in the bridegroom's presence is totally inappropriate. Now, by using this illustration, Jesus is referring to himself as the bridegroom and his disciples as his special friends. The picture is a lovely one indicating the care and love Jesus has for all his followers. With Jesus actually present with them, fasting was inappropriate. It would be completely out of place for them to mourn while he continued to do works of mercy and speak words of life. However, a day was coming when he would be taken away from them (verse 35 – a clear reference to his death), then they would mourn and express this by fasting. We need to remember that such sorrow was only for a little while, as Jesus rose from the dead and is alive for evermore. Joy and gladness are now to characterise the disciples of Jesus (1 Peter 1:8f): *"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him **and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**"*

It is at this point, to make this teaching clear that Jesus uses this parable.

a. The new cloth and an old garment

If you tear out some new cloth to patch up an old coat you will ruin both the new garment and the old one. The lesson is simply; do not mix the old with the new. Instead, receive the teaching of Jesus which gives great joy to all who believe in him. This joy is the joy of salvation, of sins forgiven, of peace with God, of transformed lives, of his presence through life, and of great blessedness beyond death. In other words, there is no room for this old Jewish legalistic fasting.

b. The new wine and old wineskins

Old wineskins are unsuitable for new fermenting wine. New wine needs new wineskins. The Lord Jesus brings the new wine of salvation, of rescue from the everlasting ruin that sin brings. This salvation is given to all who will receive it from him, whether Jew or non-Jew, whether considered highly by men or despised by them. All who come to Jesus for this most precious salvation will receive it and the joy it brings. It is a gift, because it is not by our efforts or merit that salvation is obtained, but by God's grace alone.

This new wine needs new wineskins – the wineskins of thankfulness, freedom, and eager and willing service for

God. Therefore, the old Jewish legalistic and joyless fasting is out of place.

Jesus drives this home with the words of verse 39, referring to the unwillingness to change, and rigidity in adhering to man-made traditions that characterised the Pharisees in particular. Like someone who has drunk old wine and who says it is always better than any new, so these Pharisees were rejecting Christ by claiming their old way was far superior than the way of salvation God was providing in Jesus. But their old way was not the same as God's way. They had added so many of their own rules and regulations and made religion such an intolerable burden, that they had lost sight of God's way. They frequently criticised Jesus and his followers, especially those they considered to be unworthy of God's blessings, such as tax-collectors and sinners – sadly, they did not realise their own sinfulness, but proudly thought they did not need his forgiveness because of the things they did – in this case fasting.

It is not that Jesus is excluding fasting of any kind. Instead, he is rejecting this compulsory form of fasting that was considered as earning God's favour and was deadly formal. He did practise fasting himself and gave careful teaching about it to his disciples (see Matthew 4:2 & 6:16-18). But it was always voluntary, never to earn God's special favour or as a means of gaining some merit.

Chapter 2 Luke 6:46-49: The parable of the wise and foolish builders

1) The Setting

This parable is found in Luke's account of what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount, which is also detailed in Matthew's gospel. In the verses that immediately precede this parable Jesus indicates the difference between a true believer and someone who is not a genuine Christian. Those who do not follow Jesus do not have hearts that have been changed. Instead, they remain sinful. Jesus uses the word 'evil' to describe them and the things they store in their hearts and which characterise their behaviour. The true followers of Jesus have been changed within. They have new hearts. And from these new hearts they speak words that betray the goodness within.

In this parable we have a similar theme: the difference between true Christian believers and those who are not. This time Jesus refers to the whole conduct of people as they respond to all that he teaches. He teaches us that obedience to him is the mark of his true followers.

In Luke 6:46 Jesus begins with a solemn and searching question. *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"* There were some people who sounded like genuine followers of Jesus because they said, *"Lord, Lord,"* but a further examination of their lives indicated something was not right. This can all too easily happen, because many people have ideas about what it means to be a true Christian, but which are quite different from the description given in the Bible. But this is not at first clear, because they actually do some of the things that genuine followers of Jesus do. For example, they may go to

meetings with other Christians. They may read the Bible that Christians read. They may sing the songs that Christians sing. They may even talk about God and Jesus, and also enjoy doing so at times. But although they are seen to do all these things, still something is not right with them. Still they are not true followers of Jesus.

This is very searching. Sometimes these people know they are not genuine Christians, and deliberately give a false impression. But others really are convinced they are followers of Jesus when they are not! What we must remember always is that Jesus knows the real truth about everyone. He looks at our hearts and not just at the outward appearance (2 Timothy 2:19): *"God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.'"* (1 Samuel 16:7): *"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

This means that no one can deceive him and get away with it. It is possible for some to be so good at pretending they are Christian believers that even the true followers of Jesus can be misled by them. The most outstanding and tragic case of this is Judas Iscariot. But no one is ever able to escape the eyes of Jesus who knows the real truth about each one of us.

To help us have a clearer idea of the genuineness of someone's claim to be a follower of Jesus, he gives us this parable. This will help us examine our own hearts and lives to see if we truly are his disciples.

2) The parable

Jesus said, *"I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck the house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."*

3) The parable explained

a. The genuine Christian believer

A genuine follower of Jesus will come to him, listen to what he teaches, and then put it into practice (v47). His obedience to Jesus is the important lesson here. Jesus describes such a person as 'wise' in Matthew's account of this parable (Matthew 7:24). Luke leaves that word out, but what he describes very clearly shows that this person is wise.

