

# GOSPEL WONDERS

**A different way to look at the gospels**

## **Good Samaritan (suggested) Order of Service**

1. Hymn 503 – Love divine, all loves excelling.
2. Prayer followed by the Lord's prayer
3. Introduction
4. Hymn 707 – Make me a channel of your peace.
5. At the Inn
6. Hymn 676 – Christ, from whom all blessings flow.
7. The Priest's Dilemma
8. Hymn 504 – May the mind of Christ my Saviour.
9. The Rebellious Robber
10. Hymn 513 – Take this moment, sign, and space.
11. Conclusion
12. Prayers of intercession
13. Hymn 455 – All my hope on God is founded.
14. Blessing

(All hymns from Singing the Faith)

## Opening prayers

How do we know our Lord and Heavenly Father? As a mysterious and avenging spirit Just waiting for us to make a mistake so that we can be punished or someone distant and far from us. Or does our view show Him as a source of love. As we look around us is he a destroyer who brings disaster after disaster upon us, anything to cause us distress, or is he the source of all blessings. The one who is always with us and whatever happens is with us to keep us safe. If we choose the first option, we can see the path to almost nonstop suffering and unhappiness. If we choose the second option there, as bright as day, is a source of guidance, of comfort and we can go forward with the light of hope in our hearts.

Choosing a lord who not only promises good things for us he has proved it. On the world stage He proved it in the life, sacrifice and resurrection of His son. An act that within few years had won the hearts and mind of peoples across the known world. He offered life in abundance. Taking his message to individuals for two thousand years the message that he gave has touched the hearts and lives of millions of individuals. His word touched and made lives grow.

This message comes down over the centuries until it is here today. For us, every one of us, is able to share in His blessings.

So we offer Him our grateful thanks for all He has given us, we offer Him our praise and our worship and we humbly offer our lives to His service. What else can we do but be in His service and live in the love that he gives.

This is not a wasted gesture, not some throw away action it is a blessing that we are offered and only need to accept.

But our Lord knows us. He has always known us and accepts that we are fallible. That there will be times when we get things wrong. Maybe through some act of thoughtlessness which causes pain, distress or unhappiness to others. Maybe a deliberate action which we later regret. In His love Our lord has made it possible to be forgiven. Jesus told us that if we acknowledged that we had failed in some way to be a credit to what the Father stood for and accepted responsibility for our failings then He. 'The lord Jesus would take it to the Father seeking forgiveness and that would be granted.

We have given our worship praise and commitment. Now is the time in preparation for the rest of our service to look at our own hearts and see 'Is there anything we need to bring to Him today? In a short period of silence let us consider this.

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Know that anything brought to the Lord in the spirit of true repentance is forgiven

**Amen**

The Lord's Prayer.

## Introduction

Today we are going to take you on a journey to a very dangerous place. A place where both nature and human intervention combined to make it a perilous place for the traveller. A place where it was foolhardy to be found alone. It was a stretch of road between two cities. In its 20-mile length it fell 3,600 feet with many sharp bends, narrow places and hidden crevices ideal hiding places for the robber and the thief preparing themselves to jump out on the unwary traveller. It was known as the Red or Bloody Way. It held its secrets well. There were many places where a body could be hidden and never found. If that was not enough, the heat beat down like a hammer on an anvil sucking the moisture from the body, the glare from the rock hurting the eyes making it almost impossible to see round the corner, walking into shadows so deep that the traveller staggered along feeling their way as though struck blind.

We can feel the fear of one such traveller as he leaves the safety of the city and sets forth alone.

We can hear the breathing as we wait with the robber band for the victim to approach.

We see the confusion in the face of an honest man caught up in a situation he could not handle.

We can feel the warmth and love in another heart as he risks his own safety to help one in need.

Certainly, two of those who we hear of might have felt themselves safe because of their position in society for who would dare to attack a Priest or Levite but what of the others? What drives human beings to step away from that which is comfortable to one where they step out and act alone?

## At the Inn

*Two characters – the innkeeper and traveller*

**Innkeeper:** Good morning my friend. Good to see you back with us. How are you feeling?

**Traveller:** Well apart from feeling as if I have been run over by a herd of camels, I am fine. I have been lying here checking myself over and it seems as if there are no broken bones and I still have all the bits I should have, so I suppose I am OK. Where on earth am I anyway?

**Innkeeper:** Not just anywhere on earth. You are in the best room in Ruben's Inn, the finest you will find on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. You my dear sir, have slept in the finest bed and received treatment from our local doctor, a man who learned his skills in Rome and Athens.

