

Luke 10v30-37 *"And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said – A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves which stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed. Leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest in the way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And like wise a Levite. When he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.*

"But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him – Take care of him and whatsoever thou spendest more when I come again, I will repay thee.

"Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves? And he said He that shewed mercy on him, Go and do thou likewise."

This parable is very well known. It is an example given against the prejudice of the Jews towards the Samaritans, who were a rejected sect distinct from Judaism, but still within its confines in one sense. It was common for Jews to have nothing to do with these people as they were regarded as perverters of the Truth. Their Bible (Old Testament) had been translated centuries before but contained some alterations from the Hebrew. It is not regarded as a reliable record of the Biblical details, differing in areas like the chronology of the patriarchs by hundreds of years. They were not physically descended from Jews, they did not have the blood of Jacob in their veins, but they were proselytes of a sort, who had been forced to inhabit the partially empty land of Israel which the Assyrians had moved there during their domineering reign over the Middle East (The Levant).

Jesus was even accused of being a Samaritan, not because he was descended from those people but because he refused to accommodate the common approach regarding their religion. John 8v48 *"Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil"*. He fraternised with them, and preached to them, in a way he did not do with outright gentiles. Jesus said that he was sent to none but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Matthew 15v24. By preaching to them, he demonstrated that trying to assimilate in the direction of Judaism, they were a fringe group that having access to the Word, even if in an imperfect form, that they could be reached in a way that barbarian gentiles were as yet incapable of being touched.

Acts 10v28 *"Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation"*. This was said by the Apostle Peter after contact with the Samaritans but at the time of contact with an Italian gentile, Cornelius. This passage illustrates that the Jews and the Samaritan had bad blood between them it was a toleration of wayward cousins, with some common ground between them.

Jesus could have used the example of a Roman centurion as the benefactor to the injured man but that was going too far in the issues that were at stake. With the Samaritan, there was a racial separation but a spiritual proximity. Hope remained.

What Jesus communicated was not that any foreigner was your neighbour, regardless of whether he was trying to kill you or just plain ignoring you, but that those that help you are not to be dismissed just because of a perceived sleight. Your neighbours were not always what you expected, nor were they merely the people that lived closest to you, what we call next door neighbours. Jesus was addressing something else other than that!

Both the Priest and the Levite would have been regarded as neighbours to the injured man, but when questioned "*which of the three was neighbour*", these were passed over, because they had passed by on the other side. His natural countrymen were not his neighbours! This important information is fundamental to the message Jesus gave.

In answer to the question who is your neighbour? Jesus provoked the response "*He that shewed mercy on him*". Was Jesus teaching that we are not all neighbours to each other, but we are only neighbours when we show each other mercy?

If we are **not** paying attention to what Jesus actually said, by interpreting this parable by the lens of orthodoxy, then we will likewise fall into the trap of a superficial understanding that has captured the vast majority of expositors. It is almost dismissed as a message to, just be kind to strangers!

Digging deeper, it should be noted that every jot and tittle written in the Bible is both significant and important. If we ask searching questions seeking understanding in the detail that is given and also in what is not revealed we can tease out, or more scripturally "glean" the value which the Holy Spirit has placed in the narrative for others to extract, for it is "*the honour of kings to search out a matter*" Proverbs 25v2. The saints are to be Kings and priests of the Age to come. We should search out such gems.

What does it mean to "*fall among thieves*"? Was it a matter of chance? Does not God overrule in our lives? By falling does it suggest a descent from a height, a stumble, a mistake or error of poor judgment on behalf of the protagonist?

Who were these thieves? Gentiles? Unlikely as this was the heartland of Judea, and the land was full of Jews. It does not say who they were, but it seems that the unspoken default is that these were miscreant Jews out for personal profit at the expense of others. They seemed to have been callous and violent ruffians who were not just after a few stolen coins quickly snatched before running away, but they were prepared to even kill for their loot and took the very clothes off his back in their scandalous attack!

What does it mean to be "*half dead*"? An expression which is not used anywhere else in scripture and is biologically impossible, you either dead or you are not dead. It does not say he was almost dead, or that he had almost died or come close to death, it says he was half-dead!

What does it mean that he was stripped of his raiment? Why would thieves steal his clothes? Its not a very profitable thing to do unless the clothes were expensive and worthy something on the second-hand market! This implies that the man was affluent and well off, not your average man, caught out at the wrong time and the wrong place, perhaps a robbery of opportunism, when he was attacked because he had no travelling companions, which a rich person would normally have, accompanying him.

Why travel alone if he could afford not to do so? Was he unpopular, was he doing something he should not have been doing and therefore wanted to be secretive? Had he fallen out with his friends? Had he foolishly dismissed his servants or sent them on ahead, unaware or complacent with regards to the potential dangers of the road?

Why was a priest going “down” from Jerusalem to Jericho? The capital city is some 754 metres high and the city by the Jordan 233 metres below sea level, so about 1000 metres of descent on a dangerous and exposed road winding its way through the hills of Judea. What priestly territories were his destination?

What was a Levite doing on that road? Was he ascending as unlikely with the Priest and the traveller, his direction of travel is not specified. No doubt he did not wish to be defiled by the dead, or even worse did he see him moving and therefore had even less reason to “*pass by on the other side*”.

What were the oil and the wine symbolic of in this parable? Wine is an antiseptic and an anaesthetic and was often employed in the treatment of the afflicted especially when open wounds are evidenced. Oil has a protective element of covering over sores and raw wounds stopping infection penetrating and acting as a physical barrier to some water borne diseases. These seemed to have been the provender of the traveling Samaritan and not a bespoke medical pack. They also were the currency of the affluent not the poor. The Samaritan was not a beggar but blessed by God with abundance. All this the rich man, who had questioned Jesus, would have known well as he was similarly blessed by God and was being put to the test as to what he would do himself.

