

Sunday School Lesson October 11, 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for October 11, 2020, "Love Your Enemies"

Background Scripture from Luke 6:27-36.

The saying of Jesus, "Love Your Enemies", is often ignored, even by God's people. We must recognize that Jesus is raising the bar and expecting much more from His followers than they realized.

An excerpt from a pastor, I read while reviewing for this lesson. In conducting one of the funeral services many years ago the entire family of the deceased met me in the yard. Among the first things they said to me was, "Don't say a good word about him. He was a lousy father and grandfather and deserves nothing good spoken in the service." I was stunned and clueless as to how to handle such a moment. I conducted the eulogy by talking about the love of Jesus, who could see goodness and something worth redeeming in those who hurt him most. Whether they were satisfied, I don't know. I was called to speak the gospel, and I felt this was indeed the message of the gospel. It truly is amazing that Jesus not only loved those who could literally be mean and unkind, and yet see, good in them. He could see some attribute worth saving when our eyes were blind to it.

Some debate this passage from Luke as being different from Matthews' Sermon on the Mount. This sermon was at the heart of his teaching, and more beautifully, at the heart of his life. I believe the message was especially for his disciples, though others around heard the message and certainly remembered it and took it to heart. But this was the life to which the disciples were called to live. It was the life Jesus would teach, preach, live, and give his entire life as the most powerful expression possible. Even more profound for us is the fact that Jesus is describing the life he expects from his church.

From the text section, Stepping into the Word. Enemies come in many different shapes, sometimes overtly threatening and at other times indirectly intimidating. To respond to Jesus' admonition to, "love our enemies," we must admit whom we consider our enemies, ones we fear. We should be asking our self who, do we consider to be our enemy. Who hates you, or

despises you? Then, what can you actively do to seek their good? That is the way Jesus is training his disciples to think.

Seventy two psalms, almost half of the book speak about enemies. Enemies are those who oppose not only us, but also God's way of living. We can view temptations, money, success, prestige, lust as our enemies. And our greatest enemy is Satan. King David asked God to keep his enemies from overcoming him because they opposed what God stood for. He didn't want his enemies' success to be an obstacle to the faith of others.

How do I love my enemy? We have plenty of strong examples from our God to follow. Do good, when you find a way you can do something good for one of your worst enemies, do it. Bless them, when you think of the person who is slandering you, and saying untrue and nasty things about you, find ways to work blessing into your thoughts. Pray for them, when you're praying ask God to help them. Ask God to bless them and show mercy to them.

A couple stories that you might think about, as we look at our lesson this week. A man who had reached his 100th birthday was being interviewed by a reporter. "What are you most proud of?" the reporter asked. "Well," said the man, "I don't have an enemy in the world." "What a beautiful thought, how inspirational." the reporter said. "Yep, I outlived every last one of them." the man replied.

A man was seen one day going down a river with a large dog in a boat, which he wished to get rid of by drowning. He succeeded in throwing the animal into the water, but the dog kept trying to get back into the boat. As the man was attempting to beat the dog from the boat, he fell overboard. Witnesses say that the man would have himself drowned if the dog had not seized him by his coat and brought him to shore. When someone tries to do you harm, do them good in return. As Paul writes in Romans 12, do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good.

Jesus is out to create an army of disciples that look at enemies as he and his Father look at them. Obeying Jesus' commands that are mentioned in our text, along with the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, will accomplish what Jesus desires.

Jesus then teaches us that we should "give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you do not demand it back." This speaks of our attitude of generosity toward God and toward others. This does not

mean we should allow others to take advantage of us. The point is to enlarge our hearts to one another's needs.

Second, Jesus summarizes His points in the one, great statement known as the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." There is something uniquely special in this rule in that it is stated in a positive, proactive manner. Jesus wants more from us. He wants our behavior to far surpass the expected and reflect a higher, Christ-like love. Love is the key motivator in all our interactions with people, both friend and foe.

The Sermon on the Mount was mostly heard by the Jews around Galilee, now Jesus wanted his message reaching and transforming the world. Jesus is not just concerned with how these followers treat one another. He now is asking the entire world to consider how each person treats another.

We constantly find means of expression to make a point. Jesus used hyperboles (the use of exaggeration to make a point) in his teachings. Jesus probably used hyperboles to highlight a concept that his hearers were likely to miss without it. When Jesus speaks using hyperbole, we must be more careful to listen, or we'll make big mistakes in interpreting Scripture.

In Luke 6:29 Jesus says, "If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic."

