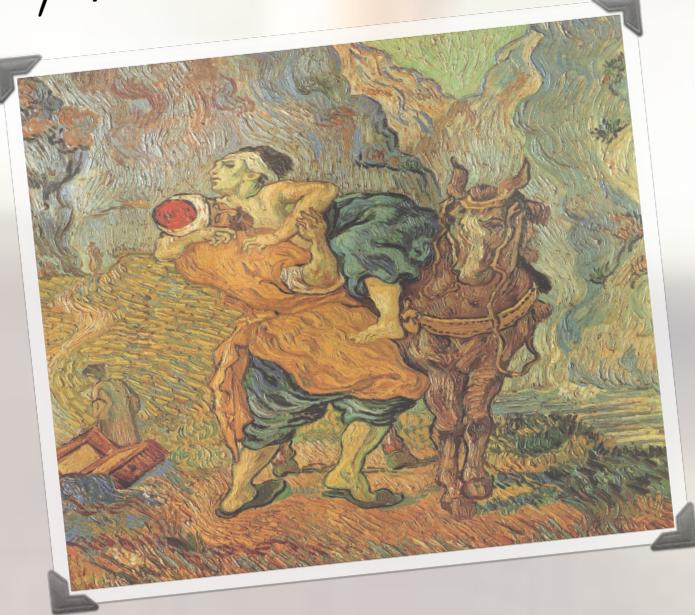


February 10-14, 2025 Edition

Following
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The Year(s) Of Jesus Part 162

The "Good" Samaritan

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner



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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we'll be looking at one of Jesus' most famous parables. Parables are like a snapshot into the very heart of God. They answer some very important questions for us. How did Jesus see His Father? How does the Father see us? How should we look at the Father? How does the Father see the people around us? How should we then treat the people around us in light of how the Father sees them?

To illustrate these profound spiritual truths, Jesus used incredibly simple stories that everyone in His day could relate to. He is generally accepted (no matter what some may think of His claims to be God Himself) as the greatest teacher who has ever lived. These stories will surely convince all of us that that's true. But let's face it, every religion believes its founder was a great teacher. Buddha, Mohammed, Confucious... what makes these stories so much more important than theirs? In order to answer that question you're going to need to decide what you think about Jesus' claims (unique and outrageous claims that none of the other founders of the great religions of the world ever made). So before we move on you can decide for yourself just Who you think He is. Because if He is Who He claimed to be (nothing less than God Himself come to this earth) then these stories become pretty darn important. He's the only One to claim that He is God.

Every other founder of any other religion you choose to look at, they claimed to have been given important truths that they were passing on to you and me. They never claimed to be God themselves, they claimed to be the moon- a reflection of God to help us on our way to Him. But Jesus claimed to be the sun. He wasn't pointing to the truth... He was The Truth. So if that's true... then when He tells us what God thinks of us and how He treats us and wants us to treat ourselves and others... maybe we should listen?

So this week we'll begin with the Good Samaritan- one of the most famous stories that has ever been told. Just about every famous artist has taken a shot at depicting a part of this story... I even found a Van Gogh and a Picasso of The Good Samaritan. And it all began with a test. Look at what the Bible tells us in Luke chapter 10:

One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" Luke 10:25-26 (NLT)

Every good teacher knows how to set really good intellectual traps for his unsuspecting students who already think that they know so much. Jesus was a master at it. This religious expert thought he was testing Jesus, turns out that he had no idea what he was in for. That happened all the time with Jesus (it still does but more on that in a minute). This guy wants to know what it will take to inherit eternal life once his life is over. Jesus doesn't really like that question very much. He is much more interested in how someone can enter into LIFE right here and now. That bothered the religious experts. "How can someone enter into God's kingdom now? What if they mess up between now and when they die? What will God do then?" But Jesus talked about God's kingdom like it was something that was all around us and could be experienced while we were still on this side of eternity. He wants this religious expert to understand this concept so He sets a little trap for the guy. These traps are how Jesus changes us. How He gets us to see that our old solutions and ideas are vastly incapable of standing up to the light of Jesus' reality.