Jesus describes him as a builder of a house. Having found the site on which to build he considered what was necessary to ensure the house would last. Therefore, he

very carefully dug good foundations. Note Jesus says he dug 'down deep'. He realised he needed a foundation that would not fail, so he dug down to the rock – something solid and lasting and not easily moved. How wise he was to do this, for he did not want to build a house that would soon fall down when under test. Jesus then tells us that a flood came, a ferocious torrent which hit his house – but it could not even be shaken because it was well built.

Everyone who comes to Jesus, listens to what he has to teach, and then puts that teaching into practice, is like this wise man. When that person's life is put under test it will stand and not be destroyed. True Christian believers will find that they will have their claim to be followers of Jesus put to the test on many occasions. The Christian will be tested in this life very often by some of life's hardships – they will be like storms, but the true believer will remain standing, because he puts the words of Jesus into practice. Christ's words strengthen believers to remain faithful. But the severest test will be God's judgment, and the disciples of Jesus will remain standing, and will not perish because they have come to Jesus, listened to what he teaches, and obeyed it.

Jesus is teaching the same thing that James wrote about in his letter (James 2:26): *"... Faith without deeds is dead."* Simply to say we believe in Jesus is not enough. It must be seen to be true, and if it is true we will obey Jesus in whatever he requires. True Christians will be eager to discover Jesus' teaching by studying the Bible as often as

they can, and then eagerly putting this teaching into practice in their own lives. Someone has described it like this: *“A true Christian is someone whose life and lips agree. They do not say one thing, but do something entirely different. They do call Jesus ‘Lord’. And they show this to be true by humbly and gladly submitting to his commands.”*

b. The counterfeit Christian

Like the genuine believer, this person also listens to Jesus’ words, but it stops at that – he does not obey them. Up to this point he looks the same as the real Christian, and that is why we can easily be misled or mistaken about ourselves and/or other people. To the question, ‘What is such a person like?’ Jesus answers, ‘They are like a foolish builder’ (Matthew 7:26).

Jesus outlines the plans of this man to build a house and the way he went about it. He chose a site that looked suitable and attractive, and then spent quite some effort to erect it ‘on’ this ground. He failed to dig and build a good foundation. In Matthew’s account he adds the detail that the ground was sand. It may well have been on a dry riverbed, or a sand bank at the edge of a stream.

Like the other builder he had to face the storm and the same torrent. But the result was disastrous. Because there was no firm foundation the force of the torrent of water washed the house away. It collapsed and its destruction was complete! What an awful picture Jesus leaves us with. This is the person who heard what Jesus had to teach, but

refused to put it into practice. He perished, and perished completely. When tested to see if it was a good house, it fell down. This is the case with many even in this life; when trial and difficulty come to them, they quickly turn away from Jesus and show they were never truly his followers. And it will be the case ultimately in the final judgment. They will fail the test and will lose everything. There will be no place in heaven for such a person, for he has despised the teaching of Jesus, the Son of God, and will be in hell forever.

4) Application to us

i. This parable presents us with the authority of Jesus. He is indeed *“Lord”*, just as the people Jesus referred to in verse 46 said. This fact has important implications for us. As Lord, Jesus is greater and higher than all, and has unique authority (see Matthew 28:18). As Lord he is the Saviour of all his followers, and is over all things for their benefit, and cares for each one of them (see Ephesians 1:22-23). As Lord, he will judge the world (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, especially noting the words of verse 8: *“And do not OBEY the gospel”*). If Jesus really is our Lord we shall gladly do those things that he requires.

ii. Our lives show if we are truly Christ’s followers. What kind of life are you building? Are you truly following Jesus by obeying his teaching? Or are you stopping short, appearing to be his follower but in truth not following him at all? Our response to these questions is

urgent and vital. We must trust **AND** obey the Lord Jesus Christ or we shall suffer everlasting ruin and loss. We are saved by faith in Christ alone, but true faith is never alone. Genuine faith will produce obedient lives full of good deeds (Ephesians 2:10). If we do not do what Jesus asks of us we cannot be his disciples, whatever else we may think or claim. But if we do trust and obey him, untold blessing will be ours. We will know the Lord in this life and enjoy his forgiveness, daily help and presence. And when our earthly life comes to an end we shall be brought to heaven itself, and be with Christ forever.

Chapter 3 Luke 7:31-35: The parable of the children playing in the market place

1) The setting

The verses before this parable concentrate on Jesus and John the Baptist, highlighting something of their respective ministries and the responses of the people to them. John's ministry was preparatory, making the people ready for the ministry of Jesus – he had pointed men to Jesus as the Saviour (John 1:29f). John was now in prison because he had courageously denounced King Herod's immoral behaviour (Matthew 14:3-4), and he wanted reassurance that Jesus was indeed the promised Saviour. So some of John's followers came to Jesus on John's behalf to ask if he really was the Saviour. Jesus sent them back to John, giving them a summary of his ministry which was a demonstration that he really was God's promised Redeemer (Luke 7:22), and also with some words of encouragement for John (Luke 7:23). As they left, Jesus

took the opportunity to ask the crowd about John and how they considered him. In Luke 7:24 he said John was not a weak messenger like a reed in the wind, and in 7:25 he was not a self-indulgent charlatan. Instead (Luke 7:26-27) John was a prophet and more. The one who came to prepare the way for the Messiah (cf. quote from Malachi 3:1). (See also Luke 3:1-6 and Isaiah 40:3-5.)

