



TOUCHSTONE
TEXTS

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

LUKE 10 FOR THE LIFE
OF THE CHURCH

EMERSON B. POWERY

THE GOOD SAMARITAN



**TOUCHSTONE
TEXTS**

Stephen B. Chapman, Series Editor

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10 for the Life of the Church

by Emerson B. Powery

The Lord Is My Shepherd: Psalm 23 for the Life of the Church

by Richard S. Briggs

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Luke 10 for the Life of the Church

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I dedicate this book to those good Samaritans whose kind acts
—especially toward people with whom they might disagree—
have caused them to alter their thinking
and maybe even their theologies.
May our imaginations be renewed!

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Series Preface

In writing workshops, “touchstone texts” are high-quality writing samples chosen to illustrate teaching points about compositional techniques, genre conventions, and literary style. Touchstone texts are models that continually repay close analysis. The Christian church likewise possesses core scriptural texts to which it returns, again and again, for illumination and guidance.

In this series, leading biblical scholars explore a selection of biblical touchstone texts from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Individual volumes feature theological *exposition*. To exposit a biblical text means to set forth the sense of the text in an insightful and compelling fashion while remaining sensitive to its interpretive challenges, potential misunderstandings, and practical difficulties. An expository approach interprets the biblical text as a word of God to the church and prioritizes its applicability for preaching, instruction, and the life of faith. It maintains a focus primarily on the biblical text in its received canonical form, rather than engaging in historical reconstruction as an end in itself (whether of the events behind the text or the text’s literary formation). It listens to individual texts in concert with the rest of the biblical canon.

Each volume in this series seeks to articulate the plain sense of a well-known biblical text by what Aquinas called “attending to the

way the words go” (*salva litterae circumstantia*). Careful exegesis is pursued either phrase by phrase or section by section (depending on the biblical text’s length and genre). Authors discuss exegetical, theological, and pastoral concerns in combination rather than as discrete moves or units. They offer constructive interpretations that aim to transcend denominational boundaries. They consider the use of these biblical texts in current church practice (including the lectionary) as well as church history. The goal of the series is to model expositional interpretation and thereby equip Christian pastors and teachers to employ biblical texts knowledgeably and effectively within an ecclesial setting.

Texts were chosen for inclusion partly in consultation with the authors of the series. An effort was made to select texts that are representative of various biblical genres and address different facets of the Christian life (e.g., faith, blessing, morality, worship, prayer, mission, hope). These touchstone texts are all widely used in homiletics and catechesis. They are deserving of fresh expositions that enable them to speak anew to the contemporary church and its leaders.

Stephen B. Chapman
Series Editor

≡ Acknowledgments

I dedicate this book to those good Samaritans whose actions have changed them. I'd like to mention the various people who have—in one way or another—impacted my thinking as this project developed. Living with a parable over several years encourages a lot of interesting conversations. Living with a parable as popular as that of the good Samaritan brings numerous opinions about its meaning. I wish this book could have included more of these engaging ideas about this first-century fictional story that has clearly shaped the lives and thinking and practices of contemporary people inside and outside the church in many ways.

I am grateful for the opportunities I have had to share segments of this research at Moravian Theological Seminary, Dubuque Theological Seminary, and Western Theological Seminary. The invitations from Dean Frank Crouch and Professor Travis West, respectively, were gifts, and the conversations that ensued were welcoming and warm. The COVID-19 pandemic hindered some opportunities, even as Zoom opened up alternative ones. I am grateful to local congregations that took advantage of these Zoom conversations, with several hospitable invitations from David True and Kathy Hettinga.

I have also been refreshed by many informal conversations along the way. For many years Jean Corey and I have walked into each other's

classrooms at Messiah University to discuss the nature of reading—she, with Langston Hughes’s poem “Theme for English B” by her side, and I, with Luke 10 in hand. Our efforts always encouraged my thinking, especially when they provoked our students. “How do you read?” (Luke 10:26) has become a constant query in my teaching due to these public encounters over the last two decades.

Others should also be mentioned, if ever so briefly. A fortuitous two-hour conversation with Cheryl Kirk-Duggan urged me to continue the work. Randy Bailey’s timely phone conversations brought much-needed laughter even as we opened up new ways to think through “old” interpretations. Michael Fuller’s reviews were always judicious.

Other colleagues closer to home should also be acknowledged. I appreciate my colleagues in the Department of Biblical, Religious and Philosophical Studies. I am especially grateful for the many conversations with Brian Smith, our department chair, surrounding various biblical phrases, ideas, or methods and for his understanding when I had to miss meetings. Drew Hart’s presence and energy have been contagious, and our conversations always leave me more energized for the journey.

I appreciate the leadership at Messiah University—President Kim Phipps, Provost Randy Basinger, and Dean Peter Powers—for their continual support. The sabbatical granted in the fall of 2019 provided key months to focus on much of the research that went directly into this book project. The space that Lancaster Theological Seminary provided—both physically and spiritually—was timely and opportune. I am grateful to LTS’s former vice president and academic dean, David Mellott, who negotiated this appointment; for the many kindnesses I received during my semester on the campus, especially from (former) President Carol Lytch, Greg Carey, Julia O’Brien, Myka Kennedy Stephens, and Catherine Williams; and for several meaningful conversations with David’s successor, Vanessa Lovelace.

