

# OpenTheo

## The Good Samaritan (Part 2)



### The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the parable of the Good Samaritan and its implications for acts of compassion in everyday life. He reflects on the notion of chance and the role of individual agency when it comes to helping others, using the example of a priest who failed to aid a wounded man on the road. Gregg emphasizes the significance of demonstrating kindness and love to all people, regardless of their background or beliefs, as a reflection of God's goodness and a call to repentance.

### Transcript

The elevation differential between Jericho and Jerusalem is 3,000 feet, so it's like over half a mile down that you go in the course of a 17-mile road. That mountainous region is fairly wilderness. I mean, it's a good place for robbers to hide out.

It would not be only there, but in many mountainous and wilderness areas that brigands and robbers would hang out, hoping to surprise a lone traveler and get the better of him. And this scenario that Jesus lays out is probably very realistic. That particular region was very amenable to burglars and robbers and so forth.

The story is, they can probably picture that road. I mean, Jericho is a major city, Jerusalem is a major city, and probably these men had traveled it themselves. And therefore, could possibly even picture the terrain.

When he talks about a certain priest, a certain Levite went by, they could possibly picture themselves in that role. Because that is a road often enough traveled that they could imagine themselves in that actual circumstance, I'm sure. Now, this man was traveling alone.

He was beat up by thieves. It does not say they robbed him, but that goes without saying. He fell among thieves.

The fact that they're thieves suggests they robbed him. But the emphasis laid on how they damaged his body. They stripped him, beat him up.

They were not content to take his money, but they apparently either just wanted to rough him up just out of spite because they were angry, nasty guys, or they maybe hoped to kill him. And in leaving him half dead, thought they had finished the job. He probably, I mean, in all likelihood, if they're going to treat him that badly, they'd want to kill him so that he couldn't testify who did it, if they were ever brought to account for this.

And so, leaving him half dead may suggest that they actually thought he was dead, and that he looked like a corpse there, but there was a spark of life still in him. Therefore, he wasn't fully dead. Now, by chance, a certain priest came down that road.

My mind is always hitched there on the word, by chance, because my understanding is things don't really happen by chance. Things happen by providence. Now, I've always wondered, and I still do, to tell you the truth, whether Jesus' use of this term, by chance, is really endorsing the notion that some things aren't providential.

Some things are really by chance. I mean, God doesn't ordain everything, but some things just happen coincidentally. Yet, it's much more common for us, I think, to say, well, there's no coincidences in God, and maybe there are not.

It's possible that Jesus is just using it as a literary device. I mean, not so much that he's affirming that things really do happen by chance. I mean, if this story were a true story instead of a parable, I would dare say that it was providential that these three men came by, to tell you the truth.

I mean, not just by chance. If the story were a true one, then each of these men would be having their day in court with God, as it were. I mean, it's no accident that God caused them to go by, be confronted with this situation, and react the way they did.

This would be God's way of testing each of them, putting them on trial to see whether they love their neighbor as themselves, or not. And, I mean, there'd just be such an opportunity for God to make use of this in the life of the Levite and the priest, even if only to judge them for their wicked hearts, that I must confess my own theology makes it hard to see this as in a real-life scenario, if it was really by chance. However, since it is not an actual case, and Jesus may be simply saying, these guys didn't plan to come.

As far as they were concerned, it was just they chanced upon this man. I mean, it is true that we could still talk about chancing upon someone, or by coincidence something happened, but in the back of our minds we know that it's not really a coincidence. I mean, God had this all planned out.

But from my perspective, I didn't have any plans. I didn't plan to run into that person. I just chanced upon them.

And Jesus, for the sake of... All I know is it could work out as simply a literary device for

him to say, by chance. But I don't know. I've never really known, as I've read this, I've thought about it many times, whether Jesus was trying to affirm that some things happen just by chance.

And maybe especially in the life of an unbeliever, like the Jew and the Levite, or the priest and the Levite were unbelievers. Could it also end on this? Yeah, I think that in saying, by chance, I think he's trying to say, it could have... This was not a big planned out thing. This is just something... It could have been anybody.

It could have been any priest. It could have been any Levite. Just by chance it was this one.

