

An Impossible Love (Part 1)

Introduction

The Text

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. (Luke 6:27–31)

An Impossible Calling

A. Last week, as we looked in more detail at the blessings and woes Jesus lays out for us in vv. 20-26, I said that being a disciple of Jesus sounds crazy.

1. This morning, as we move into vv. 27-31, I’m saying it sounds downright impossible. No man can do what He is calling us to do here!

B. Did you feel that even as we read it? “^{27b} Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...” (vv. 27b-28). And He just keeps going!

1. Does this not cut against the grain of everything we are by nature? Who wants to sign up to be a Christian after reading this? Anyone want to be abused, taken advantage of, ripped off, and then turn around and love—and open yourself up to the possibility of it all happening to you again?!
 - a. We have a whole array of responses to abuse—some of us run away in fear, some of us nurse our bitterness, some of us dissolve into depression, some of us plan our revenge—but nobody responds with love, kindness, blessing.

C. So what Jesus calls us to here sounds crazy. But, more than that, it sounds impossible.

I Say to You Who Hear

A. Which is precisely why Jesus opens up this section with a little phrase we probably just read right by: “But I say to you who hear . . .” (v. 27a).

1. These words are shorthand for what Jesus says elsewhere: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Luke 8:8; 14:35).

B. Words like these are meant to draw attention to the fact that there is hearing that goes on beneath hearing. There is hearing with the ears of the body, and then there is hearing with ears of the heart.

1. And we know there is a difference, right? We've probably experienced this ourselves. There are times where God's word moves through one ear and out the other.
 - a. And then there are times where God's word, even the same word that failed to move us previously, suddenly strikes our heart like a thunderbolt. The Spirit of God opens up the ears of heart—and we're on our faces!

- C. People need this at a most fundamental level. By nature, fallen human beings now are deaf to the things of God.
 1. We can hear Bible study after Bible study, sermon after sermon, evangelistic presentation after evangelistic presentation; a choir of angels could come down from heaven and start singing the praises of Christ and His cross—and we would hear...nothing!
 - a. We need God to give us ears to hear. We need God to do for us what He did for Lydia: "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14).

- D. And we especially need this sort of thing, if we are ever to hear and do what Christ is calling us to now in our text. Natural man cannot rise to such heavenly things. We must be born again from above if we are ever going to make a start at loving our enemy.
 1. So we begin our exposition this morning, with our hands open towards the heavens. Holy Spirit come!

Outlining the Text

- A. I'm seeing vv. 27-31 put together as follows:
 1. In the first part of v. 27 He lays down the 1 Master Principle in play here: "Love your enemies . . ."
 - a. Everything else is going to key off of this!

 2. So when we move into the latter part of v. 27 into v. 28, He fleshes this Master Principle out into 3 Basic Expressions: " ^{27b} [D]o good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you . . ."
 - a. We might simplify this by saying that our love for enemies will express itself both in our deeds and in our words.

 3. Then in vv. 29-30, Jesus fleshes this out even further by providing 4 Particular Illustrations: (1) If someone strikes you on one cheek, you turn and offer the other; (2) if someone steals your coat, you throw in your shirt as well; (3) if someone begs from you, you give; and (4) if anyone takes from you, you don't demand back.
 - a. We might simplify this by saying that this Master Principle of love for enemies, and it's basic expressions in deed and word, are illustrated in the way I lay down both

my person (my body, my reputation) and my possessions (my goods, my money) for them.

4. And then, finally, in v. 31, Jesus summarizes all of this by stating for us what's come to be known as the Golden Rule: "[A]s you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."

Outlining the Sermon

A. Now, after Easter, we will deal more fully with these verses and the call to love our enemies. This morning, I have a relatively simple agenda, and I suppose it initially emerges from these 4 Particular Illustrations. I just want to know how to understand them.

