

**"A FAITH-SHAPED LIFE: LOVING ENEMIES"**

Luke 6:27-36

There is an old Irish prayer that I came upon that goes like this: "May those that love us, love us; and those that don't love us, may God turn their hearts; and if He doesn't turn their hearts, may He turn their ankles so we'll know them by their limping."

When my brother and I were growing up we were never allowed to say that we hated someone. We might dislike them, but hate them- that was a "no-no". Let me ask you- have you ever hated someone? Have you ever had someone that you would label as your enemy? (Show hands) Now, if we are all honest, I don't know anyone who could not answer in the affirmative. Hopefully over time, our hatred diminished to dislike, but I am sure there are those, well, let's just say those we have hated. Maybe we just wished they had never been born. "Hate" is such a strong word and yet there has been and there is hatred everywhere: Palestinians and Jews; Sunni and Shiite Muslims; Protestants and Catholics; Tutsis and Hutus in

Rwanda; Serbs and Bosnians; Turks and Armenians; and the list goes on and on- hatred, hatred, hatred. I wonder how many of these people groups that I have just mentioned are proud of their hatred towards their enemy?

For some it is in-bred, it is so ingrained, being handed down from one generation to the next that it will take years, no, generations to address.

One day a reporter was interviewing an old man on his 100 birthday. "What are you most proud of?" he asked. "Well," said the man, "I don't have an enemy in the world." "What a wonderful thought! How inspirational!" said the reporter? "Yep," added the centenarian, "outlived every last one of them."

This morning we continue our series from the Place where Jesus is teaching His disciples and those would-be disciples, otherwise known as "the people." He turns His attention from blessings and woes in verses 20-26 to tell His listeners to "love your enemies."

Jesus says in verses 27-28, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." Jesus says it at the beginning of His instructions and at the end, in verses 35. Tough stuff to do, right? I mean, it is said there is no commandment of Jesus which has caused so much discussion and debate as this commandment. Do you; have you found it difficult to love your enemies? I mean, these are the people who have hurt you, said evil things about you, stabbed you in the back, made promises and left you standing holding the bag, subjected you to mental and perhaps physically cruelty. Love this person after what they did to me? Come on Jesus. I mean the best I might be able to buy into is what it says in Romans 12:19, where Paul writes, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" After I have been wronged I want to say, "Bring it on God and do your vengeance stuff and repay them, NOW!" Now we are talking the same language, God.

But is that what Jesus is saying? Is this really loving my enemy? I don't think so. And so I have to talk myself into, at least, working at what Jesus is asking, as hard as this is.

Jesus tells us to do what with our enemies? To love them. And we find between verses 27 and 35 a compilation and not a sermon on what we are to do with these people. Look at what Jesus tells us to do with these enemies of ours- He tells us to do good to them, bless them, pray for them, let them strike us again, give them more after they have taken from us.

WOW!

This section of Jesus' teaching has two parts. The first part is found in **vs. 27-31 and the principle is this, do not avenge**. Jesus does not want us to do the same things that they have done to us, for he mentions the different forms of mistreatment- hating, cursing, and abusing, and so on. It would appear that the teachings assume that the listeners are the victims and not those perpetrating the crimes.

You also notice that Jesus does not offer instructions on what the victim is to do after the striking, stealing, hating, cursing, and abuse has been dished out. The assumption is that retaliating with an eye-for-an-eye mentality is foreign to those who live under the reign of God. But there is something else in this passage, I believe. These followers of Jesus may be victims, but they are not to see themselves as victims so that they are conditioned, shaped and molded by the hostilities and abuses being perpetrated upon them. **What Jesus wants to see happen is that these followers of His take the initiative and act according to the Kingdom of God principles of loving, forgiving and giving out or their generosity.**

They are not to do this by responding in kind, or by rolling over and playing dead or by whining- they are just to act accordingly. This is not a "love them to death with kindness mentality" or killing them softly with love, but this is the higher ground one is encouraged to take as we seek to follow Jesus' example in the way He approached His enemies where He did not

reciprocate but loved those ungrateful and selfish people of the world. I didn't say this command of Jesus would be easy to do, but it is a command that He gives to us, none-the-less.

The second part is found in **vs. 32-36 and the principle is not to reciprocate in response to the way others treat you.** Look at verses 32-36 with me again. Jesus says, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." Jesus continues this train of thought by saying, "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same." And then he uses the example of the person who lends. The interesting thing about these statements is that, unlike the person who seeks to harm us in verses 27-31, these examples are of those we are in relationship with who love us and do good to and for us. I think that what Jesus is trying to say is that just like one's life is not determined by the enemy, so it is not determined by the friend.

And so the person hating because someone has hurt or harmed them and the person loving because they have been loved, the Christ-like behavior and relationship is encouraged by the God we love and worship and serve. The same God who does not react but rather acts in love and grace and mercy to all people. (*Interpretation, Luke*, Fred Craddock, p. 90.) This is what it means to be children of the Most High that Luke speaks of in verse 35. And Luke really plays out this notion of impartiality when, in Luke 15:11-32 we read the parable of the lost son, otherwise known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. For in this parable the father not only has to deal with his son who was lost but came back, but he had to deal with the son who stayed behind and became jealous at the unbelievable welcome the father threw for the wayward brother who came home, all the while the older brother remained faithful and never had a celebration thrown for him.

So what is the lesson in all of this for us? **God looks with love and favor toward those whose life-style does not warrant such favor.**

In our search for what is right and fair God has a habit of going against our grain and our understanding. And to make matters worse, somehow **God expects us to treat others with the same graciousness that He**

**exhibits.** And we struggle with this, or I should say, I struggle with this.

For I want to put conditions on the love that I express. I want to make the other person who has harmed me work for my acceptance, and yes, maybe my love. I mean, I'm from Missouri, not really, just pretending, but for heaven's sake, show me, prove to me you're not going to take advantage of me again; prove to me you have changed. And besides, why did Jesus have to be so radical, so revolutionary in His teachings?

When you think about it, the Israelites did not so much quarrel with God over the way they were treated but rather how God was so generous to others. I mean, remember how Jonah complained to God about the way God was showing forth grace to the heathen, Gentiles of Nineveh?

But Jesus expects us to be different than the world because we are kingdom people, we are Christ's ambassadors follow the kingdom principles of love, grace, mercy, generosity, and forgiveness.

Let me wrap up this sermon on loving our enemies up by sharing that Jesus gives us two reasons why we should love our enemy and they are found in verse 35. First, because our reward will be great and second, because we are the children of the Most High. And besides, who knows, our enemy may, in the end, become our friend. With God, all things are possible, right? Loving enemies, it's the right thing; it's the Christ-like thing to do. Amen.