Don't even count yourself. Yeah, that's right. Yeah, there you go.

That it was this man instead of you is just a matter of coincidence. I mean, it could have been you as easily as him. I mean, that could be what he's saying.

I confess I've thought about this a lot, and I don't know if there's any way of settling whether Jesus was trying to emphasize the chance element. It certainly is not the emphasis of the story. It just is something I don't know whether his use of that word is deliberate or by chance.

It just slipped out of his mouth or what. So, by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

Now, this might seem extremely callous. I mean, one would not even have to be a priest or a religious person to have compassion on a man like this. And I think that we probably are to understand that there was some measure of compassion that the priest probably had.

Jesus was not trying to single out this priest as an unusually wicked man. That is to say, it could have been any priest. It could have been anyone who didn't care enough to do something for this person.

I don't think Jesus... This priest is not the subject of the story. He's not saying, now look how wicked priests can actually become. If they harden their hearts against God, they can become like this terrible priest.

The priest is just a... He's got a bit part in the story. He's just any priest. Any priest could be expected to do this.

Not because all priests were so hard-hearted that they'd have no compassion on a man who'd fallen among thieves. But the question is whether their compassion would outweigh other concerns. You see, the priest had another concern.

And that would be that under the law, he could not touch a dead body without defiling

himself for a full week. And being a priest, his business was at the temple. And you can't... When you're defiled, when you're unclean in the Jewish law, you can't go to the temple for however long the defilement lasts.

In the case of contact with a dead body, under the law, that'd be a full week. He'd be out of commission. He might have considered that the work of God was more important than ascertaining whether this man were dead or alive.

Remember, he was half-dead, and there's a good chance he looked all dead. My guess is, if this were a real story, a real true thing, that the priest... We're starting to understand the priest probably had an average measure of compassion. Probably, oh, the poor guy.

What a sad thing to see that happen to a person. But there were other things mixed too. I mean, after all, there's maybe something tugging at his heart, saying, maybe I should check.

Maybe there's life in him. Perhaps he's... Maybe he's really alive and needs some help. On the other hand, he looks pretty dead.

And, you know, real compassion would have wanted to sacrifice everything to help this man if there was any chance that there was life in him. But the priest had other considerations. If I check the man and it turns out that he is dead, then I'll find myself defiled for a week.

And I can't do God's work. I can't do God's business in the temple. And, you know, is it really worth it? I mean, the guy's probably dead anyway.

And that being so, if I even try to roll him over or anything like that, I'm not going to be able to do God's work. It'll prevent me. Therefore, you know, just the very fact that, you know, is he dead? Is he alive? Now, some people would think, you know, that if the guy was noticeably alive, that the priest knew the guy was alive, but still didn't want to help him.

And if so, we'd have to say, well, he was in a hurry, didn't have time to help, or maybe he was afraid the robbers would come back and get him next, or whatever. That's some... I think in some people's minds, that's how the picture is. The priest, though knowing the man was alive, didn't care about the man enough to take his own inconvenience himself or take some risk or something.

I guess I'm inclined to think that that would take a more than ordinarily callous man. Maybe the priests were mostly that way. I don't know.

But I think that most priests, we could give a different scenario that would make more sense. And that is that it looked like the man was probably dead. And contact with the

dead body would ruin the priest for a week.

He just couldn't do God's work anymore. And the work of God is certainly more important than one poor scum's well-being. And after all, someone else may come along the road and pick him up.

You know, many times I've passed up hitchhikers with that very thought. You know, I'm in a hurry. He doesn't look like he's too uncomfortable out there.

You know, he's got a good coat on. And my car's pretty full. And there's reasons why I shouldn't pick him up.

Now, there was a time when I would never pass up a hitchhiker. Back in the days when I used to hitchhike and had the heart of a hitchhiker, I just couldn't bring myself to pass him up. But as the years went by, and I didn't hitchhike very much anymore because I mostly have had cars available to me, my sympathy for hitchhikers, though it's still there, it's become less personal.

You know, it's less of a personal thing, because I can still remember kind of, but not as sharply as what it's like to stand out on an on-ramp all night long in the cold. But there have been times when I felt it was not convenient, not the right time to pick up someone. And so I'd say, Lord, send someone else along.