**Traveller:** Fine, I appreciate that I've had, am having the best of everything but what did I do to deserve such good fortune? Oh yes, I remember, I was robbed!

**Innkeeper:** Yes, my friend you were robbed and left for dead by all accounts. If it hadn't been for Ephraim the Samaritan you would have the crows picking out your eyes by now. Mind you, knowing what that road is like it was not a really clever things to do, to travel on your own and not with a group. Only a fool does something like that.

**Traveller:** Yes! Don't tell me. It was just that my wife is expecting our first child any time now and I wanted to get home. I mean it was to get money together that I made this trip in the first place. As there were no caravans of groups leaving for week, I decided to risk it. Anyway, what do you mean the Samaritan? Are you saying that the chap who found me was a Samaritan? What had he to do with it?

**Innkeeper:** Look, why don't you tell me what you remember and I'll try to fill in the details.

**Traveller:** Well, you will remember that I passed through a few days ago. I was taking some goods up to Jerusalem to sell at the market. Well, I got there, no problem, did some good business and sold everything including a couple of mules and set off for home. I had just got to that steep narrow part of the road when there in front of me is a big ugly brute of a man. He says, as polite as you like that he feels all my money must be slowing me down and he would like to relieve me of its weight. I told him to get out of my way and then the next minute I was on the floor with a dirty sandal on my throat holding me down. They stole my clothes then hauled me to my feet and told me that because I had been uncooperative, they were going to kill me. I thought they were going to do it until a young man stepped forward and told them to stop. The big man told him to shut up and if he didn't like it to go away or hide his sensitive little eyes, but the youngster held his ground. From what he said he was the big man's son and he

had spotted me in Jerusalem and told them I was on the way, so he thought he had some say in what happened to me. When I looked at him again, I realised he had been in the market place. The big man said that if he wanted me, he could have me but he had better make sure that there were no consequences. With that he hit me hard, knocked me to the floor and stalked off. The others followed him and, I think, as they left, ever one of them kicked me, hit me or stepped on me. Then there was just the youngster and me. He looked down at me and said “Sorry my friend, you are on your own now” and then he walked off. I think I must have passed out because that is all I remember until I woke up here.

**Innkeeper:** Well, that fits in with what I heard. It seems you weren't the only traveller that day. About mid-afternoon old Eli the Levite came back along the road. He said that on the way he met a priest who told him that there was a badly beaten man a mile or so on. He told Eli that because he was on his way back from doing duty in the temple and was not ritually clean, he hadn't been able to stop and see what his injuries were but maybe he, Eli, would have a look at him as he passed. Eli said that he would but when he got to the spot, he decided against it. As he said on that road there were so many bands of thieves and it had been known for one of their men to act as decoy then when you went to try and help the others jumped you. The man didn't seem to be moving so Eli gave him a wide berth.

That was it until I went out for a last check round before I closed up for the night and that was when I saw Ephraim coming down the road holding you on his mule.

**Traveller:** I don't get it. Why would a Samaritan of all people bother to help me? A Jew. Come to that, why did it have to be a Samaritan in the first place. It could have been anybody else, but not a Samaritan.

**Innkeeper:** Now hold on there and put away your Jewish pride. I have known Ephraim for a number of years and he has always been an honest man with a good heart. His credit is good here and don't you forget it. Come to that, you are here on his credit now. Just you remember that.

**Traveller:** Yes, you are right my friend. Sorry, I am not quite myself today. I am glad he came along. The only thing is though, how do you say thank you to a Samaritan?

## The Priest's Dilemma

*Two characters, Levi (a priest) and Rebecca (his wife).*

**Levi:** Rebecca, I'm home!

**Rebecca:** Hello my dear. That's another spell of duty at the temple finished. How did it go?

**Levi:** Ok I suppose. Tends to be much of a muchness really, unless your name comes up to go into the Holy of Holies but in all the years I have been going it has never happened and it didn't this time. But then it is all about doing one's duty to God I suppose.

**Rebecca:** What's wrong? You are normally quite cheerful when you get home. You sound a bit down. Did something happen up there?

**Levi:** No, nothing happened up there but it was on the way home. You know how I am always very particular about getting myself ritually clean before I go on duty.

**Rebecca:** Yes! You are always most particular about that and then, when you are, staying that way.

**Levi:** Well, this time as I came down the road, I came across a man lying there. He was badly beaten and at first, I thought he was dead. Then as I got closer, I think I heard him groan so he could have been alive. I stood for a minute watching him. I didn't know what to do. There was I, clean from serving God in the temple and if I touched a dead man particularly one covered in blood and dirt as he was, I would become unclean. I didn't know what to do.