At this, a clear division that already existed now became apparent. The ordinary people, including the despised tax collectors, agreed with Jesus' assessment of John (Luke 7:29). They recognised God's message was right, because they had already repented of their sins and shown this by being baptised (see Luke 3:7-15). They knew they were sinful and in need of forgiveness and, therefore, gladly submitted to God's command – expressing their change of heart in baptism. But the religious leaders, the Pharisees and teachers of the law, rejected God's message and refused to repent and were not baptised by John. They thought they were better than the rest and were so good that God would automatically accept them. Therefore, they considered this preaching about sin and repentance really had nothing to do with them, so they dismissed it – and rejected God's purpose for them. Indeed, they rejected both John's ministry and that of Jesus.

At this Jesus posed a question that was designed to make these unbelieving leaders and their followers sit up and listen (Luke 7:31). He really is asking, 'What are you like?' What the Lord thinks about us is really more

important than anyone else's ideas, including our own! His opinion is clear, honest, unbiased and truthful – totally accurate. Our opinions of ourselves are often biased and proud. For example, we may say about ourselves, *"I'm not as bad as all that!"* However, Jesus sees us as we really are, with his searching, penetrating gaze.

Jesus now proceeded to tell them what they were like by supplying his own answer with this short parable.

2) The parable

Jesus said, *"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling out to each other: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.'"*

Often when the market traders had left, the children used the market place for a playground. But on this day the children were shouting at one another and arguing. Some suggested playing at weddings with all the music and dancing that was normally associated with that – but a number of the children refused to join in, considering it too joyful. So another suggested playing at funerals singing the usual sad dirge. But the others still refused to play, considering it too sad. Hence the shouting match as the children began to argue. Some of the children were simply unwilling. No one could please them. They were being very childish.

3) The meaning and application

Jesus is saying that these spoilt children were just like his listeners. The way in which this displayed itself is now made clear for us. Regarding John the Baptist, who did not eat bread nor drink wine, they accused him of being demon possessed because of his austere life (Luke 7:33). Regarding Jesus, who did eat bread and drink wine, they accused him of grave excesses – gluttony, drunkenness and befriending the undesirables and social outcasts of the day, saying he was not austere enough! (Luke 7:34.) In other words, no one could please them! They were full of criticism and refused to participate in the message God gives, regardless of the way it came to them.

Further, their criticism was totally unjust for both Jesus and John preached repentance and self denial (cf. Matthew 3:1 with Matthew 4:17).

Like the children who were determined not to play, these people were equally determined not to repent – they were not going to receive God's message at all! They were always finding some excuse for not believing and obeying God, and then claiming they were right, when they were tragically wrong. In their critical way they were being rebellious. These people proudly refused to humbly acknowledge their sinfulness and so saw no need to repent and, therefore, would perish (Romans 3:23, 6:23).

The result of this is described like this in verse 35: *"But wisdom is proved right by all her children."* Those who do

take heed of the Saviour's message and accept it, rejoicing that he is the friend of sinners, and gladly are guided by such wisdom, repenting of their sin and trusting in Christ for forgiveness, are blessed and saved.

What are you like? Are you stubbornly refusing to repent of your sin? Always making excuses for not trusting the Lord Jesus to cleanse your sin away through his precious blood? Never accepting God's message whoever brings it? Remember Jesus' words in verse 35 – those who do receive Christ are right and will be proved right, but all others, though they think they are right, will be proved wrong.

Therefore, if you are not yet a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, then turn to him, the Saviour you need, and do so in repentance and faith.

If you are a Christian believer, when you are mocked or criticised for following the Lord, do not doubt, nor despair, nor stop following him – for this is the right way.

Chapter 4 Luke 7:36-50: The parable of the two debtors

1) The setting

Jesus was in the house of a Pharisee named Simon as his guest at a meal. He reclined at the table in what was the normal way of sitting at a meal – on a couch. As the meal progressed a woman with a sinful reputation came to where Jesus was. Note carefully Luke's words, "*who had lived a sinful life*" (Luke 7:37). She was no longer living that way – that was in the past, and very probably in the recent past. That she came to the dinner uninvited and to a Pharisee's

house was unheard of in that day and, therefore, took tremendous courage, and what she did was very unusual.

She brought an alabaster jar of precious perfume and stood behind Jesus by his feet. She began to weep and her tears wet his feet, then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them.

Simon the Pharisee viewed this very critically, but did not express his views. We are simply told what he said to himself (Luke 7:39). He was shocked that Jesus would even allow such a sinful woman to touch him, and his self-righteousness comes to the fore. This indicates a number of things regarding Simon. Clearly he despised this woman. Also he intended to do nothing to help her be restored from her sinful ways, neither did he think it was ever possible for such a woman to be brought back to God – hence his critical thoughts. Added to this we can say he did not consider himself to be a sinner who was unworthy in the sight of God and himself in need of repentance. Then also he was a coward as he kept these things to himself and did not talk openly with Jesus about them. We see, then, that he did not respect Jesus very much, thinking he could not be a prophet for allowing such a thing to take place. We must say he was wrong on each of these points, as Jesus goes on to reveal with the use of a parable.

