

Luke 6.27-49  
*The Merciful God and His Merciful People*

This is *truly* a hard passage. If you think the Christian life is easy, all you have to do is read through these verses a few times and reflect on them, and your opinion will change really quick.

*Love your enemies. Give freely to everyone.* Of course, it's common knowledge that these are things Christians are supposed to do. But how much does the church really keep these commandments?

Last week we looked at the *Blessings and Woes* of verses 20-26, where Jesus set two ways of life in contrast to each other in light of the coming Day of God's judgment.

First, there's the blessed—the poor, hungry, those who weep and are rejected. And then there's the cursed—the rich, full, those who laugh and are accepted.

And *Christ himself* fulfills all those things that he calls blessed. He *became poor*, that we might be made rich. He *became hungry*, that we might be filled.

He was a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief, that we might have eternal joy. He was reviled, hated, outcast, that we might be accepted and received into God's Kingdom.

And that's why those who follow him in the way of the cross are blessed. Because he went before us, so that we might receive an eternal reward through him.

And so, now in the rest of the chapter, Jesus teaches his disciples how to follow him in their interactions with other people. And in all these things he's calling us to imitate him in our lives by living with the reward of the coming age immediately in view.

Because, why did Jesus endure the cross? He endured it, as the book of Hebrews says, *for the joy that was set before him. For the joy* of his eternal inheritance. For the greater, lasting pleasures that are *ever more* at

his Father's right hand. And that's what he holds before us too. *His* example and *his* reward.

### 1. Love Your Enemies—Verses 27-29

And so, what follows here flows out of those blessings and woes Jesus started off with. In the blessings and woes, he *redefined* the world in which we live, by holding the basic assumptions of human society up against the light of God's judgment.

And here in what follows, he shows something of what living in light of the coming Kingdom ought to look like in terms of our interactions with other people.

And remember, he's talking here to this new community that's gathered around his person and teaching. He chose his 12 apostles as a new leadership for God's people. And he just laid out for them two opposing ways of life.

So in contrast to the cursed way of the rich and powerful in verses 24-26, Jesus now says to his disciples, starting in verse 27, "BUT, *I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*"

And it's no coincidence that he starts with *love your enemies*. Because this really highlights the contrast Jesus is making between how his disciples are to act and the *assumptions* of human society.

I mean, can there be any way of life *more opposed* to the general tendency of humanity than this idea of loving your enemies and doing good to people who hate you and abuse you? I don't think so.

We're constantly told you need to look out for yourself and assert your own will in your dealings with other people. Look out for number 1. And *if* you think like that, much to the contrary of *loving* your enemies, you'll only seek their destruction.

And this is the most pressing thing for Jesus' disciples to hear. Because they *will be hated*. Remember, the list of blessings ended with

*“Blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.”*

This is what Jesus himself is about to go through. And it’s what his disciples will go through too after he’s crucified.

And what *really* shows whether or not you’re following Christ in the way of the cross is whether you show love to people who hate you—people who either *will not* or *cannot* give you anything in return.

Because that’s just what Christ did, *isn’t it?* We’re all enemies of God apart from Christ. *You were* God’s enemy. Jesus didn’t just come to hang out with nice people who loved him. He came to love and give his life for those who hated and killed him.

That was his mission from the very beginning. As we read earlier from Isaiah 50.6, Christ willingly gave his back to those who struck him, and his cheeks to those who pulled out his beard. He didn’t hide his face from disgrace and spitting.

And as all this injustice happened to him at the hands of his enemies, Jesus still cried out from the cross, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they’re doing.”*

And this was all that we who are God’s enemies might be forgiven and accepted into God’s favor. Romans 5.8: *“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Then Jesus gives 3 aspects of loving your enemies: 1. Do good to those who *hate* you. 2. Bless those who *curse* you. 3. Pray for those who *abuse* you.

Doing good to those who hate you means action—*actually doing* something that benefits them. Blessing means speech. *Speaking* in ways that will bless them rather than curse them. And lastly, praying for those who mistreat you has to do with the *sincerity* of your heart before God.

And notice that these are all active rather than passive. *Do good* to those who hate you. Don’t just *avoid* them. Actively *do good* to them.

Bless those who curse you. Don't just *keep your mouth shut*. But *actively bless* them.

And *Pray* for those who abuse you. Don't just go your merry way and ignore it. But *actively* and *sincerely pray for* them.

You see, Love, if it's really love, expresses itself through action. It's not simply a passive indifference. And you *simply cannot* practice this kind of love if you have yourself and what you can get out of other people *anywhere near* the center. This is *utterly selfless*.

Christian love is a love that seeks the good of the other rather than yourself. It's a love that gives without expecting *anything* in return. It's the *active embrace* of another human being, regardless of what they've done or will do or can do to you or for you.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, "*Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.*" This is the kind of love Jesus is talking about.

