

David Hrechuk - A Parable In Perspective

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We would like to consider the parable of the Good Samaritan as found in Luke chapter 10, and we'd like to look at it through the eyes of different perspectives. There are at least three perspectives from which to read any of the Gospels. The first is from the perspective of the present, from our perspective in 2025, we know how the story of Jesus ends. We know the fulfillments of Jesus, cryptic sayings.

And so when we are reading, we are reading back into the text from our vantage point. The second way to read is from the perspective of the audience that the Gospel writer was writing to. In this case, Luke was writing to a gentile audience in the first or second centuries, and they would like to pick up the book of Luke to learn about Jesus, and so each incident is building up a picture in their mind of who Jesus is.

And each time they turn the proverbial page, they encounter something new, something unexpected.

The third way to read the Gospels is from the perspective of the characters in the Gospels themselves. In this scenario, in this perspective, we focus on those involved in a specific scenario. So we might say the characters step into the frame, and then they step out of the frame, and we will find that with their interaction with Jesus, their thinking changes from how they thought at the beginning to how they think at the end of that interaction. So using all of these perspectives, we want to analyze the parable of the Good Samaritan today.

The premise of the parable itself begins in verse 25 of Luke, chapter 10, and I'll be reading from the ESV. We read and behold, a lawyer stood up. Well, Luke is already giving us enough information about this character to understand his prejudices and where he is coming from intellectually, and so defining him as a lawyer is the building block for the how and the why of this interaction. Throughout the Gospel of Luke, Luke differentiates between the Pharisees and the lawyers.

These two groups are interconnected and yet different, and yet we note that the term lawyers is interchangeable with two other terms, doctors of the law and scribes. The second group, the lawyers, traces their occupation to the scribes of the Old Testament who were writing things down, they were copying the law, and they were preserving the writings. After the return from Babylonian captivity, the word scribe began to include those who were involved with the teaching of the law. Ezra the scribe, was not just copying the law, but he was correlating, explaining, and teaching.

To a Jewish mind, in the time of Jesus, a scribe meant an expert in the law, but to a Greek reader, a scribe meant merely a copyist. So Luke explains this occupation to his readers by also using the terms lawyer, doctors of the law interchangeably to build up a picture of who this man actually was. As we said, this group is connected with the Pharisees, but seems to be of a higher caliber. Academically speaking. The Pharisees have political overtones.

The doctors of the law are seen to be more neutral. Their supreme loyalty is to the law of Moses. So this is the man that stands up at the beginning of this interaction with Jesus. I believe that we have a pretty good idea of how he is going to think. Once again we read in Luke 10:25 and behold, a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test.

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So now we have more information. This lawyer is not coming to inquire, but he is confronting Jesus in order to expose what the lawyer thinks is an incorrect teaching. This means that the lawyer is anticipating Jesus answer. He is setting up the question so Jesus can fail. That is why he addresses him as teacher.

The lawyer's motivation is to expose Jesus false authority as based on poor scholarship and an incorrect understanding of the law. So he asked the teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Let's pause and consider this question. Now we know that the lawyer already has an answer to this question. He is going to say in some fashion that to inherit eternal life, you must follow the law of Moses.

Obviously, then, in order to be a test, he thinks that Jesus is going to answer differently. But the lawyer hasn't made it easy for Jesus. He doesn't ask, what must one do to inherit eternal life, but what must I, a doctor of the law, Someone who to all outward appearances is already following the law of Moses. What must I do to inherit eternal life? In the lawyer's mind, the law covenant was a contract that the people of Israel entered into at Sinai.

If you want eternal life, you will do the things, the things stipulated in this contract, and this contract has been in effect for 1500 years. But from what the lawyer has heard of Jesus teachings, Jesus is adding an additional clause to that contract without the consent of all parties, and it's not even retroactive. The clause is in order to inherit eternal life, you must also believe on me.

Now I think that this additional clause has been introduced earlier in Luke chapter nine, and briefly, Jesus references the prophecy of the Son of Man from Daniel chapter seven. The prophecy states that a man will descend from heaven and the judgment of life and death of mankind will be given to him. In Luke 9, Jesus identifies himself with the Son of Man prophecy and states that one must therefore Believe on him and in his words, in order to receive life. I think that when the lawyer asks, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

He is anticipating Jesus answer to be, you must now believe on me. In other words, you must believe in something that is outside of that original contract, and so the lawyer was ready with his response. He had set his trap, and of course, our Lord was aware of this.