Before looking at the parable we must take note of the fact that Jesus knew what Simon the Pharisee was thinking! Keeping it to himself did not mean Jesus was unaware of

his attitude and response to what was happening. This is a very important lesson: we cannot hide anything from Jesus, including our sinful thoughts. We can hide our thoughts from other people. For example, it is possible to smile at someone, while having very evil thoughts about them, and they never know. We can deceive others. **But we can never hide anything from the Lord.** He is everywhere we go, he sees everything we do and say, and he understands every thought we ever have, including sinful thoughts. The Bible makes this clear on many occasions, and it is very searching. Consider David's testimony (Psalm 139:1-4): *"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord."* We have similar words from Peter in John 21:17: *"Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."* Then the Psalmist tells us (Psalm 94:11): *"The Lord knows the thoughts of man..."* And Jeremiah writes (Jeremiah 12:3): *"Yet you know me, O Lord; you see me and test my thoughts about you."*

2) The parable

Jesus said, *"Two men owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii (a denarius was worth one day's wages), and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"*

Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled. You have answered correctly."

Jesus' response to Simon's attitude and thoughts is very interesting. He does not immediately rebuke Simon, but tells him a story and gets him to answer a pertinent question – getting Simon to see by his own words how wrong he was. He draws Simon into the parable, by first saying he had something to tell him (Luke 7:40) – which Simon is then eager to know about.

The two men in the parable had considerable debts. One owed about 2 months' wages, the other about 18 months'. Also they were both bankrupt because they had nothing to pay the debts with, so could do nothing of themselves to get out of this trouble.

Jesus asked Simon in Luke 7:42, *"Now which of them will love him more?"* Simon said, *"I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled."* He was clearly correct (Luke 7:43). The man with the larger debt was bound to respond with greater love. Jesus then commends Simon for his wise answer.

3) The explanation of the parable and application Jesus makes

It is only now at this point that Jesus begins to reveal he knew what Simon had thought about the woman, and how wrong he was. By doing it this way Simon had already condemned himself with his own mouth. Jesus draws a

comparison between the woman and her actions and Simon and his actions, or lack of them in this instance.

i. Simon had not provided water for Jesus to wash his feet. This was the normal custom and minimum standard of common courtesy and hospitality in Jesus' time when someone who had been walking in the dusty streets came to visit. (See Genesis 18:4; Judges 19:21.) Simon had not provided this. **But the woman had wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.** Her tears show her deep sorrow for her guilt and shame. And to wipe his feet with her hair was again remarkable because no woman was supposed to let her hair down in public at that time. A tremendously loving thing to do!

ii. Simon had not welcomed Jesus with a kiss. Again a kiss was normally given on the cheek as a sign of friendship and welcome (Genesis 29:13, 45:15; Exodus 18:7). **But the woman had not stopped kissing his feet!** Again, what loving action; how highly she thought of Jesus, and how humbly she considered herself.

iii. Simon did not put any oil on Jesus' head. Again; an act of welcome, especially by the host of a special occasion. But Simon had not even anointed his guest with cheap olive oil! (See Psalm 23:5, 141:5.) **But the woman had poured this alabaster jar of perfume on his feet.** This jar was very expensive. Yet this woman does not count the cost as she pours it on Jesus. Plainly she loved Jesus very much indeed as all these actions indicate.

iv. The pointed application Jesus makes. This sinful woman had been forgiven (Luke 7:47). Her many sins had been pardoned. Her enormous debt of guilt had been wiped out. The Lord had been merciful to her. Her life of sinfulness was now over. The Lord had changed her heart. And it was because of this great mercy that she responded with the loving actions she had performed. She was so sorry for her past sinfulness, and so grateful for Jesus' forgiveness.

Lesson: Someone who has been forgiven much loves much, but those forgiven little love little.

What an exposure not only of the woman's love, but also of Simon's lack of it. We are left with the conclusion that Simon had not yet asked Jesus to forgive him for his sins – how sad. The scene continues with Jesus assuring the woman her sins had indeed been forgiven. But even this drew forth criticism from some other guests at the meal. However, Jesus was not put off by their unloving and unforgiving attitude, but says to the woman (Luke 7:50), *“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

What wonderful and comforting words for this woman to hear. Though others had dismissed her and thought her beyond hope – Jesus assured her she was not beyond his help. Even though her life had been a sinful mess, so that her reputation was known throughout the town, she was not beyond Jesus' power and grace to forgive. Now she could

go in peace knowing that she was right with God. Jesus uses the present imperative tense which means this was her permanent condition. At peace because God had forgiven all her sins.

It is important to note that it was not her loving actions that saved her from her sins; it was her faith in Jesus. But her faith in Jesus which brought her his forgiveness drew forth the love of her heart that was expressed in those gracious deeds.

4) Application to us

i. We must never think anyone is beyond the power, love and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive, cleanse and transform their lives. We need ever to guard against such a critical and unforgiving and self-righteous spirit. Instead, we should have hearts filled with compassion that reach out to the lost to help them.

ii. This parable and incident give great hope to the guilty. How wonderful to know that Jesus can forgive and change the most sinful of people – whatever we may have done in the past. If we truly repent of that sin and trust in him we shall be saved. No one is too guilty for Jesus to forgive, nor too shameful. Jesus brings hope for every sinner in this parable.

Therefore, we must all ask ourselves if we love the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you, like this woman, placed your faith, not in your efforts to make yourself right with God, but in

the Lord Jesus Christ to do that for you through his death on the cross?

Jesus was applying the principal which Simon himself had already stated was true. He was really calling Simon to do what this woman had done: to repent and place his trust in Jesus to be his Saviour too. Those who do are forgiven, and those forgiven will love him very much.