There's a lot of other cars going on this road, and someone else will pick him up. And to tell you the truth, you know, I say that to make myself out more like this priest than anything, but I'm not sure that's always the wrong way to think. I mean, a lot of hitchhikers are not in a desperate situation.

A lot of times to stop or your car is full or whatever is not really the main thing that has to be done. I mean, a lot of hitchhikers are hitchhikers because of their lifestyle. They don't have any appointments.

They've got nowhere they have to be. I mean, being at that on-ramp is not where they want to be right now. They want to be somewhere else, but where they're going may not be any more important than where they are now.

I mean, some people really need a ride and really need to get there. I've been in that place, but there were times when I hitchhiked when I just really wanted to go somewhere else. There's no good reason for me to go to that other place more than where I was.

I mean, it's a hard thing. It's a hard call to make. And when I think of the Good Samaritan, I always think of picking up hitchhikers because it's one of those kinds of situations where we do encounter people along the road in need and where we could put someone on our own beast and take them somewhere.

And I do think that in most cases we probably need to show compassion by picking them up. There are cases where, because my kids are with me and the guy looks like he might be a criminal or something like that, but I don't take the risk, and I'm not sure that those circumstances are insufficient to justify passing him up. But I say this because I know that when I have passed people up, I sometimes will pray for them to get a ride, or I'll assume there's a lot of cars on this road, someone else will pick them up.

And the priest may have thought something like that. Well, I'm doing the work of God. If I touch this dead body, if it so be that he is dead, I'm going to be out of commission for a whole week.

Someone else who doesn't work in the temple may come along here and they can check him out, and if it turns out to be dead, they can be defiled for a week and it won't affect their life so much. But for me, it shouldn't be done. And so he passed by on the other side of the road because, of course, under the law, one would put as much distance as possible between himself and a dead body, even in battle.

If you were fighting in battle and someone was killed next to you, you were defiled for a week. I mean, you were just that close to a dead body. So apparently, as the priest came in the distance, he could see there was something over there on the side of the road that looked like a body.

And even before he got close enough to tell whether it's alive or dead, he just put himself on the other side of the road just so he wouldn't get too close to incur defilement. If it were simply a matter that he knew the man was alive, didn't want to help because he had other more selfish things, there would be no reason to mention crossing on the other side of the road. It seems clear that defilement from a dead body is the man's concern in the parable, because he took the other side of the road.

If the man was simply a cruel person who saw this guy in need and said, I don't care, I'm going to go do my own thing, he might even walk up close to him and get a better look at him. But this man, I think, had a conscientious desire not to defile himself. But, of course, Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that you've got an unsettled matter with your brother that needs to be settled, you leave your gift at the altar and you go settle a matter with your brother.

In other words, your love for your brother, your relationship with your brother is more important to God than even your attendance at the temple. And that's where this priest would have had the wrong priorities. He'd put his ceremonial duties at the temple above his more universal duty to help a man in trouble, even on the chance that the man might be alive, though probably the priest assumed him to be dead.

Likewise, verse 32, a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked and passed on by the other side. Now, again, the Levite would have the same kinds of concerns as

the priest. Jesus gives two examples, just to show probably that this would be the general approach of religious people.

One example might not be enough to establish that, but here we've got a priest, we've got a Levite, guys who are conscientious about the law, putting ceremony first, they don't want ceremonial defilement, even though there's a man who could desperately need their help. Now, verse 33, 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 bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. Now, pouring oil and wine on, actually, olive oil was, and still is, in the Middle East, one of the things that is used to dress wounds, it soothes the wounds, it encourages healing.

Wine, no doubt, was applied because the alcohol in it would stop infection or whatever, although, of course, they wouldn't know specifically why it would do so in those days. Even ancients learned that vinegar and wine and things like that killed, you know, somehow helped. We now know that they killed germs, but to pour wine on the wounds and oil would be to help disinfect and to soothe and promote healing, and then put him on his beast.

Now, of course, in doing all of this, the Samaritan took the risk of being overtaken by thieves himself. He was on an animal. We, I suppose, have always probably assumed it to be a donkey, though it may have been a horse or a camel, and that being so, he probably could escape better if he were on the animal himself.