Now, brethren, I like to think of Jesus as a master teacher, always ready and able in any situation to bring people up to a higher level of understanding. So let's return to the narrative and see how Jesus accomplishes it.

Verse 26, Jesus said to him, what is written in the law? How do you read it? Jesus is not sidestepping the question, nor is he just asking the lawyer for his answer. By the wording of his first question, what is written in the law? Jesus is acknowledging the lawyer's perspective.

As a basis for this discussion, we must remember that at the time that this interaction is taking place, the Hebrew Bible had not yet been codified or canonized. In other words, it was not yet agreed upon which books constituted the Hebrew Bible. Instead, at that time, the Hebrew Scriptures were classified into three sections. The first section was the law. The first five books of Moses, which everyone agreed constituted the word of God.

The second section was called the Prophets, and the third section was called the writings of these latter two collections. The Samaritans accepted none of them, and the Sadducees, which the current priestly class in Jerusalem was comprised of, accepted some of them, hence their disbelief

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in angels and in the resurrection of the dead. By asking, what does the law say? Jesus is agreeing to discuss this question within the confines of the contract given at Sinai as revealed in the first five books of Moses.

The second question, Jesus asks, how do you read it? Acknowledges that the lawyer's opinion is valid. Jesus is meeting this man at his level. By this unexpected maneuver, Jesus has disarmed the trap, and in addition, he is opening the door for the lawyer to come up to a higher level of understanding, if he chooses to do so.

And so the lawyer answers in verse 27, and he answered, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as your salt.

The lawyer's answer was not a quick or easy one. It's a studied answer. It's taking two separate scriptures from two separate scrolls, Deuteronomy and Leviticus, and combining them, joining them together as one, and I think this is probably an innovative way of answering. It's not just quoting scripture.

It is explaining Scripture by how you quote it. Let's look a little bit more closely at this answer to see more of its complexity. The first part of the scripture to love God is taken from Deuteronomy, chapter 6 and verse 5, Deuteronomy 6:5, and when we read Deuteronomy 6:5, we will notice that there are three ways to love God. However, when we read the account in Luke, we see that the lawyer mentions four ways in Deuteronomy.

It says to love God with your heart, your soul, and strength. In the lawyer's answer, he adds, and mind. So we naturally inquire, why is this lawyer adding something to the text? By what authority does he add to Deuteronomy? The three ways to love God in Deuteronomy are based on loyalty oaths given by vassal states to overlords.

This was a common formula in the ancient near east in Deuteronomic times, and you showed your love or your allegiance to your overlord by your loyalty of heart, and so the Israelites showed their allegiance to God by not worshiping other gods. They worship Yahweh and Yahweh alone. You showed your allegiance to your overlord by pledging your life, your soul on his behalf.

If you had to die in one of his battles, that is what you had to do, and so the Israelites fought at the command of YHWH ready to give their life, and you showed your allegiance to your overlord with your strength, with whatever you have, livestock, men, money, all of that was pledged to your overlord when needed, and so Israel had monetary obligations to YHWH of the harvest, first fruits, and other monetary obligations. But over the course of time, this formula of allegiance based on a vassal pledge took on a deeper meaning.

And it was understood as referring to the totality of your person to show your love to God. Everything you had was God's. So your heart wasn't just your loyalty. It incorporated your emotions and your thoughts. Your soul wasn't just your last breath.

It was every breath. Your strength wasn't just what you possessed. It included your energies, your labors, and your efforts, and this deeper meaning was conveyed by sometimes replacing the word heart with the word mind for adding the word mind along with the word heart. Brethren, I know this gets complicated, but we have to remember that Deuteronomy was written in Hebrew.

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Jesus and the lawyer are discussing this in Aramaic. Luke is writing about it in Greek, and we are talking about it in English. So we understand that it gets a little complicated, and we're doing our best to understand something that is really tangled in the past. What we see is that this lawyer is making the law come alive, as it were, bringing it into the present, bringing it into what for him was modern language. So our lawyer, in his proper role as a teacher of the law, has quoted Deuteronomy in a way which actually provides an explanation of its deeper meaning.

In order to achieve eternal life, one must love God with the totality of one's being.

In addition, he adds, and your neighbor as yourself. This is taken from Leviticus 19:18.

We notice that he does not quote it as a separate action. In other words, he does not say, and love your neighbor as yourself. By using the verb to love once, as in love your God. How you act towards your neighbor becomes part of how you love God. In other words, he's saying that the love of God is incomplete without the element of one's neighbor.