Maybe you're in one of those traps right now... today. Maybe you don't see any way out of the predicament you're in. I'm not saying it's always Jesus' doing, but He will use these impossible situations to open our eyes to a whole new way of relating to this world. It's like Steven Curtis Chapman says in his song, "Something Beautiful":

We know the world got broke when it took the fall
And here we are living in the middle of it all
Longing, waiting for the day when everything's restored
But the best of the beauty that we get to see
While we're living down here in this "yet to be"
Is to watch God take the most broken things
And to hear Him say
"When I get through, you're gonna be amazed"
'Cause I'm gonna turn it into something different
I'm gonna turn it into something good
I'm gonna take all the broken pieces
And make something beautiful like only I could
So put it all in the hands of the Father
Give it up, give it all over to
The only One who can turn it into
Something beautiful
Put all the pieces in His hands
And watch Him turn it into something beautiful.

More tomorrow on what Jesus is getting at with this story... for today focus on putting the pieces of your life into His hands and get ready for Him to turn it into, something beautiful.

Tuesday Reflection: Alright... so just to reset a little bit, the religious expert thinks he's going to test Jesus with this question about how one inherits eternal life. But Jesus is ready for him and turns the question back on him (Jesus did this a lot... He rarely gave concrete answers to questions... He would turn it around and ask the questioner what he/she thought... hey, maybe that's where psychologists came up with their evil tactic of just asking us back every question we ask them???) ;o)

But I digress... Jesus asks the guy (remember... he's a supposed "expert" in religious law... he won't be able to resist showing how smart he thinks he is) what the law of Moses says, how does he read it? And the guy replies with a statement that is probably pretty familiar to you if you've spent much time in church:

The man answered, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' " "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!" Luke 10:27-28 (NLT)

These are the Cliff Notes on the Old Testament. I don't know if you've ever read the whole thing but it's THICK! And there are easily over 530 laws in it. How can one boil it down to one statement? How can you possibly reduce it to these two (it looks like two, doesn't it?) laws? Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself?

Well this was actually accepted doctrine in the first century. In fact, if you look at the 10 commandments the first 3 or 4 deal with how we relate to/love God and the rest of them deal with how we should relate to/love others (and ourselves). Add to that these next two scriptures from Deuteronomy and Leviticus and you've got a pretty air tight case for this guy being right.

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:5

Stop being angry and don't try to take revenge. I am the Lord, and I command you to love others as much as you love yourself. Leviticus 19:18 (CEV)

So what was the problem? They weren't doing a very good job in the first century. The religious experts had missed the point. The concept of love had been slowly but surely killed over the centuries until nobody knew what had happened or what love was even supposed to look like any more. Jesus comes along to do a sort of love autopsy (ever watched the movie, Music & Lyrics? If you have you're humming the song right now in your head... you're welcome ;o)

So what is Jesus getting at with this story? Well first of all that inheriting eternal life (not just something that happens when we get to the other side of eternity) is all about love. But love was a foreign concept to these people and so the guy asks Jesus a very revealing question... more on that tomorrow but for today maybe we should spend some time thinking about what it means to "love God and love others as we love ourselves".

Wednesday Reflection: DISCLAIMER- Today's thought is LONG! I couldn't figure out how to cut it in half and still have it make at least a little sense so if you need to break it down into more than one sitting I totally understand ;o) You've been warned!

The religious expert doesn't want his moment in the limelight to end with Jesus just asking him what he thinks and agreeing with him. Remember... this is supposed to be a test that the religious expert is springing on Jesus. So he asks Jesus a question:

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
Luke 10:29 (NIV)

This is a fascinating question but what's even more fascinating (at least to me) is that little phrase Luke tosses in there almost nonchalantly, "he wanted to justify himself." Wow. The more I learn about the theology of God the more that statement really amazes me. Does it amaze you too? No? Maybe? Well I don't generally do this (get all deep and thick with the theology) but for the purposes of understanding this story I think we need to do a crash course in theology... a sort of theology for dummies (not that you're a dummy... I'm sure you could handle reading the greatest theological minds of the last 2,000 years and explain it better than me but I'm pretty slow so I have to break it down into its simplest terms just to wrap my brain around it... confused now? Yeah, me too... so maybe we should just get started ;o)

A Crash Course In Theology For Dummies ;o)

