

# PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 18, The Good Samaritan, Part IV. Luke 10:25-37

1. Thus the lawyer asked this question in a world where there was a variety of views on just who the neighbor really is. Safari observes; “the oral law was not really uniform,” there was a lively debate on points of interpretation. The literary form is that of a seven-scene p ballad and is as follows;
  - a. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among robbers  
And they stripped him and beat him  
And departed, leaving him half dead. COME  
DO  
GO
  - b. Now by coincidence a certain priest was going down that road, COME  
And when he saw him, DO  
He passed by on the other side. GO
  - c. Likewise, also a Levite came to that place. COME  
And when he saw him DO  
he passed by on the other side. GO
  - d. And a certain Samaritan, traveling, came to him, COME  
And when he saw him, DO  
He had compassion on him DO
  - e. He went to him COME  
And bound up his wounds, DO  
Pouring oil and wine, DO
  - f. The he put him on his own riding animal DO  
And led him into the Inn DO  
And he took care of him. DO
  - g. The next day on took out and gave two denarii to the manager DO  
And said, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend DO  
I, on my return, I will repay you.” DO
2. In trying to reconstruct the world in which this priest lives, and thinks let’s turn to Sirach 12:1-7, ‘If you do a good turn, know for whom you are doing it, and your good deeds will not go to waste. Do good to a devout man, and you will receive a reward, if not from him, then certainly from the most

High.. Give to a devout man, do not go to the help of a sinner. “Do good to a humble man, give nothing to a godless one. Refuse him bread, do not give him any, it might make him stronger than you are; then you would be repaid evil twice over for all the good had had done him. For the Most High himself detests sinners, and will repay the wicked with a vengeance. Give to the good man and do not go to the help of a sinner.”

3. Thus help offered to sinners may labor against God who detests sinners. Furthermore, sinners hands should not be strengthened. Clearly Ben Sirach cautions against helping any stranger. The priest may have been influenced by such ideas current in his time. More likely, he is the prisoner of his own legal/theological system. The priest’s problem, writes Derrett is a ‘balancing act of commandments.’ (Derrett) The rabbis taught; “Whence we know a man sees his fellow drowning, mauled by beasts or attacked by robbers, he is bound to save him! From the verse, thou shalt not stand by the blood of thy neighbor.” (Sanhedrin).
4. But the priest did not see this happen, additionally, how can he be sure the wounded man is a neighbor? When confronted with a mute, stripped body, he is paralyzed. With speech impossible and distinctive dress missing, the observer can’t identify him. There is a possibility that the wounded man is a non-Jew and even dead! If dead, then contact would defile the priest. The priest collects, distributes and eats tithes. If he defiles himself, he can do none of these things and his family and servants will suffer the consequences of him.
5. A tithe of a tithe, called a ‘wave offering,’ was given by the Levites to the priests for consumption by the priest and his household. They can only be eaten in a state of ritual purity (Safari). Also, under the ban, the priest can not wear his phylacteries or officiate any of the services. On the written list of five sources of defilement, contact with a corpse was on the top of it. The oral law added four more, contact with a non-Jew was the first of this additional list. Thus, this ‘poor priest,’ was in danger of contracting ritual impurity with its most severe form from the point of view of both the written and oral law.
6. Contracting ritual impurity was a very serious matter, Safari writes: “the rules of purity were...always considered an end in themselves, not just a means to an end. They were held to the best way of avoiding sin and attaining the heights of sanctity as all tests affirm from Phil to the tannaitic period.” The priest struggling in trying to be a good man. He avoids sin to

attain sanctity. An additional part of his struggle is that he is like the wounded man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Large number of priests served in the temple for a two week period and lived in Jericho. Any priest leaving Jerusalem on his way to Jericho would naturally be assumed to have fulfilled his period of service and be on the way home. (Safari). We are told that "Ritual purification," took place in the temple and carried out by priests. Levites and Jewish laymen called the 'delegation of Israel.' During the service a gong was struck at the time of the offering up the incense. At the sound of the gong, the chief made all the unclean stand at the Eastern gate in front of the altar. Some commentators affirm that these people were unclean priests who were obliged to be stand there "to shame them for their remission in contracting uncleanness." (Danby) It is easy to imagine the burning humiliation that the priest would feel if he contracted 'ritual impurity.' Having probably completed his 2 week as leader of worship at the temple, is he now to stand at the Eastern gate with the unclean? Furthermore, in addition to the humiliation involved, the process of restoring ritual purity was time consuming and costly. It required finding, buying and reducing a red heifer to ashes, and the ritual took a full week. Thus it is easy to understand the priest's situation as he comes upon an unconscious man besides the road.

7. He can't even approach more than four cubits to a dead man w/o being defiled. He would have to over step that boundary just to ascertain the condition of the wounded man. Then if he is dead, the priest would have to rend his garments. This action, 'conflicted,' with an obligation not to destroy valuable things (Derrett). Derrett thinks that wives, servants and the colleagues would have applauded his neglect of the wounded man and that the Pharisees would have found him justified and stopping and yet "entitled to pass by." Finally, the commandment not to defile was unconditional, while the commandment to love the neighbor was conditional. Therefore, the priest had a legal right to pass by.
8. In commenting on the Jewish background of this p, Oesterley writes, "the whole reason for the growth and the development of the Oral Law was the need of providing for the ever-increasing new cases with the experience of life brought to the fore. The system, there was to blame; so that the priest and Levite are looked upon as victims of an evil, or at least an inadequate system (Emphasis his). The priest was a victim of a rule book, an ethical/theological system. Life for him was a codified system of 'do's and

don'ts.' This mentality persists in many forms in our day and continues to offer the security of having quick answers to all of life's problems and questions. The answer assures the devotee that he's right and seem adequate until we face the unconscious man on the side of the road. When we do, we discover that the agenda has become, "Maintain status within the supporting community," rather than, "Reach out in freedom to one in need beside the road.'" This dynamic seems to have overtaken the priest and he passes by on the other side.

### 9. SCENE 3: THE LEVITE:

<i>h. Likewise, also a Levite came to that place.</i>	<i>COME</i>
<i>And when he saw him</i>	<i>DO</i>
<i>he passed by on the other side.</i>	<i>GO</i>

10. Both Levite and priest fall into the same Come-Do-Go action pattern established by the robbers. This action pattern classifies the priest and the Levite with the robes. The priest and the Levite contribute to the wounded man's sufferings by their neglect. The word, "Likewise indicates that the Levite is also a descending and thus following the priest. He certainly knows that there is a priest ahead of him." Derrett believes that the Samaritan knew that others passed the wounded man. Regardless which way one is traveling, "in view of the nature of the man's injuries and contours of the road, which make a long lapse of time and prolonged absence from view unlikely. The traces of the old Roman road are still visible and the present writer has personally walked almost all of its length." Derrett's statements about the contour of the road are true. One is able to see ahead in the road for a considerable distance most of the way. Furthermore, having traveled ME roads by camel, by donkey, and on foot for 20 years, I know that the traveler is extremely interested in who else is on the road as his life may depend upon it. A question put to a bystander at the edge of the last village just before the desert begins; a brief exchange with a traveler coming the other way; fresh tracks on the soft earth at the edge of the road where men and animals prefer to walk; a glimpse of the desert air of a robed figure ahead; all of these are potential sources of knowledge for the Levite traveler.
11. As I have determined by investigation, ME peasants assume that the Levite does know that there is a priest ahead of him on the road. For them the story assumes it. Maybe it's truer in the story to assume the knowledge of the priest on the road ahead of him rather than his ignorance.