

8

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

What thought comes first to your mind when you hear or see the word, *Samaritan*? Many people almost automatically attach *good* to it, and think of a person who goes out of his way, especially at cost and risk to himself, to help another.

How did all this “Samaritan” business develop anyway? Almost a thousand years before Christ, a man named Shemer owned a large, rocky hill some forty miles north of Jerusalem. The hill was called Samaria for this Shemer. King Omri of Israel - the ten tribes that had broken away from Judah after the death of King Solomon - bought the hill and built on it a city, calling it Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). From here, he, his son Ahab, and others ruled their kingdom for 150 years, until it was conquered by the Assyrians. The name Samaria had come to be applied to the surrounding territory, so it is recorded that the “cities of Samaria” were emptied of their Jewish people, and that people from various areas of the idolatrous Assyrian empire were brought in to replace them (2 Kings 17:6-24). The result was a population mixed in nationalities and religions.

The kingdom of Judah with its capital in Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians more than a century later; but after seventy years’ captivity, the Jews were allowed to return and rebuild their city and its temple. People from Samaria sought to take part in the enterprise, but were rebuffed, and from that time they tried in many ways to hinder it (Ezra 4:1-6:14). Bitterness between Jews and Samaritans continued during the five centuries until the time of Christ.

Meanwhile the Samaritans developed their own form of religion based on the five books of Moses. They built a temple on Mount Gerizim near the old city of Samaria. Jews destroyed that temple in the days of the Maccabees a century before Christ, but Samaritans continued to worship on their sacred mountain.

This is the situation as Jesus found it when He came. When leaders of the Jews became thoroughly angry with Him, they could find no harsher epithet to hurl at Him than this: “*Do we*

*not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”*¹ The Jews had no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:9). So on their journeys between Judea and Galilee, the Jews would cross the Jordan River to the east side, travel through Perea, and then cross over the Jordan westward to their destination. Jesus did not always follow that detour. Once He went northward through Samaria, conversed with a Samaritan woman at Sychar, and remained for two days teaching there (John 4:1-42). More recently He had come southward through Samaria on His way to the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, and had been denied lodging in a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56). There as bitterness on both sides. *Good* simply did not fit with *Samaritan* in the Jewish vocabulary.

1. What are the greatest inconveniences in your life?

2. When has someone gone out of his or her way to help you?

3. What do you think motivates most people to do good?

4. Read v. 25. What did the lawyer ask Jesus? Why did this legal expert ask a question about eternal life?

5. Read v.26-28. What did Jesus say this man must do in order to inherit eternal life? Why does this differ from what the Jews were told to do on Pentecost in Acts 2:37-39?

6. Read v. 29. What was the lawyer's next question? Why do you suppose he was asking this?

¹ John 8:48

7. Read v. 30-32. Who were the first two men who discovered the injured man? Why did they “pass by on the other side?” Did the law of Moses require them to help this man? (See Deuteronomy 22:1-4). What, along this line, does God expect of a Christian?

8. Read v. 33-35. Can you sense Jesus’ audience stiffen as he says these words? What did this Samaritan do for the injured man? What did it cost him?

9. Read v. 36-37. We aren’t told what the lawyer *did* with this lesson, but he must have pondered Jesus’ words for some time afterward. What do you suppose this conversation caused him to do later?

10. What natural inclinations make it easier for you and me to act more like the priest and the Levite than like the Samaritan?

11. What “neighbors” does God expect us to love today? What situations do you know that we are dealing with by “passing by on the other side?”

12. In verse 28, Jesus said “*do this.*” In verse 37, he said “*do the same.*” What are we doing that shows love for our neighbors?