"Turning the other cheek" has made it into the English language as an expression meaning to go out of your way to avoid a nasty confrontation. Even though provoked, instead of lashing out, you turn the other cheek. I think that's pretty close to what this sentence means in Jesus' teaching. Jesus' point is that we are to avoid hitting back, the natural human reaction. How can we love when we hit back with something that will wound our opponent? Don't retaliate. Don't hit back.

The second command may be harder to understand. "If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic." (Luke 6:29b) The principle is the same. When your enemy takes your cloak, remember that you love him. You are praying for him. You are blessing him and seeking his good. Don't get grabby, nasty and accusing. Let him have your tunic also.

Ouch, we say. I don't think I can do that. But with the Spirit of Jesus working through us can teach us to love your enemies, even at their ugliest. We can learn from the masters of patience, and repeated forgiveness. Think back to the story of Hosea. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute and have children by her. Inevitably she returned to her old ways, and left Hosea. But

he went searching for her, and brought her back and forgave her. You can hear the old story of the searching Father loud and clear in the story of Hosea, as you do in the story of the Prodigal Son. On the cross, this is how Jesus treated his enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

If you've got the point, then Jesus' hyperbole has struck home. What doesn't Jesus words mean? They do not mean that society should let criminals run free to do violence on citizens. It doesn't mean we shouldn't call the police when robbed. It doesn't mean that we should stand idly by when someone is assaulted.

"Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back" (6:31). Verse 31 follows along in the same line as verse 29. When our enemy seeks to take what we own, we are to still to love them. Our love is to transcend evil deeds. That is Jesus' point. Jesus expects us to be good stewards of our money. The point is how we treat our enemies, the radical way we love them.

In verse 31 Jesus moves from love of enemies and the radical way we are to exercise that, to a principal that can be applied generally. It is called the Golden Rule. Scholars observe that it had been stated negatively by many before Jesus. The great Rabbi Hillel, taught, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof." Jesus turns this to a positive, it states we are to treat people the way we would like to be treated. Not the way they deserve to be treated, but the way we would like to be treated. If Jesus had treated us as we deserve, we'd all be doomed. But he has shown us grace, and now expects his disciples to dispense that same grace and graciousness to the world in his name.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full." (6:32-34)

Jesus gives several examples to illustrate the difference between a selfish, prudent way of dealing, and his own radical love, looking out for the other person's best interests. Even "sinners," unbelievers, shrewd but relatively moral people, care about their friends. "What goes around, comes around," so let's all be nice. But that isn't Jesus' point. He tell us to show kindness, especially when we won't be beneficiaries of it later. Unselfish, serving love, agape love, is what he is illustrating here. Self-love seeks repayment. Agape love seeks no repayment.

"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (6:35-36)

At the heart of Jesus' teaching are two basic attitudes or actions: sharing love and showing mercy. Teaching such behavior is not unusual in itself, but Jesus gives both an unexpected twist. Those to be loved and shown mercy are enemies, not friends. The terms used of love and mercy in the Bible usually refer to divine behavior. God is the one whose relationship with us is marked by self-giving and compassion. God's care is extended to all, even the wicked (6:35).

Jesus digressed a bit and generalized his instructions about love to all mankind. But now he narrows the view again to enemies. Anyone can love friends, and we must, but the test of real love comes with loving enemies. Jesus tells his disciples, if they would follow him they must learn the Father's way, the way of long-suffering, the way of love, and the way of mercy. Jesus gives three commands as the elements of this pass-fail exam: love your enemies, do good to them, lend to them without expecting to get anything back.

How can we love our enemies? Where does ability to love our enemies come from? Part of the answer comes Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Jesus says that not only can we endure the mistreatment of the enemy, but we can also rejoice in it, because our reward in heaven is great. The command to love your enemy is a command to find your hope and your satisfaction in God and his great reward, not in the way people treat you. "Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. (Psalm 63:3) Loving your enemy doesn't earn you the reward of heaven. Treasuring the reward of heaven empowers you to love your enemy.

Look at these Proverbs and the verses from 1st Peter:

Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the Lord, and he will help you". (20:22)

"If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink for you will heap coals of fire on their heads, and the Lord will reward you". (25:21-22)

“Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. For those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:9-12)

How do we know what God the Father’s love is like? Jesus says, “Look at the weather.” For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week’s lesson October 18 2020, “Loving Your Neighbor” Background Scripture from Leviticus 19:18 and Luke 10:25-37.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Dr. Craig Rikard, lesson on Love your Enemies, from South Georgia Advocate, The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.