But when he was reduced to walking next to the animal, because he had a patron there on his vehicle, then he would be making himself a little more vulnerable to falling into the same kind of trap that the first man had fallen into among thieves. Now, he took him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.

Now, I suppose from the beginning of the Christian age, there have always been some commentators that have sought to see in the Good Samaritan a picture of Jesus. There are such commentators today. I remember back in 1970, hearing one teacher give this story as an example of one of the data that he thought proved that Jesus would come back in the year 2000.

He had all kinds of interesting things that he used, and none of them valid in my thinking. But at the time, you know, I was a teenager, and I had not heard enough to be cynical in those days. And I thought, well, maybe it does mean that.

But of course, as I studied the Scripture more, I realized that he's totally abusing it. But what he thought was that the man who fell among thieves represents each of us who

have been wounded and were half dead, spiritually dead, that is, physically alive but spiritually dead, so that's half dead. And the devil is the thief who's come to rob and kill and to destroy.

And the law, represented by the priests and the Levite, do not help the sinner. The law cannot save the sinner, but leave him in his misery. But Jesus, the Samaritan, and by the way, the Jews did call him a Samaritan, although he was not ethnically Samaritan.

In John chapter 8, they said, have we not rightly said that you're a Samaritan, you have a demon? A Samaritan would be a term of contempt. But here comes Jesus, hated by the Jews, by the Jewish religious leaders, but he cares for the man, pouring wine, representing his blood for cleansing, and oil representing the Holy Spirit, and taking him to the inn. Now, all of this sounds very tempting to accept, and then here's where this guy made the application.

He says, and then, he gave the innkeeper two denarii, and said, when I come back, I'll pay you whatever more I owe. And he said, oh, you see, a denarius, it cost one denarius a day to stay at an inn. And so he paid for two days, and then promised to come back.

And that a day to the Lord is a thousand years, and a thousand years is a day. Therefore, the amount that he paid the innkeeper, promising to come back, was enough to last for two days, or two thousand years. And therefore, he'll be coming back at the end of the two thousand years.

This is how this man reasoned. Now, there's several reasons to reject this line of reasoning. One is that Jesus never gave a clue that the Samaritan in the parable represented himself.

If anything, he was saying it should represent you. You're the one. This is the role model for you.

This is not a symbol of the Messiah. This is a role model of the man who loves his neighbors himself. And so there's not a hint in the passage that Jesus is supposed to be the hidden meaning behind the Samaritan.

Furthermore, even if he were, there'd be no indication of the number of days or whatever. This teacher was quite wrong in saying that it cost a denarius a day at an inn. He probably got that from the fact that the average laborer earned a denarius a day.

That was the average wage for a working man. But a person could stay at an inn much cheaper than that. Polybius, a man who wrote around the time of the New Testament, indicated that in Italy, it would cost one thirty-second of a denarius a day.

In other words, you could stay thirty-two days for a denarius at an inn in Italy. And probably in Palestine, it would be not too much different than that. And so, a denarius



would be good for almost a month, or maybe more than a month.

Now, Joachim Jeremias, a modern scholar, has presented evidence that he believes a denarius would buy twelve days at an inn in biblical times. His evidence is taken from Palestine, where Polybius is from Italy. But in any case, even if Jeremias is correct in what he documents, then a denarius would be good for twelve days, two denarii would be good for twenty-four days.

Still almost a month's time. Not at all, just the payment for two days. Now, I think what we would understand is that the Samaritan paid all that he could afford at that point.

He may well have been on his way to Jericho on business, and hoped that he would be returning home and have some more money. If necessary, he could put it on the tab. Probably an inn where he stayed regularly on his way, therefore they would know him and would trust him for the money.

The point is, of course, it's not a true story anyway, it's a parable. And all that is there is to make a particular point. And that is, well, certainly the main point is, who is a neighbor? Because that was the question that was asked.

You shall love your neighbors yourself. Well, who's my neighbor? Well, this story was given instead of an answer. And then, again, Jesus follows the story with a question.