The question we want to ask is, does the lawyer realize the ramifications of this thought? That in order to fully and completely love God, you have to be loving your neighbor as yourself? Well, the answer is obviously no. He does not understand the ramifications because he is not treating Jesus very lovingly by trying to entrap him, and this lack of love is even more pointed when we read the context in Leviticus 19.

Well, let's look at Leviticus 19, verses 17 and 18 in their entirety. Leviticus 19, 17, 18, which reads, you shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Yahweh.

Setting a trap to expose someone is not the spirit of reasoning frankly with your neighbor. By his own words, the lawyer is condemning himself that he is not following the law correctly.

And yet how does Jesus respond? Verse 28, and he said to him, you have answered correctly, do this and you will live. Jesus does not point out the obvious. Jesus is letting the lawyer draw his own conclusion about whether he is properly keeping Leviticus 19.

He is opening the door for this lawyer to come up to a higher level of understanding if he chooses to do so, and we should pause here a moment, brethren, to reflect on our Lord's method of teaching. The true spirit of any lesson is learned. When we arrive at the answer ourselves, we see why Jesus gave this man the opportunity, because we know he caught Jesus rebuke, do this and you will live. In other words, start doing this and you will live.

Because as we read in verse 29, but he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

The lawyer is referring to the exact part of the answer that he is in violation of. He sensed Jesus silent, rebuke, and is now trying to justify his violation of Leviticus 19. Let's look a little closer at Leviticus 19 to understand the lawyer's retort. Leviticus 19 is part of a section of Leviticus that is called the Holiness Code, and this is chapters 17 to 27. Leviticus 19 is a very formalized, structured section.

It begins with Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy. What follows is a diverse collection of laws that Israel must

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follow in order to be considered to be holy. Verses 11, 18 set forth laws that must be followed when you deal with others. All of these laws contain phrases such as to your neighbor, to your kin, to your fellow Israelites, to one another, and so these laws were recognized as covenant obligations between those within that covenant.

It did not apply to any outside of the contract. This is the heart of what the lawyer is now asking Jesus. He is saying, I am not actually violating any law against loving my neighbor by hating you, by holding a grudge against you and setting a trap for you, because I don't think I have covenant obligations to you because you have cut yourself off from the community by your words, your teachings, and your actions.

He's also turning the question back onto Jesus and asking him, who are you covenantly obligated to? What are your parameters?

Jesus as the master teacher, instead of confronting him head on, uses a hypothetical teaching method loosely known as a parable.

First of all, Jesus takes a scenario from the Book of Chronicles as the basis for this parable. There is a reason for taking this historical account because it is an instance when God commanded aid to be given between warring brothers. This account is found in 2 Chronicles, chapter 28, verses 5 to 15.

We find at this juncture the nation of Israel is divided. We have the kingdom of Judah in the south, with Jerusalem as its capital, and we have the kingdom of Israel in the north, with Samaria as its capital. Because the nation of Judah had forsaken Yahweh, God brought the kingdom of Damascus and the kingdom of Israel against the kingdom of Judah. The kingdom of Israel slaughtered very many people in Jerusalem. Let's read from verses 8 to 11 of 2 Chronicles 28:2 Chronicles 28:8, 11.

The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons and daughters. They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, behold, because the Lord the God of your fathers was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand. But you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven, and now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female as your slaves.

Have you not sins of your own against your Lord God? Now hear me and send back the captives of your brothers whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you.

So the leaders of the kingdom of Israel agreed. As they said in verses 13 to 15 of 2 Chronicles 28, you shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us the guilt of the Lord in addition to our present sins and guilt, for our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly, and the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed those who were naked among them.

They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria. So what we have here, brethren, is the kingdom of Judah is violating their covenant obligations to God, and the kingdom of Israel in the north is

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violating their covenant obligations to God, and yet God says to them through the prophet, you are still required to keep your covenant obligations to each other.

I am still dealing with you, even though you are in violation to me, and so you must still deal with each other as brothers.

Well, to the modern mind, this may sound completely illogical by saying, it is okay to kill your brother in battle, but it is not okay to turn them into a slave. But we have to remember that from the perspective of the ancient near east culture, there are worse things than death. Status and honor were more valuable than life.

So what Jesus is going to do, he is going to modernize this scenario that we just considered and bringing it into the present, and he is going to overlay characters taken from the lawyer's own parameters. The law of Moses, and who should these characters be in Leviticus 19 we have seen that the people of Israel, by observing certain covenantal obligations, would be considered holy. So Jesus is going to use and include an everyday Israelite man into this parable.