Chapter 5 Luke 8:5-15: The parable of the sower

1) The setting

The setting for the parable of the sower is important to grasp. Luke 8:1 tells us that Jesus was now travelling about from one place to another proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. This message was about God's kingship, rule or sovereignty recognised in the hearts and lives of his people. There God reigns in his grace bringing them complete salvation, making them his children, bestowing upon them every spiritual blessing, and securing them a place in the new heaven and earth for ever. Quite literally hundreds and hundreds of people were hearing this message from Jesus.

One day a large crowd was gathering to hear him again, and they were coming from over a wide area (Luke 8:4), "*from town after town*". It is this '*listening to Jesus*', or rather '*how men listen to him*', that is the reason why he taught the parable of the sower. There are many ways to listen to Jesus and not all of them are right or beneficial.

2) The parable

Jesus said, *“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”*

3) The explanation of the parable

Jesus now explains the parable of the sower to his disciples (Luke 8:11-15).

a. The seed is the word of God

This phrase means ‘God’s message’, the message Jesus brought and which is contained in the Bible. Jesus began this great work of teaching God’s word and it is carried on today as God’s servants and people share his message, the message of the Bible, with others. Most important is the way of salvation, that guilty sinners can be pardoned through the Lord Jesus Christ, and be *“... rescued ... from the dominion of darkness and brought ... into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”* (Colossians 1:13-14). This is the good news about the kingdom of God.

b. The different soils

These different types of soil represent different people and how they respond to the good news about Jesus.

i. The path (Luke 8:12). This is hard soil that has been trodden down, making it impossible for the seed to penetrate and grow. It just lies on the surface. Jesus said these are people who hear the word, but it does not sink down into their hearts. It is snatched away by the devil, the great enemy of God and men, so that it cannot do them any good. These people are very hard hearted and do not want to receive the word of God. The devil can snatch the word away by all sorts of means. For example, someone might hear a Christian believer talking about the love of Jesus and his power to forgive and change them, but the listener is quickly distracted by something else and does not really take notice of what was said to them. Or this can happen to those who meet with Christians to hear the Bible explained, and soon afterwards the conversation is about the weather, or some sport, or other interest, and it is as if the message of God has been snatched away from them and they forget it and it does them no good at all. Really, the path represents people who do not want to listen to God’s message.

ii. The rocky soil (Luke 8:13). These people are quite different from the first group because they do listen to God’s message and listen with joy at the good news they hear. Their response is not entirely negative but is quite encouraging at first. They are moved by the message, perhaps even tell the preacher. It looks as if they may respond to God’s message and become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything looks most promising; they

believe what they hear. However, their believing is not true saving trust in Jesus; it is only very superficial, or shallow. The seed has no roots going down deep because their hearts are like stony soil. A time of testing comes to them to see if they are genuine in the way they received the message of God's word. Perhaps persecution – family, friends and neighbours begin to mock them for this initial interest in Jesus and God. And it is all too much for them. They do not endure, and give up any interest they appeared to have. It was not genuine. They were not truly converted. (See 1 John 2:19 and compare it with John 10:27-28 and Philippians 1:6.)

iii. The thorns (Luke 8:14). This soil describes those who do listen to the message, but again they do not endure. In this case the problem arises over a period of time and the word of God is choked and does not come to fruition in their lives. The pressures of life begin to build up. Their concerns and worries over matters like money and material things and earthly pleasures increase, and have the effect of choking any growth in the things of God. Again all comes to nothing. They were never really converted, though it took some time for it to show in their case – (Luke 8:14) *“they do not mature”*. But it does show eventually and, tragically, they do not benefit from the good news about Jesus.

iv. The good soil (Luke 8:15). This stands for people who have *“noble and good”* hearts. The word *“noble”* means good quality, honourable, excellent, profitable, and the

term *“good”* means generous, virtuous, upright. In other words, these people are genuine listeners to Jesus. They come to him really wanting to know the truth God has to teach. They take spiritual things seriously. They are honest and open and listen without prejudice in order to consider carefully all that Jesus says. The Bereans (Acts 17:10-12) are an example and contrast to the Thessalonians. They eagerly examined the Scriptures, the Bible, to see if the message was true. They really desired to understand what God had said.

Having heard the message they then *“retain it”*. This term means to hold in a firm grasp and to keep. They do not let anything take the message of God from them, including the devil and his distractions, trials and persecutions, or the cares and worries of life. And they keep on doing this continually, never stopping, never letting the word of God depart from their hearts and minds. They persevere. They do not give up following Jesus at the first sign of difficulty or discouragement or even failure on their behalf. And after a long time they remain faithful to Jesus and keep on following him. They let God's word sink down into their hearts. They begin to obey its instructions. This starts with becoming a follower of Jesus. This continues by turning away from sinful ways and following the paths of righteousness – doing those things which are good and profitable, such as we find in Paul's instructions in Philippians 4:8-9: *“... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or*

praiseworthy – think about these things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” And in Colossians 3:16: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...”*

They apply the word of the Lord and live it out in their lives as they trust in him. The result of this is an abundant harvest – the word of God bears fruit in their lives. They are transformed. They enjoy increasing victory over sin. They grow more and more like Christ. They have the assurance that the Lord has prepared a place for them in heaven so that death no longer holds them in terrifying fear. They become useful in God’s service, and an encouragement to other believers. They enjoy fellowship with God daily, and much more (see, for example, Galatians 5:22-23 and Ephesians 5:9). The result of this is that their lives bring praise and honour and glory to God.

4) Application

The whole point of this parable is to challenge us about the way we listen to the message of the Bible, the word of God. Which of these different soils are we like? Only the good soil bore fruit. If we belong to any of the other three soils, then we need to be changed. We need the Lord to give us new hearts. We need to be converted by the grace of God.