Why would an Inn keeper trust the word of a Samaritan and spend an unqualified extra amount on a stranger on the word of another stranger out of his own business profits? This is not how real people behave. Yes, take care of him but when the money is about to run out spend the last of it on relocating him, even sending him back home!

By asking such further searching questions it is possible to re-examine the basic approach to consider that it is much more layered than the popular notion often superficially taught at Sunday schools.

If we can say that the nation of Israel was a rich man, tragically alone, robbed by the jealous Jewish thieves in his own land where he should have been safe. However, he was leaving the holy city behind and was descending into the depths below sea level. That the thieves took his clothes because he was now naked and exposed to the elements, the former covering of Moses violently ripped away. Left “*half dead*” because the two-fold element of the split nation of Judah and Ephraim, the great division, never fully healed and which remained as a sore only to be finally resolved when the heir of the Davidic line patches up the nation so that they are divided no longer Ezekiel 37v22. Judah died even if the rest of the tribes remained alive although in a very sorry state! The end of the Jewish commonwealth came in 70CE when the temple was burnt, and the city ravaged by the Roman legions! Naturally speaking there was no way the Jewish nation could survive without the generosity of others, even those they despised and looked down upon.

The priesthood was of no real help to Israel, they had long abandoned their divinely appointed role of teaching the people and seeking to heal a sick nation, to focus on

preserving their own status and ritual cleanness under the misplaced and misunderstood Mosaic institutions. The Levites were no better, their supportive role to officiate in the temple was to end because nothing there was really done to the glory and honour of the Father, therefore it had to go.

The unexpected saviour was a Samaritan, just as Jesus was so dismissed in their jealous bigotry. The man needed to accept help from whence it came, not to refuse help because they did not like the religious position of an alleged heretic! Obviously in the parable it was not the man who had to decide, he was half dead, but the onlooker whom Jesus was testing by asking him of dark sayings and hard parables!

He put the injured Jew on his own beast of burden Greek Ktenos, perhaps a donkey or ass, and gave up of his own victuals. Oil and wine, to ensure that Israel survived and spend time energy and purpose which he could have spent elsewhere, in ensuring that Israel, who hated him, was nursed back to health over the extended time that was required, whilst he was away. These were not staples but luxury goods, only carried by those blessed with a certain abundance, not the fodder of the poor! Jesus had all things put under him but not yet seen by others, Hebrews 2v8.

The two pence (margin in KJV - for the day) suggests the two thousand years of the madness of the pigs, when Jesus was to be away from the land of promise before his promised return.

The Inn keeper had to act in good faith and had to trust the word of the Samaritan in order for the story to have a happy conclusion, as the Samaritan could not stay to finish what he had begun in person, so it is with the nation of Israel. Jesus will return to keep his promises and will pay the third party what he is owed for *“doing unto the least of these my brethren”*.

This radical approach has the advantage of redirecting the rich man who had asked the question *“What must I do to inherit eternal life”* away from the Law, which never saved anyone but was rather a pedagogue pointing towards the second Moses, Jesus Christ, the Jewish messiah who alone could save him from his sins. He was being directed away from the misdirection of the priesthood and temple worship which had failed the nation to instead accept the largesse of a veritable stranger, the heretical Nazarene who was dismissed as a Samaritan by the ignorant and jealous religious classes of the day.

Rather than saying “believe in me”, he downplayed his status as the Messiah at that point and instead instructed him through a parable which challenged him to dig deeper and to come to realise that the answers were not where he imagined them to be but were instead to be found on the fringes of Jewish society, even in that sect everywhere spoken against, Christ’s ecclesia, the new Samaritan.

If he could accept that the nation of Israel owed their full recovery to the word of a Samaritan and the earnest of a down payment to an Innkeeper who was required to act in good faith, then this meant that only then could Israel escape from the false rigours of the claustrophobic Judaism which had smothered the life out of God’s people, and a failed temple worship which was now only self-promoting.

It is belief and acceptance of the gospel that alone can bring Eternal Life through God's grace. The parable was given to stop the rich man justifying himself in his own circle of misbelief.

Robert Roberts in his book *Nazareth Revisited*, touches upon the dangers of a misapplication of this parable. "He did not mean to say that salvation was to be found in the succouring of the destitute, though the succouring of the destitute is one of the duties connected with it". Jesus taught his disciples "*enter not into any city of the Samaritans*" so it is not a question of promoting do-goodism nor the breaking down of all religious barriers! There is a nuance that will be missed by those who refuse to dig deeper than a surface reading. There is no requirement to go outlooking for the destitute but to deal with those whom God places before us in need, not "passing by on the other side" nor telling our friends to come to the roadside, so that they can help him instead of us!

Again, from *Nazareth Revisited*.

"When the Samaritan example is recognised at all, it is generally done with the effect of nullifying very much else of the teaching of the Spirit of God. The doing good to the poor in the matter of temporal supplies is made to take the place of the "righteousness of God which is by faith in Christ Jesus". The outcast position of Adam's race is denied: the mortal and hopeless relation of man to God, both by nature and character, is not admitted, the imperative necessity for the belief of the gospel, and submission to its requirements before men can become acceptable worshippers of God or heirs of life eternal is completely ignored – because of the parable of the Good Samaritan."

A dire warning from a faithful pioneer Brother.

We have much to learn from this and every parable, but we will only discover the challenge of obedience to the teachings of Christ, if we seek them out for ourselves by rightly dividing the Word of Truth and not following the herd, who stampede down the cliff to fall into the depths and drown in their own madness and folly.