Theology is just the study of God. That's all the word means. Just like biology is the study of life (bio = life and logy = study), theology is the study of God (theo = God and logy... well you already know what logy is, don't you?). And when it comes to God and how we relate to Him and why Jesus had to come to this earth and why dying on the cross somehow brought us back into relationship with the Father there are a couple of important terms to get down:

1. Sin. Sin is what happens when we mess up. The word was used for archery contests in the first century. If an archer missed the target he/she had "sinned". It literally meant to miss the mark. Spiritually speaking, we sin (miss the mark) whenever we decide we know better than God how to live our lives. When we know what the right thing would be, we just think we know better than God what will satisfy us and make us happy. When you boil it all down, that's the story of Adam & Eve and the Garden of Eden.

God said, "don't eat that fruit... it's bad for you... if you eat it you'll regret it. Adam & Eve thought: "it looks good though... eating it will give us something God doesn't want us to have... I think I know better than God what will make me happy." And so they ate. And sinned. And ever since Adam & Eve, we (their children) have carried on the family tradition:

All have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. Romans 3:23 (NLT)

All of us have missed the mark. All of us at one time or another (some of us more than others but still... ALL OF US) sinned. So the first important term in our crash course in theology for dummies is, "sin".

2. Justice. The second important theological term is, "justice". God is a God of justice. He can't just look the other way... it has to do with His Nature and He can't go against Who He Is like we can. So this second term is an important one: justice... in other words getting what we deserve. And what do we deserve? Well, that's pretty bad news as it turns out:

For the wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23 (NLT)

Ouch. Death?!?! Why is the wages of sin, death?!?!? Seems pretty harsh to me, how about you? Well, the only answer I can give you is, I'm not really sure. The Bible doesn't really come out and explain a lot of this, possibly because if God explained it all in terms that we could understand then His adversary (and your adversary too, by the way) would have understood what Jesus was doing and wouldn't have done things the way he did them (there's another theory... that Satan is so arrogant and filled with hate that even though he knew what Jesus was up to he couldn't help himself... that's possible too but again, I digress...).

No matter the reason, the Bible is pretty vague about the "why" of a lot of this stuff. Suffice it to say that when God created the universe He wove "laws" into the very fabric of creation that would govern how things work. We all take for granted the physical law of gravity. The Bible doesn't explain God's thought process for gravity... scientists just observed the effects of gravity and figured it out.

Some spiritual laws are kind of like that. Nobody knows why the wages of sin is death. We just know that it is. When we "sin" there is a price to pay. We owe a debt to God. Until that debt is paid we cannot have the kind of relationship with God that He longs for. That we were created for. It's sort of like if I bounce a ton of checks to Fred Meyer (I know... what's a check, right? It's an antiquated form of exchanging of goods where I give Fred a piece of paper with some numbers on it, promising I have that amount of money in my bank, and Fred takes me at my word that the money is really in there). After a while as the checks bounce like super balls and as the amount of money I owe Fred adds up, I will no longer be allowed to take groceries home just on the say so that I promise the money is in my bank account. My relationship with Fred is broken.

So what do I need for the relationship to be restored? I need to pay my debt. The trouble with spiritual sin though, is what acts as payment for my debt:

Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Hebrews 9:22 (NLT)

Ouch. But why? Why is the shedding of blood the only payment for the penalty of sin? Again, I don't know for sure. I just know that it is. That's the only "justice" for sin. When I do something wrong I should get what I deserve... what I've got coming. But thank God there's another important theological term:

3. Mercy. Ahhhh. I like the sound of that much better. If justice is when I get what I deserve... what I've got coming to me, then mercy is when I don't get the punishment that I deserve. God is a God of justice but He's also a God of mercy and as it turns out, mercy is much more powerful than justice:

So you must show mercy to others, or God will not show mercy to you when he judges you. But the person who shows mercy can stand without fear at the judgment.
James 2:13 (NCV)