And if we are like the good soil and we are true followers of Jesus, we must ask ourselves, “Are we as fruitful as we ought to be?”

Chapter 6 Luke 9:57-62: The parables of the fox and birds, and the plough.

“As they were walking along the road (ie. Jesus and his disciples), a man said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ He said to another man, ‘Follow me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’”

We have here two short parables with a speech in between.

[A] The parable of the foxes and birds

1) The setting

In Luke 9:51 Jesus had demonstrated his whole-hearted commitment to the salvation of all who would believe in him by resolutely setting out to Jerusalem, knowing it meant the cross! (What an example he sets before us. He was willing to save sinners, even though the cost to him was going to be enormous.) Then a man came to Jesus and promised he would follow him wherever he went (Luke

9:57). He was making the bold statement that his whole life would be committed to Christ from then on, and that he would serve Jesus in whatever way Jesus decided and wherever he might send him.

Matthew 8:19 tells us this man was a teacher of the law, a scribe. This makes his promise the more remarkable, because these men were amongst the strongest opponents of Jesus. This is a heart-warming statement and the response that is desired by Jesus from all who would truly follow him. But Jesus' reaction to it is interesting. He does not welcome this man with open arms but puts an obstacle in his way.

This was not to reject the man but to test his commitment. In other words, to show the man himself if he was genuine, and to help him see that what is required is life-long loyalty and not just a spur of the moment decision.

2) The parable (Luke 9:58)

Drawing on two familiar facts Jesus teaches a valuable lesson. The foxes have their own homes in holes in the ground. They have their places of rest for weariness and refuge from danger. Similarly, the birds have their places to roost in, again for rest and refuge from danger. However, the Son of Man, Jesus, had nowhere to lay his head, nowhere he could call his own, no place of rest and refuge. (The title Son of Man comes from Daniel 7:13-14 and was used to speak of the authority, glory and sovereign power that the Saviour would possess.)

Jesus was telling the man that he was often rejected, asked to leave, and also had to move on so other people could hear the gospel. To follow Jesus may well mean deprivation, and will mean self-denial, sacrifice, service and suffering. Following Jesus is not easy, and will demand a life of ceaseless expending of energy in his service. Much is demanded of our strength. It can be very costly in personal terms to be a Christian believer.

We do not know how this man responded to Christ, but the real issue is how do we respond to him? Are we genuine followers, prepared to suffer the cost that will be involved?

[B] The short speech

1) The setting

This time it is Jesus who calls another man to follow him (Luke 9:59a). Jesus is exercising his Lordship over this man (cf. how he called Matthew in a similar way – Matthew 9:9). Jesus expects our eager and willing obedience to his commands.

2) The speech (Luke 9:59-60)

But the man responds in an interesting way (Luke 9:59b). He does not refuse and rebel out rightly, but he puts a delay on his obedience. *“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”* This phrase does not necessarily mean his father had just died, but was a colloquial phrase indicating looking after aged parents until their death, whenever that would be. In Israel it was the eldest son's responsibility to

arrange for burial and was considered a duty and a kindness that was to come before all other tasks.

So what this man is doing is using a delaying tactic – and the delay could be years. He does not say he will not follow Jesus, neither does he dictate what he wants to do but seeks Jesus' permission. So this is not outright rebellion. But he had not grasped the greater duty, and greater urgency there is concerning following Jesus. That **MUST** always take precedence over everything else because eternal issues are at stake.

This is clear from Jesus' response which is quite direct (Luke 9:60): *“Let the dead bury their dead.”* In other words, the spiritually dead can deal with these matters whenever they are necessary. *“But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”* That is, this work is of major importance and, therefore, must be a priority to us. This is more urgent as people are perishing, and their time and ours is running out. The Day of Judgment gets nearer every second.

[C] The parable about ploughing

1) The setting

Another man declares he will follow Jesus, but first wants to go back home to say goodbye. In Middle Eastern culture the man was in effect going home to seek permission from his family to follow Jesus, as 'goodbye' frequently means 'take leave of'. His priority was family first and what they said, and Jesus came second. But the

Christian believer must put Jesus first. So Jesus uses the second parable.

2) The parable (Luke 9:62)

A farmer needs to plough a straight furrow for his seeds and, therefore, needs to fix his eye ahead to ensure his oxen walks in a straight line. Undivided attention is called for. It would be no good for him to look backwards while his plough travels forwards. His work would be crooked and parts of the field left untouched and, therefore, wasted. His priority is to be his ploughing. He must not let his attention wander somewhere else.

In a similar way, Jesus will not accept half-hearted service. He wants our full attention, complete devotion, and unconditional faithfulness. If you are to follow Jesus then there must be no going back and no looking back to the old sinful ways. This man, in order to be useful in the Lord's kingdom, is to put Jesus first, not the opinions of his family.

Here are some examples from the Bible itself of what this means. Paul writes (Philippians 3:12-14): *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.”* Or Joshua

(Joshua 24:15): “... *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*” And Ruth in Ruth 1:16: “*But Ruth replied (to Naomi her mother-in-law), Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you will go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.*” (See also Ruth 2:12.) Also Timothy was urged to be wholehearted in his commitment to Jesus by Paul (2 Timothy 2:20-21): “*In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*”

We are not to be like the people of Elijah’s day who hesitated over following and serving the Lord, or following and serving the idol Baal (1 Kings 18:21): “*Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’*”

What are you like? Do you truly follow Jesus Christ first above everything and everyone else?