**Rebecca:** So you helped him, of course.

**Levi:** No, that's the thing. I didn't. I crossed over and walked away. I left him lying in the dirt and walked away. Sure, I told a man I met a bit farther up the road, but I walked away and left an injured man, possibly alive, lying there.

**Rebecca:** What do you think they would say if you told them about it at the temple?

**Levi:** Well – you know what a bunch of stuffed shirts they are there. They would probably have said that I had done the right thing to put God first. Well done. But I don't know that it was "well done". It has been worrying me.

**Rebecca:** If you think about it what else could you have done my dear? You have always taken your duties at the temple seriously, seen it as a privilege to be part of worship.

**Levi:** Yes, I know but maybe I could have helped that man. I am sure I heard him groan. He was alive and I just crossed the road and left him lying there. I know he might have died later but I could have helped him at the time. I just don't know.

**Rebecca**: But you would have been unclean – (pause) What about your duty?

**Levi**: Yes, I know “my duty”. But which is more important? My duty to the temple or my duty to a fellow human being in trouble. You tell me for I really do not know. In a way, it does not matter whether he died or not. The fact of the matter is that I did not help when I could have done just so I could appear so holy and self-righteousness.

**Rebecca**: I know what you’re saying and I don’t know how I would have acted if I had been in your place. I hope I am never in that position. At the end of the day, you did what you did at the time because it seemed to be the right thing.

**Levi**: Yes, you’re right of course but there are times when you have to wonder about what you do and somehow the reasons you did it seem a little like making excuses. Anyway, I think I will have a cup of wine and then go and bathe before we eat.



## The Rebellious Robber

*Two characters: the chief robber and his son*

**Chief robber:** I don't care if you are my son, you never argue with me in front of the men. You're the same as them and you do what you are told. You know how we always kill them and dump them later. Now, if you are getting squeamish then go and make your own way. OK?

**Son:** Look father, it's not that I want to challenge you, but I was the one sitting beside that man in the market place. I even helped him to get loaded up for his journey. He told me that he was rushing home because he was due to become a father. He even gave me a tip for my help. I liked him and didn't want to see him dead. I just felt that we didn't need to kill him.

**Chief robber:** So, you don't like the way I do things. Look, I have been doing things for a lot of years now and we have never had any trouble. Do you think it's been easy looking after you since your mother died? Don't look at me like that. When the Romans came to our village on one of their "reprisal" raids for something those fool Zealots had done I thought they would be merciful on a family that had never done them any harm. But no.

They set fire to the farm and killed your mother because she fought against them trying to take her off to be in one of their military camps. I vowed then and there that I would never be in the position of being made a prisoner again. I have kept you safe since then. Me and the rules I have enforced. So, don't you go getting all sentimental over somebody you knew for a couple of days who would not normally have given you the time of day if you had not been of use to him?

**Son:** Yes! I know the story and I know that you have kept me safe and don't think I am not grateful. But the way we live is wrong. I have not thought about it much until you sent me to Jerusalem to watch out for suitable "customers". What I saw there were people getting on with living, doing business; making families; going to worship and being together. There were even some pretty girls, and let's face it the only girls we ever see are those who are our prisoners and they are usually scared to death of what is going to happen to them, and usually with good cause. I couldn't help thinking how nice it would be to go home in the evening and spend time with a woman, and not one that I had paid for.

**Chief robber:** I'm sorry son. I hadn't realised that you were growing up. I remember when your mother was alive, that was the time of day I liked best – the evening. It was even better when you came along and we were a real family (sigh). Well, it's too late for me now. I am trapped in this life. The reason I sent you to Jerusalem was that I didn't dare go myself in case someone recognised me. Everybody knows me as a violent thief and that is how I will die. One day I'll make a mistake and end up with a sword or dagger in my heart. If not on the road one of these will decide it's time to

take over. I cannot change my ways, but you can. Maybe it's time you left us and set off to make your way in the world. Take what you need and cut across the hills to the coast. Make for Caesarea, there is less chance of you being recognised there, and probably a better chance of finding something at a sea port.

**Son**: Why don't you come with me? We might be able to make a go of something between us.

**Chief robber**: I told you I am a dead man walking. Just go.

**Son**: But father.....

**Chief robber**: I TOLD YOU – JUST GO.....

**Son**: Yes father.

**Chief robber**: May God bless you my son.

## Conclusion

Life is interesting in the way we often see, at first glance, how everything seems so simple. Good is good and bad is bad. But as we look closer, life and human nature covers a range of situations and the emotions that go with them.