The NIV Bible translates that verse as, "mercy triumphs over judgment." I don't know about you, but I like the sound of that because I REALLY don't want what I've got coming to me... what I deserve. However, God can't just overlook our sin and show mercy instead of dispensing justice. Why not? Again, I'm not exactly sure, but He can't. It would go against His Nature and He couldn't do that. If you really want to spend some time thinking about his read C.S. Lewis' The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe. Lewis does a masterful job of explaining why Jesus' sacrifice solved the whole sin/justice/mercy dilemma. For the purposes of this crash course let's just assume that this is the way it is... God couldn't just overlook our sin and the penalty that goes along with it. There was a debt owed and somebody had to pay it. Which leads us to the next theological concept:

4. Justification/Righteousness: I know... packing those two together is maybe doing an injustice to both of these terms that are packed with meaning, but this is a crash course so hopefully you'll forgive me and not hold it against me- please show some mercy ;o)

Remember when we talked about sin? About how all of us had done it... we were champions at perpetuating our family tradition handed down from Adam & Eve? Well let's look at that verse again but continue with verse 24:

All have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard... and all need to be made right with God. Romans 3:23-24 (NLT)

We need to be made "right" with God. What does that mean? It means the debt we incur from sin needs to be paid. Just like with the example of bouncing checks to Fred Meyers, somebody has to pay the debt before I can get more groceries. I need to be made "right" with my grocer. Fred doesn't really care who pays as long as he gets his money. Same is true with sin. There's someone who owns the balance sheet that contains every wrong thing I've ever done and what the cost of the penalty for those sins is. His name is Satan and when we sin, we end us in his debt (again, watch the Lion The Witch And The Wardrobe and see how Edmonds "sin" means he belongs to the White Witch...) and that is where the whole, "death" thing comes into play:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 (NLT)

So the penalty of sin is death, but Jesus had other plans. It didn't just involve mercy but also payment for the debt we owe. It's something that only Jesus could pay off for us. Again, I'm not exactly sure why it worked, but when Jesus died for me it released me from being in Satan's debt and restored me to "right" standing with God. In other words, now that my debt is paid I can again be in relationship with the Father, and it's only because of Jesus:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

Righteousness is what happens when my debt is paid and I am "right" with God. No outstanding balance. But the righteousness isn't mine... I'm still a sinner. I continue to mess up. But somehow even as that continues, Jesus' righteousness continues to pay my debt. I don't understand it, but I'm VERY grateful. And that leads to the last theological term in this crash course of theology for dummies:

5. Grace. If justice is when I get what I deserve, and mercy is when I don't get what I deserve, then grace is when I not only don't get what I deserve but I get an unbelievable gift along with not getting what I deserved (I know... that was a confusing sentence, but it's a confusing concept so deal with it ;o)

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. Ephesians 2:10-11 (NLT)

Ok... crash course over. Don't you feel smarter now? Well, whether you do or not, here we go... the whole point of Jesus coming to this earth... the whole point of the Old Testament Law was to show us we owed a debt we could not pay... Grace is not a reward for good things we've done. It is a free gift. We can't earn it. That means we cannot justify ourselves.

Ok... now let's read today's verse again:

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
Luke 10:29 (NIV)

The story of the Good Samaritan cannot be fully understood without a basic understanding of the theology we've been wading through today. Everything comes back to this concept of the religious expert wanting to "justify" himself.

Problem is, we can't justify ourselves. We don't have the proper capital to pay the debt. The Jewish leaders didn't believe that. It was the number one argument they had with Jesus. So Jesus springs this trap on this unsuspecting religious leader who thought he was springing a trap on Jesus...

How about you? Do you spend your life trying to "justify" yourself before God? Waiting to come to God until you've cleaned yourself up or turned your life around? Stop waiting... you can't do it on your own. That's something addicts learn early on in their recovery. It's high time you and I learned it too or we'll never move forward.

Thursday

Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. "Then a despised Samaritan came along and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.' "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same." Luke 10:30-37 (NLT)

Reflection: What else is Jesus getting at? That we are incapable of loving perfectly. Why is that a big deal? Because as it turns out it's what it takes to "inherit eternal life" according to Jesus. Remember, the religious expert is trying to test Jesus. He wants Jesus to incriminate Himself (religiously speaking) and say something that will get Him into hot water with the rest of the religious elite. But instead Jesus' answer (or lack thereof) takes the religious expert from the frying pan and into the fire (so to speak).