Chapter 7 Luke 10:25-37: The Good Samaritan

1) The setting

Repeatedly throughout his life Jesus was questioned by all sorts of people about a variety of things. But sometimes the questions were hostile and intended to trip Jesus up and catch him out. So they were not asked because the

questioner really did want to accept Jesus’ answer and teaching. This was nearly always the case with the religious leaders of the day, the priests, Pharisees and scribes. These were the teachers of the law of God in the Old Testament and the Jewish traditions which often obscured the true law of God. One such questioner, an ‘expert’ in the law, is involved in this incident.

His question is a good one (Luke 10:25): “*Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” However, his motives were not genuine. Indeed, he was hypocritical. Firstly, he stood to speak to Jesus and addressed him as ‘Teacher’. This was the normal way to address a teacher and acknowledge your respect for him. **BUT** he only asked this question to ‘test’ Jesus, not to accept him. Secondly, he later tried to ‘*justify himself*’ (Luke 10:29).

But his question is a very important one that needs examining in some detail before we come to the parable that Jesus taught. What is eternal life? Eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3). Eternal life is not only life of endless quantity, but also of the highest quality. It is where the love of God is known and enjoyed, where fellowship with God is a daily reality, where the peace of God is experienced in all its serenity, even in life’s storms, and where the joy of God abounds and increases in the believer’s heart. Eternal life is God’s gift (Romans 6:23). It cannot be earned because of man’s inability to keep God’s law perfectly. Eternal life is gained through Christ and Christ alone. So faith in him is

absolutely essential (John 3:16). Eternal life is to have the forgiveness of our sins through Christ. Eternal life begins on earth, in this life, and endures after death forever.

Jesus turns it back to the expert by asking him the questions in Luke 10:26: “*What is written in the law?*” and “*How do you read it?*” In doing this Jesus was showing that his own teaching was perfectly in accord with all that God had taught in the Old Testament. It was not some teaching that had nothing to do with what God had already revealed. (See Matthew 5:17.) The expert’s answer in Luke 10:27 says that to gain eternal life men must love God with all their being and in every part of their lives, and they are to love their neighbour with no less a love and concern than they have for themselves (i.e. Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). In other words, total devotion to God (“*with all*” is mentioned four times), and total dedication to promoting the good of others. So the Old Testament law of God teaches that perfect obedience results in eternal life. Jesus commends his answer and commands his continual perfect obedience to God’s law (Luke 10:28).

The problem is, however, not that God’s law is not good, but that we sinners cannot keep it. Therefore, we can never achieve or gain eternal life by our attempts at perfect obedience. We are always imperfect. The fault is not with God and his law (Romans 7:12), but with us! Indeed, the Bible goes much further. It shows our total inability to do anything of ourselves to attain eternal life. Consider these

verses: (Romans 8:7-8) “... *the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*” Romans 3:9-20 tells us there is no one who is righteous. All have turned away from God and, therefore, no one will be declared righteous by observing the law. Instead, the law of God exposes our sin. Indeed, this high and holy standard which the law of God sets before us demonstrates devastatingly how miserably we fall short of God’s standard and fail in this perfect obedience (Romans 3:23). The law of God places us under its judgment and curse (Galatians 3:10). It teaches us our sinfulness and great need of someone to be our Saviour (Galatians 3:24-25).

But, praise God, he has provided us with a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is able to rescue sinners from this curse because he became a curse for them through his death on the cross (Galatians 3:13-14, 4:4-5). He took sin’s punishment in the place of sinners. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He also kept God’s law perfectly and never once sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21a; Hebrews 4:15, 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22&24; 1 John 3:5). He laid down that life as a sacrifice for sin, shedding his precious blood (Galatians 1:3-4, 2:20b; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:14, 9:26b-28).

If only this expert of the law had then humbly repented of his sins and asked Jesus to forgive him, then he would have received the gift of eternal life through Christ. But sadly

he does not. Instead, he tries to justify himself! How arrogant and tragic!

Probably Jesus' words went home to him and he knew he did not possess eternal life, and that he did not love God perfectly all the time, nor did he treat all men with love. Therefore, he tries to get out of the dilemma by hoping to prove all men are not his neighbours. So he asks this question in Luke 10:29: "*And who is my neighbour?*"

Now, some had perverted the term "*neighbour*" (Leviticus 19:18) into 'love your neighbour but hate your enemy', which Jesus dealt with in Matthew 5:43-48. Many also said 'love your neighbour the Israelite'. But the Pharisees eroded it even further saying 'love your neighbour the Pharisee and ignore the rest'. It has been suggested that the 'expert' expected to be told his neighbour was his relative and friend, to which he would then say, "*I have fully loved these.*" Then Jesus would praise him and all the people would admire him. However, if so, the answer he received was not what he expected. Further, his question also indicates he still hoped to earn his entrance into eternal life. He clearly does not know that only by God's mercy can he live and inherit eternal life. He lacks appreciation of God's grace and trusts in his own abilities. Pride is his stumbling block.

It is at this point that Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan.