We have here a group of people. In most cases, unknown to each other. When they woke up that morning, little did they know that before the sun set, their lives would be changed for ever. They were to be challenged physically, spiritually and emotionally. Their respective worlds would be turned upside down. Let's look at them.

There is the victim. A man who, in the flush of expected fatherhood was doing all he could to provide for his family. He made the trip to the capital to raise money by trading and in his excitement had done something very foolish.

Against all perceived wisdom, he set off down a very dangerous stretch of road without companions or an escort. A decision he was to regret. Before the day was over, he was to suffer the physical pain of being violently attacked; of seeing the purpose of his trip taken from him, leaving him with nothing, not even clothes to stand up in; the pain of having to admit that he had brought it upon himself and worst of all, knowing that he owed his life to someone who he had been brought up to see as an enemy and less than human, because he was different in race and religion.

Then there was the priest. One who had devoted a large percentage of his life to doing his duty to God and the temple? In doing this he had not spared himself. His neighbours would have seen him as a seriously God-fearing man. Preparing himself properly, as laid down in the rules had become almost an obsession. So much so that God's will had been side-lined, as he was to find out. He seems to have been a good human being suddenly faced with a situation he couldn't cope with. He had a decision to make. Then realised that he had got it wrong. But by then it was too late and it didn't help that he could have done something but could only come up with pat answers which only highlighted his dilemma.

He was left alone, haunted by the groan from the man he had ignored and tormenting himself; that the man was alive and he could have, and should have helped him. He had allowed man's instruction to override God's.

Finally, the robber. He is the one we would have little sympathy for. We would see him as an evil man, and that he was is undeniable. He would try to convince you, that after his home was destroyed and his partner killed, he had little choice but to turn to crime as a way of living and supporting his young son. Equally, he would tell you that it was only violence he used which had enabled him to do this. But then he had to face the fact that his son was now groaning up and confronting him with how wrong the lifestyle that he was guarding so precious was. On this day, he was forced to admit that the person who was most important in his life was rejecting him and his way of living. Facing this reality must have made this the most painful of days since his wife

was killed. He had to let his son go with his blessing knowing that if he wanted to leave, other people would not give him the opportunity to change, they would want him dead.

Stories like this have message for us. Jesus was asked “who is my neighbour?” After he told this story he put the question back not just to the one who asked it, but it comes right back to us.

It says three things:

- We must help others even if they may have brought their troubles on themselves
- Anyone of any nation or group who is need of help is our neighbour. Our help must be as wide as the love of God
- That our help must be practical. Compassion without action is not good enough. It must be real and result in deeds and not just words, even for those we may not think worthy.

What Jesus says to the scribe he says to us – go and do thou likewise.

## Prayers of intercession

Whenever we pray we make time to move away from the prayers about ourselves and our personal thoughts to expand our meditations to the world around it and its people.

Now is that time so let us pray.

So much to pray about. In what appears to be a world tearing itself apart with violence greed and self-seeking where do we start.

Well! Let's look very close to home. The church and those in it. We remember those who lead the ones with the responsibility for making the decisions and all those who translate those decisions onwards and ensure that the message that is passed on is the one that you want to be heard. We remember all those who day by day and week by week work within the church in oh so many ways not just saying but doing and living your message of love. We acknowledge that the church couldn't do without them and ask that they are encouraged and strengthened in the tasks they take on.

We ask as well that in those places where your people are persecuted in one way or another for loving you and would ask especially that your love and support be with them in their lives and work

Then the world at large as we look around the world we see people suffering through the actions of others where the acquisition of wealth, the desire for power and the domination of others takes precedence of simple humanity. Certainly there are those who seek and sometimes put their lives and liberty at risk in their efforts to help others and we would pray that they will be supported in their efforts and for the others Lord, please find ways to teach them what the word humanity means.

At the beginning of this pray we spoke of moving away from our personal prayer but we all must acknowledge that there are people in our lives that we hold dear and would wish to pray for and situations that rest on our hearts. In the silence let us take time to bring before the Lord those people and situations which particularly rest on our hearts today asking that he surround them with his love and care.

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We ask that through our Lord Jesus Christ our prayers will be set before our Heavenly Father for Him to give them his consideration.

**Amen.**

## Blessing

Lord God Heavenly Father

We live in your love,

We go in Peace

The world can be hard.

We feel the strain.

We can go in peace.

It can be dark,

It can be joyless

We can go in peace.

We need not fear

His love surrounds us

We go in His peace.

The world is there

We step out in joy

WE GO IN HIS PEACE.

*Followed by the sharing of the Grace.*