When Jesus turns the question back on the religious leader and asks him how he reads the law of Moses, the guy correctly answers that God's Law can be summed up from 2 verses in the Old Testament- one from Deuteronomy and one from Leviticus. Love God and love others as you love yourself. Jesus tells him he's correct and when the guy asks for clarification Jesus springs His trap and tells him a story.

The story ends up being one of the most famous and recognizable stories that has ever been told. The story of the Good Samaritan.

Just a bit of set up here... the Jews and Samaritans hated each other. The Samaritans were closely related to the Jews but had intermarried with other ethnic groups and so they were

considered mongrels by the (supposedly) purebred Jews. The Samaritans had their own place of worship in the northern part of Israel because after the civil war in Israel the northern King couldn't have his people traveling to the south (where the Temple of Jerusalem was) to worship and spend their money.

By the time of Jesus there was only one Temple... in the south. Why was that, you ask? Because the southern Jews had sent a team of special forces north and had burned the northern temple to the ground. The Samaritans tried to return the favor but their team was sloppy and got caught so the Temple in Jerusalem still stood at this point in time (the Romans would destroy the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD but that's a story for another time).

All that to say, the Jews and Samaritans HATED each other. The worst derogatory name one Jew could call another Jew in the first century was a Samaritan. They were fighting words. If you called someone a Samaritan you better be ready for them to "come at you, bro." When Jesus claimed to be, the "I AM", they called Him a "Samaritan devil." Jesus didn't even blink but I guarantee everyone in the crowd gasped and wondered what He'd do when He heard that.

Ok... so now the story. Jesus tells about a man who is on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. This was a trip of about 18 miles but it was the most dangerous 18 miles you can imagine. This road wasn't just famous for danger (because of bandits) in Israel but throughout the entire Roman world. No sane person would travel it alone and yet this Jewish guy is risking it for some reason.

Turns out to be a bad risk. He's robbed and beaten and left for dead. Two guys come into the story. They are both religious figures. One's a priest and one's a Levite (a Temple worker). It would be like a pastor and a church secretary or custodian coming along. Neither one of them stops to help. Why? Who knows. Maybe they were in a big hurry or maybe they were afraid or maybe they didn't want to get dirty. Whatever the reason they both pass by as quickly as possible and leave the guy bleeding in the road.

A third person comes by. At this point there would have been a lot of anticipation. Jesus is following a familiar story pattern from the first century. Everybody would have known that this story was going to have a problem (the guy gets mugged), two goat-like figures who don't get it right (the priest and the Levite) and then the third character would always be the hero and save the day. When Jesus gets to the third guy He drops a BOMB! The third guy is a Samaritan. I guarantee there were gasps and maybe people started shouting immediately. NO WAY COULD THIS SAMARITAN BE THE HERO!

But he was. The Samaritan stops, cleans the guy up, bandages his wounds, puts him on his donkey and takes him into town. He takes care of the guy at the hotel he stays at and when it's time to leave the Samaritan gives two silver coins to the inn keeper and tells him to take care of the guy... and if there's any extra that the two silver coins don't cover then the Samaritan will pay that when he comes back through. We'll talk about the extravagance of the Samaritan's love tomorrow, but at this point Jesus looks at the religious expert who hoped to spring a trap on Jesus and says this:

"Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same." Luke 10:36-37 (NLT)

I know I say this a lot but come on... Jesus is awesome, right? He gets this religious expert to reexamine his stereotypes and prejudices. He gets the religious expert to admit that the Samaritan was the "neighbor" to the Jewish man and then tells the guy, "go and be like the Samaritan".

Ouch. Jesus makes an extremely vivid point. That we can't follow the Law of God perfectly. That we almost always fall short. What does that mean? Well it means, I cannot justify myself (and neither can you by the way ;o). Remember how this whole story started? The religious expert wanted to "justify himself" and so he asked the question, "who is my neighbor?" Jesus' answer makes it painfully obvious self justification is not possible. Not only are we incapable of loving God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength but we are totally incapable of loving others the way we are supposed to.

And at this point Jesus has brought the religious leader to the place where true learning can finally take place. To the point where we recognize our old answers are completely inadequate. We still may not see the new answer that Jesus is trying to show us, but our foundation is cut out from under us and we're left looking around wondering what just hit us. Why does Jesus do this? Turns out it's the only way He can get us to listen.