He says, so which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among thieves? And the man said, he who showed mercy on him. Notice he didn't say the Samaritan. He couldn't bring himself to say that.

He just said, that guy who showed mercy on him. I guess he was the neighbor to him. And Jesus said, go and do likewise.

Now, in a sense, Jesus answered his question, but in a rather backward way. Because the man said, who is my neighbor? Namely, who is the one that I am required to love? That's what the question really means. You shall love your neighbor.

Well, who's my neighbor? Who am I required to love? And instead of answering that, he told a story where it was up to the Samaritan to decide whether he was going to be a neighbor or not to this man. You see, the Samaritan lived in another country from the Jew. He was not even his countryman.

They had different religions. Therefore, even a person of a different religion who was in need, you could choose to be a neighbor to them. They were also a racial group that was hated by the devout Jews.

So, there are all kinds of reasons why the Samaritan, seeing this Jew in need, might argue, well, I guess I don't need to help this fellow. By no stretch of the imagination is he

my neighbor. I mean, I've never seen the guy before.

He doesn't live on my street. He doesn't even live in my country. He doesn't even worship the same God I worship.

He's no neighbor to me. But the Samaritan didn't play around with the decision, well, is he my neighbor or is he not my neighbor? You see, there's a law in there that says you should love your neighbors. Now, I wonder if God considers this man my neighbor or not.

He just had compassion. It didn't occur to him to wrestle with the intricacies of the law. He saw a man in need and had compassion and did what he did.

He probably never crossed his mind, oh, I'm fulfilling the law of God. I'm probably getting some gold sticky stars in heaven for this. He just did the thing that came natural to him because he was a loving man.

Because he had compassion on the man, he did the right thing. And therefore, he was a neighbor to the man who fell among thieves. Now, it's interesting because in view of the lawyer's question, you would expect Jesus to tell the story a little differently.

You'd expect rather to be, okay, a certain Jew was walking along the road and he found three men who fell among thieves. A priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. I mean, which one was his neighbor that he had to love? But instead, he tells it in such a way that the person who's doing the loving is the one who's determining to be a neighbor.

That is, neighborliness is not defined by any particular quality except what you define it as. You can make yourself a neighbor to the person who least would qualify for that definition. God doesn't have some limits on who you're willing to call your neighbor.

And you must love them and not someone else. The issue is, are you willing to be a neighbor to anybody who happens to be in need, regardless of how many other factors might make him not be defined as your neighbor? Now, of course, what Jesus is saying is essentially that even though it is in the law you should love your neighbor yourself, you shouldn't even be worried about the wording of the law. It shouldn't matter who you're calling a neighbor or whatever.

You just love. God just wants people to be compassionate. And when he said, who was a neighbor to the man who had mercy on him or compassion on him? A neighbor, therefore, is anyone who wants to be a neighbor.

And Jesus doesn't put it upon, you know, the fulfillment of that law depends on how you define the neighborliness or non-neighborliness of the person in need. But how do you define your own neighborliness? Are you going to call yourself that man's neighbor? You decide. God, of course, expects you to.

But the fact that the Samaritan was in no sense a neighbor by any of the Jewish definitions of what a neighbor is, is what made the story significant, is that Jesus pointed out that take a guy who's of another country, another religion, even someone you hate, and who hates you. I mean, there is a possibility that this Jew, before he fell among thieves, if he had seen the Samaritan coming on the road, would have gone on the other side of the road and avoided him altogether. And held his nose while he was at it.

And stamped the dust off his feet and shook off his garments after the Samaritan went by. I mean, that Jew who was helped by a Samaritan might have had that attitude towards Samaritans. In fact, we are not told that the victim of the thieves was a more than ordinarily righteous Jew.

He was just a certain man. And therefore, we would have to assume, the likelihood is, and Jesus probably assumed that his readers would know this, that the man who fell among thieves would not view the Samaritan as his neighbor in ordinary circumstances. In ordinary circumstances, this Samaritan and this man would have paid no attention to each other at all.

In fact, it's very possible that the Samaritan would have, under ordinary circumstances, hated this Jew too. I mean, we don't know. Not hated him, but I mean, just avoided him.