In numbers chapter 8 we have another class, the Levites, who in addition to all of the obligations of all the regular people, have even more covenantal obligations to be considered holy. So Jesus is going to add a Levite to this parable, and in Leviticus 21 we have another group, the priests, who in addition to the obligations of the people and the Levites, had even stricter covenantal obligations in order to be considered holy, and so Jesus is going to add a priest to this parable. But there is one more class of people mentioned in Leviticus 19.

These are identified by the Hebrew word *ger*, translated as stranger, the alien, the sojourner. We read in Leviticus 19:33, 34, when a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, for you shall love him as yourself. For you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

The word *gur* has a wide range of meaning. The Israelites were strangers in Egypt. They weren't citizens of Egypt. They did not worship Egyptian gods. They were resident aliens.

And yet *ger* came to have the meaning of a full convert to Judaism, and so it is translated in the Septuagint by the Greek word *proselyte*.

Jesus is going to choose a character who is from this *gur* or stranger class, and he's going to choose a contemporary of the lawyer. He is going to choose a Samaritan, and a Samaritan can be considered a *gur* in both senses of the word. In the first sense, Jews did not consider the Samaritans as part of them.

They were separate in location, did not eat together, and didn't talk together. Really had nothing to do with each other, and yet, on the other hand, these Samaritans could be viewed as converts to Judaism. These latter day Samaritans, who were descendants of peoples from Iraq, Iran and Syria, were forcibly settled into the northern kingdom of Israel after the northern king's destruction by Assyria. We read in 2 Kings 24 that these new settlers began to be killed by lions.

And the solution was for priests of YHWH to be brought to them to teach them the law. So these Samaritans accepted the first five books of Moses. They were circumcised, they kept feasts, and festivals mentioned in the law, and so Jesus is going to add a Samaritan to this parable.

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So the parable is designed to answer the lawyer's question, who has covenantal obligations to each other?

A regular priest, regular Israelite, a priest, a Levite and Samaritan got these four characters. So with this in mind, let's read the parable as found in Luke 10:30, 35.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now, by chance, a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.

He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him, and the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.

Then Jesus asked the lawyer, which of these three do you think prove to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? We notice that Jesus did not ask, which is the real neighbor? No. The Master Teacher is aiding the man to see the real meaning of the law by framing the question in a way that leads him to this truth.

Now we ask, did the lawyer catch the point of the parable? We've already noticed that he was able to deepen the concepts of Deuteronomy 6, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength. He was able to rise above the letter of these three words to the spirit of these words. Was he also able to deepen the meaning behind and your neighbor as yourself to catch the spirit of those words?

And yes, brethren, I believe he did. Because let's look at his answer. He says, the one who showed him mercy. The clue is he did not say the one who showed him love, taken from the Greek word agape. Instead he said, the one who showed him mercy.

Taken from the Greek word helios, Luke transliterates a Hebrew idiom which means the one doing mercy with him, and within this idiom in the Hebrew word mercy is the word chesed. Hesed C H E S E D. I know I'm not pronouncing it correctly. Chesed is one of those words for which there is no equivalent in English.

And so to define it, you have to explain its concept. It means the love of God that he exercises towards his covenanted people, and this love is demonstrated by compassion upon those breaking the covenant and kindness to those straying away from the covenant and steadfastness toward those unfaithful to the covenant. No matter what God extended chesed to to his people in the Old Testament, people could extend hesed to one another. These were acts of kindness and loyalty that go beyond duty or obligation.

Because God showed you hesed, you showed hesed to others, and so the real meaning of the lawyer's original love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and your neighbor as yourself means loving God with the totality of your being and loving others in the same manner that God loves.

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Now, from this lawyer's perspective at the time Jesus is actually saying this, this means that he must consider everyone to whom God has extended mercy as his neighbor, whether they are living up to the covenantal obligations or not, and so this was every Jew, sinner or not, and the political class of the Sadducees that he so vehemently disagreed with, and even the strangers within the land.

And what is the meaning of this parable from the perspective of a Gentile reading this? From the time of Luke to today, has not God in his mercy, extended his compassion to everyone by giving them the opportunity to accept the Gospel message? And so to Christians, the concept of neighbor has extended to include all people, and isn't this still the answer to teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And so how do we respond to his command, you go and do likewise?

Jesus, by means of this method of teaching, was able to bring this man and all of us to a better understanding of the law of Moses into a higher dimension of the love of God. Neither Lord Ezra.