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10 for the Life of the Church has become a much clearer book due to the engaged efforts of series editor

Stephen Chapman and project editor Jennifer Hale Koenes. Their attention to detail and insightful questions forced me to rethink (and often revise) several areas of the project. Please know that any confusion that remains is due to my own stubbornness.

As Langston Hughes echoes in my head, so I hope he will echo in yours:

So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.¹

1. Hughes, “Theme for English B.”

Abbreviations

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes
Exod.	Exodus	Song	Song of Songs
Lev.	Leviticus	Isa.	Isaiah
Num.	Numbers	Jer.	Jeremiah
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Lam.	Lamentations
Josh.	Joshua	Ezek.	Ezekiel
Judg.	Judges	Dan.	Daniel
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hosea
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Joel	Joel
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kings	Obad.	Obadiah
2 Kings	2 Kings	Jon.	Jonah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Mic.	Micah
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Nah.	Nahum
Ezra	Ezra	Hab.	Habakkuk
Neh.	Nehemiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Esther	Esther	Hag.	Haggai
Job	Job	Zech.	Zechariah
Ps(s).	Psalms	Mal.	Malachi
Prov.	Proverbs		

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Acts	Acts
Mark	Mark	Rom.	Romans
Luke	Luke	1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
John	John	2 Cor.	2 Corinthians

Gal.	Galatians	Heb.	Hebrews
Eph.	Ephesians	James	James
Phil.	Philippians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
Col.	Colossians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	2 John	2 John
1 Tim.	1 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Tim.	2 Timothy	Jude	Jude
Titus	Titus	Rev.	Revelation
Philem.	Philemon		

General

b.	born	e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
BLM	Black Lives Matter	Gk.	Greek
ca.	<i>circa</i> , about, approximately	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	p(p).	page(s)
chap(s).	chapter(s)	r.	reigned
d.	died	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> , under the word
		v(v).	verse(s)

Bible Versions

CEB	Common English Bible	NIV	New International Version
ESV	English Standard Version	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
KJV	King James Version		

Old Testament Apocrypha

Jdt.	Judith	Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees	Sir.	Sirach

Josephus

<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>	<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>
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Bibliographic

BDAG Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

||| The Preamble

This short book is about one of Jesus's most memorable parables, the so-called parable of the good Samaritan. It is also a book about the nature of interpretation: how different interpreters have engaged the wisdom of this first-century Jewish teacher. It is not, however, a step-by-step guide on the proper ways to understand ancient biblical parables. Rather, it will provide descriptions of various engagements with the parable and trust its readers to make their own interpretive judgments about what works and what may not. Within these pages, attention will be given to history, culture, linguistics, context, recontextualization, hermeneutics, ethics, and much more.

Many of these categories lie behind the (acknowledged and unacknowledged) assumptions interpreters make whenever they engage the parables of Jesus, which are imaginative stories that come to our age from a different time and place with their own cultural, religious, and sociopolitical assumptions about people, prejudices, and power. But these assumptions also come to us through tradition; our churches, our families, our communities have handed down insights into these stories that travel alongside the accounts themselves. Interpretive forces and assumptions are at work when these multiple worlds collide. The contemporary interpreter must decide whether the necessary goal is to get the meaning right or to enjoy the journey

(although these are not necessarily mutually exclusive), hopefully with conversation partners in a community of others longing for and imagining a better world toward which we must work even in our short lifetimes on planet Earth.

It would be fitting then, in light of the title of the book, to begin with a retelling of Jesus's great parable, which is recorded only in Luke's Gospel (chap. 10).

A lawyer approaches Jesus—who is in a celebratory mood (vv. 21–24)—to probe about a particular concern: eternal life. Readers are aware that it is a test. Regardless, Jesus turns the question into a discussion about Torah: “How do you read?” (v. 26). This is a game two law interpreters know how to play well. Jesus acknowledges as much: “You have given the right answer” (v. 28). Then the tension in the story rises. According to Luke, the lawyer wants to “justify himself,” so the game turns serious: “Who is my neighbor?” (v. 29).

To love a neighbor requires clarification because contexts, circumstances, relationships, laws, and a multiplicity of other factors have bearing on how people might interact with others. Who the neighbor might be was (and is) a good ethical and religious question. Jesus answers with the parable.

The parable begins with a tragedy. An unnamed person is brutally beaten, robbed, and left for dead. Three unnamed persons pass by on that road. Each one is briefly identified: a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. The first two make no effort to assist the traumatized man. The third person stops and provides aid, including assistance that will (eventually, so it seems) lead to his full recovery. Apparently, the man's “trauma” (Gk. *traumata* = “wounds”; v. 34) requires long-term care. Explicitly, this stranger takes the brutalized person to seek assistance from others and promises to pay for the full costs of his care. The parable ends here.

Following the parable Jesus turns to the lawyer and asks the ultimate question: “Which of these three . . . was a neighbor?” (v. 36 NRSV). Apparently Jesus created his own test, this parable. The lawyer passes the test with the correct answer: “The one who showed