Had nothing to do with him. They would have passed each other on the road and never thought of saying hello to each other or anything. But here was a case of a man in need.

And to the Samaritan, it didn't matter what the man's attitude was to Samaritans or who the man was, what his race was. He was just a miserable man, and met by a compassionate man. And this shows us, of course, that we're not required only to help Christians, but to help others as well.

Even those who are the enemies of God. Remember, earlier in Luke, in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, in Luke chapter 6, Jesus described God as our role model in this way. He says, in Luke 6, 35 and 36, Therefore, be merciful just as your Father also is merciful.

Be like God. Be merciful like He is merciful. He is kind, even to the unthankful and to the evil.

Well, why in the world would He be kind to people like that? They don't deserve it. Well, if God was going to withhold His kindness from everybody except those who deserve kindness, He wouldn't have much of an outlet. Because there wouldn't be many qualified takers.

But, it is true, nonetheless, that many people that He shows kindness to are thankful, and are not evil. That is, I mean, the goodness of God leads you to repentance. And there are people who, upon receiving God's kindness, turn to God in gratitude and seek

to please Him.

But God doesn't only give His kindness to such people. The parallel in Matthew 5 says that He sends His rain on the just and the unjust, and causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good. That is, He gives His blessings, certain blessings at least, to people indiscriminately of their status.

So why does He do that? Because they need it. Not because they deserve it, but because they need it. And that should be how we extend mercy.

To people, not because they deserve it, but because they need it. Now, in our modern world, there are several considerations that would not have entered the mind, probably, of the lawyer, or probably even of Jesus at the time, which we nonetheless have to consider. And that is that we are neighbors to a much larger world than they were.

I mean, if this Samaritan had stayed in his country, he would have never encountered this Jew. This Jew could have died there on the side of the road, and the Samaritan would have no responsibility. If he had not encountered him on the road, he would not be responsible for it.

It was not the responsibility of every Samaritan to do investigative work into how many suffering Jews there were, and go out there and help them. Nor of the Jews to do so for the Samaritans. What caused this man to have a duty to this Jew was that he happened to be in the same place, so that he became aware of his misery in a situation where he had something he could do about it.

And at a time when most of the people in the world didn't know much about anyone else in the world, except in their neighborhood, there wouldn't have been all that much responsibility. I mean, if people were starving in China, but the people in Europe didn't even know China was there. The Christians in Europe could hardly be held accountable for that.

But we live, of course, in an information age where if there's a hurricane, or if there's a civil war in some African republic, or if there's starvation and famine in some country, we know about it the same day. Or we can. And suddenly the whole world is in our face with its needs.

And that raises some, I guess, dilemmas with reference to the application of this parable. Go and do likewise. Do what the Samaritan did.

Well, what did he do? He helped one man, paid a couple of denarii, a couple of days' wages to do it, and inconvenienced himself by probably a few hours or days of time. But he didn't alleviate the poverty of the whole world. For one thing, he didn't have enough money to do that.

Secondly, he didn't know about it. Now, there's a difference with us. We know about it.

But we also don't have enough to alleviate all the poverty in the world. And so it makes it very difficult to know when, day after day, we see advertisements for Compassion International, World Vision, and, you know, whoever, the Peace Corps, and other organizations. They're helping world poverty, and they're putting the pictures in our faces, and there's television coverage of these things, and so forth.

And they all want us to help. And we should, I think, in some way. But we could really get on a guilt trip if we don't help everybody.

The thing is, Jesus did not paint that kind of scenario, where a man became responsible for all the poor in the world. He was responsible for that circumstance that providence led him to. Actually, in the scriptures, by chance, the priest came.

But I would dare say that providence brought the Samaritan there, if the story were a true story. God sent help to this man. And in our own lives, providence creates many divine appointments, where we become aware of special needs of individuals, and so forth, and where we are, in particular, in a position to help, and can.

In those cases, I think it's applicable to this. We could be overwhelmed in this information age of ours. We could be overwhelmed by the needs of the world, because we can't help them all.

And it becomes much more difficult to know who we can help. I mean, who is my neighbor? Everybody in need? Everyone I feel compassion toward? But what can I do for all of them? I mean, there's even cases where there's just one person that I want to help, but I can't help. Or I don't have any money, or it's just not in my power to help, much less the whole world.