And then he follows that in verse 29 with 2 specific examples of what this looks like. 1. If someone hits you on one cheek, offer them the other one. 2. If someone takes away your cloak, don't withhold your tunic.

The point in each: Don't just put up with injustice done to you. And *don't* retaliate against it, either. But, again, *actively love* and *give yourself over* for the good of those who mistreat you!

Now, you might be thinking: Well, that's easy to say. But *is it even possible?* But think about Jesus. Was he struck on the cheek? Yes. Again, Isaiah 50.6, "*I gave my cheeks to those who pull out the beard.*" And John 19.3 says the Roman soldiers struck him in the face with their hands.

Did he have his clothes taken from him? Yes. John 19.23: "*They took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; and also his tunic.*" And *how* did he respond? *Did* he retaliate? Insist they treat him better *or else?* No. "*Father, forgive them.*"

Friends, Jesus was a man. He went through those things as a man—with human pain, feelings, and emotion. And in enduring those things, he

shows us what a perfect man is. He shows us what it means to love even our enemies. Because that's *exactly* what he did for us.

But, *does this* mean we should never defend ourselves, or others? *I don't think so*. Because remember, the *main point* here *isn't about* whether or not you can defend yourself.

It's about not asserting your own will. It's about *not insisting* that people treat you how you *think* you deserve. It's really still about *seeking* your treasure in the age to come *rather than* this world.

And notice that Jesus *doesn't say* here you can't do anything to keep yourself from being harmed. And he *certainly doesn't say* you should never use force to protect the innocent.

In fact, it's a biblical imperative that we protect the innocent and the helpless. The words of Jesus here aren't at all opposed to that. I mean, if someone attacks my wife and daughter, or I see someone being attacked, it's my responsibility to do everything I can to protect them.

But what Jesus does say is that you're not to *retaliate* and *exact vengeance* for harm done to you. If someone wrongs you, you're not to fight back, or hold a grudge, or try to get them. And, positively, you're to seek to do good and bless them.

Now, Jesus gave himself over to those who hated him for the redemption of mankind. And of course, when we love others, we're not doing that. But *we are* called to live as Christ lived. And as we do that, we do play a part in people's salvation.

Think about Stephen in Acts 7. He bore witness to Christ in his life and what he said. And he willingly faced the consequences from those who hated him. As an angry mob *rushed* him and *stoned* him to death.

And what were *his dying words*? Much like the Lord Jesus from the cross, "Lord, *do not hold this sin against them*." You see, Stephen *prayed* for those who abused him.

And who was there approving of his death, but Saul, whom we know as Paul? Paul was one of the enemies Stephen prayed for at his death. And Paul would become an apostle and later give his own life for the sake of the gospel.

And that same Paul, who once persecuted the church, would later teach the *very thing* that's taught here by Jesus in Luke 6.

Romans 12.20-21: "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.*" *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*"

Now, of course, in 21<sup>st</sup> century America we're not going through the sort of persecution the early church went through. But the Scripture is clear that everyone who seeks to live a godly life in Christ will endure some form of persecution.

Sure, that won't mean stoning in our society. But it will at times mean being mocked and ridiculed. Being excluded, taken advantage of, threatened.

How do you react in those situations? Do you get angry and fight back when people oppose you? Do you love them or hate them? Do you curse them or bless them? Do you wish evil upon them or pray for them?

Are there people in your life you have a really hard time being around or dealing with? Are there people whose sin really grates on you? Or who mistreat you and abuse you in any way?

How do you respond? Think about your neighbors, your co-workers, your family members. *How do* you treat them? Do you seek to assert your own will in your interactions with them? Or do you seek to bless them and pray for them?

It's not easy. In fact, as I said before, nothing's more aversive to what we're naturally inclined to do in such situations. But this is your calling—to seek the good of your enemies, to bless those who curse you, to pray for those who abuse you.

## 2. Give Freely to Everyone—Verses 30-34

But Jesus doesn't just stop there. He goes on to say in verses 30-34 that you're to *give freely* to everyone, without ever expecting or even necessarily wanting to get anything back!

Now, if you love and bless your enemies, as degrading as *that might* be, there's still a chance that if they're rich, you might eventually win them over and get something in return.

But if that's your motivation for doing good, you're not following the Lord's teaching. We're not to pay any regard to what we can get out of it in how we treat other people.

In verse 31, Jesus says, "*Do to others what you'd want them to do to you.*" In other words, put yourself in their place. This is the ethics of Jesus encapsulated in one sentence.

And it's not, *Do What do you think should be done to them.* It's, *If you were personally in that situation, what would you someone to do for you?* In other words, imagine you're someone without a home and nothing to eat. What would you have somebody do for you in that situation?

I fear that all too often we tend to look at people skeptically. Like, *What did they do to get themselves in that situation? They're obviously lazy.* And sure, that may at times be true.

But the point is that those *are not* the sorts of questions that should motivate what you do for people. The *only two questions* we're to be concerned with are, *What would the Lord have me do?* And *What would I want someone to do for me if I were that person?*

Now, of course, none of that's to discount that we need to be wise in how we use our resources. There will be times when people are really trying to scam you.

