

Dear Jill,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You asked if the Good Samaritan was a Christian by religious faith.

This is a good question because "The Good Samaritan" was not an actual person, but a fictional one who appeared in a parable or story of the same name. (See Luke 10:25-37.) Jesus told the parable to illustrate a universal moral lesson.

The circumstances leading up to the telling of the parable are as follows. A Jewish scholar of the Mosaic Law asks Jesus what is necessary to inherit eternal life. After Jesus asks him what the Law says, the scholar says it is loving God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and the parallel law of loving your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says that he answered correctly and tells him to do this and live. But, then the lawyer asks Jesus to tell him who his neighbor is. It is at this juncture that Jesus relates the parable of the Good Samaritan.

There was a traveler who was attacked, robbed, stripped, and left for dead by the side of a road. Later, a Jewish priest saw the stricken figure and avoided him, presumably in order to maintain ritual purity. Similarly, a Levite (one who assists priests at the Temple) saw the man and ignored him as well. Then a Samaritan passed by, and, despite the mutual antipathy between his and the Jewish populations, immediately rendered assistance by giving him first aid and taking him to an inn to recover while promising to cover the expenses.

At the conclusion of the story, Jesus asks the lawyer, of the three passers-by, who was the stricken man's neighbor? When the lawyer responds that it was the man who helped him, Jesus responds saying, "Go and do the same."

It is important to note that the Samaritans were despised as apostates and considered outcasts by the Jews because of their mixed ancestry of Israelite and Assyrian lineage. Thus the parable had a theme of non-discrimination and interracial harmony. It demonstrated that anyone of any religion or race should possess love and mercy for his fellow man. The actions of the Samaritan showed that he fulfilled the spirit of the Law, rather than its letter. In this respect the fictional Samaritan is a picture of how each true Christian should act.

We hope we have answered your question.

Sincerely,  
Christian Questions Radio