And there are Christians who would try to lay it on us that we are responsible for the poverty of the whole world, and I don't know that that's legitimate. Sometimes even the good Samaritan story is used as a way of forcing that point home. I will say this.

If you can be aware of human suffering in any part of the world, and not feel the kind of compassion that would incline you to help them if it were in your power to do so, then you've got a problem. I mean, I cannot hear of even... Every day on the radio when I hear of a crime in Portland or something, some kid shot accidentally by some gang crossfire or something like that, I can't hear that without it grieving my heart and wishing I could do something for the parents or something. I mean, my heart goes out to them.

But there's not very many cases I can actually do something tangible for. There's just too many cases. I know of too many situations.

I mean, in biblical times, if somebody was accidentally killed, you wouldn't know about it

unless it was in your village. And that might happen once every few years. I mean, everybody in the whole village could come and help out and try to relieve the family.

But if you just listen to the radio for an hour, you'll know of far more cases than you'd ever be able to help in several years' time if you worked at it full time. So I just want to say we need to have some balance on this. Jesus is arguing for loving your neighbor the way you love yourself.

And in this particular case, it resulted in concrete action, as it should, if possible. But there are times when it isn't possible, but we shouldn't just then harden ourselves, well, I can't do anything for them, so it's not my problem. Well, it may not really be your problem.

It may not be anything that God expects you to do anything tangible for. However, prayer is a concrete response. And I virtually always pray for persons that I become aware of and have compassion for that I can't help.

But if all we do is pray, when there's actually poor people in front of us that we could do something for, then we're not really doing what we should be doing. That's one of the main things. Another thing, of course, is to know to what kind of circumstances our obligation extends.

I mean, here is a man who is half dead. If he had been left there, he would have been dead by evening probably, and he was in big, big, big trouble. Now, does that translate into every time we meet someone who is needy in any way? I mean, what if they are needy because of their own criminal action or their own laziness, their own whatever? I mean, do we have the same obligation to pay all their bills and everything for them? Some would say yes, but I think there are other ethical issues that the Bible raises that have to be brought in too.

The only point this parable is making is that if you don't have compassion on a person because you don't consider him to be qualified to be called your neighbor because maybe there's some ethnic or religious rivalry or something between you and him, or he's somebody that isn't, even though he's human, his suffering doesn't touch you because you don't care about that breed of humans. You don't care about that brand, that kind of person. Then you do not fulfill the scriptural mandate to love your neighbors yourself.

You should love people regardless of their race, regardless of their religion, regardless of their nationality, regardless of even whether they love you or not. You should do what you can do. That's what a loving, that's what God does.

That's what a loving person would do, would show compassion on a person whose need like that you've been confronted with. But in terms of every person who has any kind of

need that may come to your door, I believe there are other passages of scripture that suggest there are cases when you have no obligation to do it. In fact, in some cases it would be wrong to do it.

It says, if any man will not work, let him not eat, in 2 Thessalonians 3.10. And so there's more than one scripture to balance the consideration here. Certainly the teaching of this was to expand this lawyer's understanding of what a neighbor is, of who you're supposed to love the way you love yourself. The Samaritan in the parable treated the man the way anyone would wish to be treated if they'd fallen among thieves.

It's what you would have others do to you, do to them likewise. It doesn't matter whether he's a Jew or a Samaritan or whatever he may be. And so that is the point of the parable.

As we close, we can just say by way of summary that Jesus is continually making this same point in his teaching that love for your neighbor is really what matters most to God. The priest and the Levite who did not wish to disqualify themselves for ceremonial service to God by helping this man out, they obviously had priorities different from those of Jesus. And throughout Jesus' ministry, he points out that religious or religiosity type things are not important to God really at all, or if they have any importance at all, they're far less important than practical help given to people who need it.

In other words, just expressions of love toward your fellow man, that's really the top priority with God, not ritual and ceremonial religion. And of course, we've encountered that lesson in different ways in the teachings of Jesus elsewhere. We have to stop there because of the time limitations upon us, and if anyone has any questions, they may ask them at the time.