So how about you... are you listening?

Friday Reflection: I can only love once I see how much I've been loved. That's what Jesus is really trying to get this guy (and me and you...) to see. I think that's the point of this story but I didn't always think that.

I used to think the point of the story was for me to go and be a "neighbor" to everyone I came across. If I saw anyone with any need I had to stop and fix it in whatever way I could. I was determined to be a neighbor to everyone who needed me. I would stop to help every person stranded on the side of the road. I'd give money to anyone who asked me for some. I helped whenever someone needed help.

But do you know what I soon figured out? There are a TON of people out there who need help and I couldn't help all of them. It was a crushing realization. I figured I was disappointing Jesus and not living up to the requirements for inheriting eternal life (remember... that's how this whole story started... with the religious expert asking Jesus basically what the requirements for entrance into Heaven were). I learned that my answers were horribly inadequate for the questions that arose every time I saw someone in need that I couldn't help because I thought the point of this story was that I was supposed to help everyone without thought to the costs. And make no mistake... the Good Samaritan's "neighborliness" cost him plenty.

First he put himself in danger by stopping to help. Not only could the bandits still be around but what if the guy who appeared to be a victim was instead one of the bandits and this was a trap? He also got himself dirty. He cleaned the guy up, bandaged his wounds and put him

on his own donkey. And then there was the financial cost. The Good Samaritan gave the inn keeper two silver coins and then told the guy that if it wasn't enough he'd pay whatever extra there might be when he came back by. A silver coin was basically one month's pay for the average person in the first century. I don't know how much you make a month but whatever it is, that's a huge sacrifice to part with two months' worth of wages and then promise that if there's further expenses you'll pick those up too. Basically the Good Samaritan gave the inn keeper his gold card Visa and said, "charge me for whatever debts he may incur in the future." The Good Samaritan's love cost him plenty. Everybody would have understood this who was listening to Jesus. Then Jesus says, "go be like the Good Samaritan." But is that the point of this story? I sure hope not because if it is we are all in trouble. So what was Jesus doing then?

I think He was demonstrating that we cannot justify ourselves. We can't love perfectly and that's just something we are going to have to come to grips with. But there's Someone Who can love perfectly... Who did love perfectly. Someone Who could pay the debt we couldn't pay even though it wasn't a debt that He owed. And just Who was that Someone?

Jesus. The True Good Samaritan. He left the safety and comfort of Heaven and traded it for the dirty, uncomfortable, dangerous world that we live in. He traded the praises of Angels for the mocking of stupid human beings who accused Him of having ulterior motives. He picked us up, bandaged our wounds, cleaned the dirt that we were covered with and then paid our debt. And He left behind His gold Visa card and said, "if there's any debts incurred in the future I'll take care of those too."

Now go out and love like that. Is that the point of the story? I hope not. If it is I'm in serious trouble and I imagine you are too. I'm not saying we don't try to live up to Jesus' standard. We should do our best to love like Jesus. Look at what He said during the Last Supper to His friends:

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. John 13:34 (NLT)

What's Jesus doing? He's taking it up a notch. Remember the whole, "love your neighbor as you love yourself" thing? Now Jesus changes things up. He wants us to love each other not as we would love ourselves (some of us don't take very good care of ourselves, do we?), but now He wants you and me to meet each other's needs the way Jesus would if He were here in our place.

How am I supposed to do that? Progressively... slowly... surely... by spending time with the One Who not only defines love, He is love personified. The idea is that over time as I see how very much I have been loved, I will get better and better at loving the people around me that Jesus has entrusted into my care and influence.

If the story of the Good Samaritan is just about me loving people perfectly the way Jesus loves me then this is a crushing, defeating, exhausting story that leaves me feeling helpless and hopeless and overwhelmed. But if it's a picture of Jesus' care and love for me and an invitation to walk with the True Good Samaritan and learn how to love the way He did by experiencing His love and care in my own life... well that changes things, doesn't it? Suddenly it's the most amazing story I've ever heard, told by the greatest Teacher Who

has ever lived. A Teacher Who knew what He was talking about. A Teacher Who wants me to learn to become like Him. To learn to love like Him.

Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

Ephesians 5:2 (MES)

Amen.