2) The parable

Talking to an expert in the Law, Jesus said, "*A man was going from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 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. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'*"

3) The meaning of the parable

The key to this is seen in the characters in the parable, (presumably) a Jew who had been attacked and a Samaritan, and the Lord's question and answer gained and command given (Luke 10:36-37).

a. The robbers.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is downhill for about 27 kilometres or about 17 miles, and has a long history of bands of robbers attacking travellers. This traveller was

brutally attacked, near to death, and very likely unconscious. (The Rabbis, the teachers of the law, used the expression ‘half dead’ to describe someone who was nearly dead). Now there were two ways someone could be identified in ancient Palestine. Firstly, by their dress – their clothes would indicate the area they came from. And secondly, by their speech – their accent. But in this case his clothing had been stolen, and being near to death would have been unable to speak, so he remained an unidentified figure to those who passed by – a complete stranger.

b. The priest.

Many priests lived in Jericho, and spent two weeks in Jerusalem when it was their turn to officiate in the temple. Because he was from the upper class of society it is very likely he was riding. In the Middle East the poor walked while the rest rode. But seeing the man, he did not come near him, but passed by on the other side.

Two reasons may account for this. Firstly, the man might be dead and the current rules for the priest would mean he would defile himself if he came within 4 cubits, or 2 metres of a dead person. The priest would then be unable to serve in the temple until he had gone through a prolonged period of ceremonial cleansing. The force of this is weakened considerably by the fact that he was returning to Jericho having completed his service in the temple. So the importance of such ceremonial uncleanness is reduced dramatically. Secondly, prevailing teaching was not to help an unknown stranger, and certainly not a non-Jew. As

he could not tell from his clothing where he came from, nor hear the man’s voice, he decided to ignore the man. His attitude was, ‘I do not want to get involved.’ This really is very selfish and uncaring.

c. The Levite.

Levites were the priests’ helpers in their work in the temple. Many of these also lived in Jericho. He did the same as the priest and really contributed to the wounded man’s suffering by his neglect. The Levite did not have such severe rules of uncleanness as the priest and, therefore, could have rendered help, but did not.

“He came to the place”, that is, close to the wounded man, to have a look. But again failed to give any help, perhaps being afraid of the robbers. So for the second time a no-caring attitude is expressed.

d. The Samaritan.

He really is a surprise character because Samaritans were hated by the Jews and had been for centuries. (See John 4:9 and also the insult to Jesus in John 8:48 and the mutual hatred in Luke 9:53.) The Samaritans were publicly cursed in the synagogues, and prayer was even made that they might not be partakers of eternal life! He was a rejected outsider, yet he becomes the hero of the story. It took great courage for Jesus to use a Samaritan.

The Samaritan had a deep reaction to the injured man, feeling compassion and pity. You would have thought that

the Priest and Levite would have at least done something to help but, instead, the Samaritan outshines them both. He, too, would become ceremonially unclean. He, too, was in danger of further attack from the robbers, and more so because he was a Samaritan. Further, if the injured man was a Jew, the Samaritan risked retaliation from the man's family, such was the Samaritan/Jew hostility! Yet he ignored all of these enormous pressures and came to the man, offering emergency first aid. He then placed him on his own donkey and walked instead of riding, just like a servant would do. Further, he stayed with him in the inn overnight and paid for his care, knowing the man was unable to pay him back.

What tremendous acts of selfless self-sacrificing love. He did the very opposite to the robbers. They robbed him, the Samaritan paid for him. They left him dying; he left him taken care of. They abandoned him, he promised to return. So the Samaritan helped the unknown stranger, and in spite of the cost in time, effort, money and personal danger, and without expectation of repayment, freely showed unexpected love to the one in need.

4) Application

Jesus then made a pointed application to the "*expert in the Law*" by asking him the searching question of verse 36: "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*" The "*expert*" answered with a measure of reluctance, not even using the name Samaritan!

So Jesus refused to tell him who is and who is not his neighbour, nor gave him a list of such individuals. He was really saying to the lawyer, "*To whom must you become a neighbour?*" He was being challenged to love all men if he wants to earn eternal life – even his enemies!!! – and to help anyone in need.

But this high standard is impossible for us sinners, as we have already seen above. Therefore, the expert is left with only one conclusion. These things were beyond him. Clearly, he could not justify himself and earn eternal life. Therefore, he needed someone to be his Saviour, someone who could give him eternal life. He needed to trust in Jesus. But, sadly, there is no record of his ever doing so.

5) Lessons

This parable has a number of important lessons to teach us concerning this great matter of gaining eternal life. Any attempt to earn eternal life will fail. God's standard is too high. And those who teach that salvation is achieved by our works are wrong and must not be followed (see Ephesians 2:8-9). To help us understand our need of God's forgiveness and to be given eternal life, Jesus shows us that sin falls into two categories. There are the things we do, such as is illustrated by the robbers, and the things we fail to do, as is seen by the priest and Levite (see also James 4:17). Honesty demands we admit we fail in both of these areas. We cannot ever earn God's favour. Eternal life can only be gained through God being merciful to us.

The other great theme of this parable is that of true love for others, both in the example of the Samaritan and through Jesus' words to the expert in the law (Luke 10:37), "*Go and do likewise.*" Though God's standard to love him and others is too high for us to achieve, so that we cannot earn our own salvation this way, yet when we have received eternal life as God's gift to us in Christ, we should still strive to be this loving to both God and our neighbour. This is not to earn eternal life, but in gratitude for God's mercy in freely giving salvation to all who trust in Christ for it. Also, the Samaritan was a hated outsider, yet he truly loved his neighbour. He had no prejudices against the injured man. We must, therefore, ensure we do not have sinful prejudices against people because of their different country, language, colour, social standing, education, tribe, caste, or anything else. Jesus teaches that our neighbour, to whom we are to be a neighbour, is everyone in need, even our enemies. Christian believers are to be caring people.

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