For instance, one Sunday morning we had someone call the church saying they'd visited us a few months ago and they needed money wired to

a Wall Mart in Florida immediately. Nobody recalled ever having met this person. And so it was a clear case of someone trying to scam us.

But there might also be times when somebody's trying to scam you and you don't know it. In those situations, what *they're doing* is between them and God. And if you have no clear reason to doubt their sincerity, then you have to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Paul gives us a principle to follow in 1 Corinthians 6. Now, he's talking about lawsuits among believers. But I think it applies here as a general rule. He says in verse 7, "*To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?*"

You see, the point's that to exert your own will and insist on your own way is a defeat for you. That's not how a Christian is to live. And transferring this to helping people in need: It's better to be willing to suffer wrong and be defrauded than it is to run the risk of withholding help from somebody who really needs it.

You see, this ethic of Jesus is *so radical* because it's not just about what you *don't do*. It's about what you *do*. It's not enough to just do no harm. But in order to be like Jesus, you have to also *do good*.

But, why? *Why* would you ever want to give to people who can't give anything back to you? Well, because of what Jesus has been saying from the beginning: The reward you're living for isn't rest or treasure in this present age. But it's the *lasting treasure* of the age to come, which only God gives.

Last week at the end of the sermon I mentioned briefly the example of Abraham, when he rejected the plunder of war from the King of Sodom.

Now, *why* did Abram reject those riches? I mean, he had a rightful claim to it. Well, he said to the King of Sodom in Genesis 14.22-23:

*"I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup> that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'"*



You see, Abram knew, and he wanted everyone else to know, that his reward came from God and from God alone. He didn't do what he did for the riches of men, but for the glory of God and the reward that only God can give. And what did God say to him after that? Genesis 15.1, "*Fear not, Abram, for I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great.*"

And if we really have this perspective on things, *how deeply* would it affect our interactions with each other in the church or in our homes. How would this impact your interaction with your wife or husband? With your parents? With your children? With your brothers and sisters?

Jesus tells us here that loving and doing good to those people is just a given. There's really no reward in it because it's just what should be natural to us. But all too often it doesn't come naturally, *does it?*

Men, if it's your calling as a Christian to *love even your enemies* and not seek what you can get in return from *even strangers*, *how much more* ought you to *selflessly love* and *serve your wives*? Or wives, your husbands? *Or all of us to one another?*

And, further, how ought this perspective to affect our ministry as a church? It's a dangerous temptation within churches to focus in on people that we think will be an *asset* to the church.

I've seen it. And it's really nothing new. It was a temptation even in the first century church. That's why James warns in James 2.1-4:

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. <sup>2</sup> For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," <sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

*Brothers and sisters*, May that *never be so* of us! We're called as the church of the Lord Jesus to serve and love and give *without any regard* to what we may or may not get in return.

Sure, we may never *actually say* to anyone, “*Sit down at my feet.*” But think about this scenario James gives us. If there’re two people visiting the church, one clean cut, *seemingly* well-to-do. And the other in shabby clothes, looking like it may’ve been a few days since the last shower....

Who would you be more inclined to try to get to know after the service? I would hope the answer from every one of us would be, “*the one in shabby clothes.*”

Because we’re not to make distinctions, but to love and give generously of our time and our possessions to everyone regardless of what we can get in return.

### 3. “Even as Your Father is Merciful”—Verses 35-36

And the reason for all that, as Jesus says in verses 35-36, is because of the example of our Father. He shows mercy to everyone regardless of what he gets back. *He’s kind to the ungrateful and evil.* And as his children, we’re to do the same.

The Lord’s mercy is over everything he’s made. Psalm 145.15-16: *The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

And God gives mercifully without the possibility of receiving anything of any worth to him in return. Because he’s God! Romans 11.35—“*Who has ever given a gift to God that he might be repaid? For from him and to him and through him are all things.*” Everything’s his!

Yet he gives generously to all his creatures. And *even those* on whom Jesus pronounced *woe* at the beginning of this sermon. God *continually* has mercy and blesses *those very people* who spurn his gifts and mock him.

And that merciful God is *your Father*. And he’s *your Father* precisely because he’s *Christ’s Father*, who was sent into the world as the *supreme example* of the Father’s love for his enemies.

And as such, we're to exemplify that indiscriminate mercy of God in our dealings with everyone. *Your God* is daily mocked and hated and reviled. And yet he continues to bless and give.

*Your Savior* was hated and mocked and crucified for you. And he forgave. And so, *even as* we're mocked and hated and reviled, we're to act like our merciful Father and our merciful Savior by showing mercy and love.

And *friends*, in order to do this we have to keep our eyes ever fixed on Jesus—Crucified and raised and seated in glory at the Father's right hand, where there's *stored up* for us lasting treasure that *will not* fade away.