1. They are challenging, they are searching, and they are also a bit confusing.

B. We can misunderstand and misapply Jesus at this point. In fact, it is those of us most eager to obey that might find ourselves most confused on these verses.

1. This might sound nice and tidy in a little Bible study on Sunday, but when you get out into Monday, and you're faced with applying these things to the details of your life, things start to get tangled.

- a. When your boss throw you under the bus during the board meeting, as a Christian are you not allowed to speak up for yourself?
- b. Or, God forbid, if your husband ever gets physically abusive, as a Christian are you not allowed to call the cops?
- c. Or when you're walking downtown and a homeless man holds out his hand asking for change, as a Christian are you not allowed to say, "No"? Can Christians say, "No"?! Is that word even allowed to be in our vocabulary.

C. So Christ's words here will hit reality right when you walk out these doors (if not before) and I want you to know how to make sense of them, how to live out what He's teaching here.

D. I think one of the best ways to come at this is to first look at (1) What Jesus Doesn't Mean here. Then we'll wrap around and have a better sense of (2) What Jesus Does Mean. And, finally, we'll identify (3) What All this Means for Us.

(1) What Jesus Doesn't Mean

Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

A. One of the best ways to deal with difficult texts is to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

1. It is always a very dangerous thing to isolate and absolutize one text. That's a recipe for heresy.
 - a. Instead we want to let the rest of Scripture shed light on this one text so that we can get a more complete, more balanced perspective on it.

B. So the initial reading of these illustrations in Luke makes me feel like I ought never to speak up for myself, or call the cops, or say “No”.

1. But is this the sort of thing that Jesus is after here? Yes...and no.

Jesus’ Action Contradict His Commands?!

A. If all you have is yes as your answer on this point, then, when we consider this text in light of the rest of Scripture, you are brought to face one massive problem: Jesus Himself doesn’t always do what He here seems to command.

1. Let me take a few minutes just to show you this.

(1) Christ’s Person

A. Concerning Christ’s person, and this whole concept of turning the other cheek or letting people abuse you, we already have seen one glaring contradiction in Luke’s gospel itself!

1. The sermon He delivered in Nazareth gets the people all up in a rage. We read this in [Luke 4:28-30](#): “²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away.”

a. Now that doesn’t like turning the other cheek. That sounds like getting the heck out of there. And He’ll do this numerous times throughout His ministry.

(2) Christ’s Possessions

A. Concerning Christ’s possessions, and this idea of giving to any who ask, well, again, we’ve already seen Him say, “No” even within Luke’s gospel itself.

1. Do you remember back in [Luke 4](#), Jesus had been ministering in Capernaum. He was teaching with authority, casting out demons, healing the sick, and they loved it. So we read in vv. 42-43: “^{42b} [T]he people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, ⁴³ but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”

a. He looks at these people begging Him to stay, and He says, “No.”

B. Or consider [John 6](#), when He had just fed the 5000 with bread and they were all clamoring after Him so they could get more, and He calls them out: “²⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me . . . because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (vv. 26–27a). And then He says a hard word that ends up turning most of them away: “If you want my food, here’s what you’ve got to do, eat my flesh and drink my blood” (v. 53). And they say, “This guy’s crazy!” We’re out of here.”

1. He essentially says, “No! I’m not giving you anymore bread for you bellies if you’re not interested in the Bread of Life.”

(2) What Jesus Does Mean

Bringing His Teaching and Life Together

- A. So what are we to make of all of this? How do we bring together the teaching of Jesus in our text with these other examples from His life where He seems to do otherwise?
 1. Certainly Jesus is no hypocrite. It’s not as if He is playing that card that maybe your parents did: “Do as I say, not as I do.”
 - a. No! In fact, everything Jesus teaches here, we must emphatically declare, He certainly will do literally...and more!
- B. So why slip away earlier when the Jews are seeking to kill Him? Why say, “No” to those believers in Capernaum? Why withhold bread from the crowd in [John 6](#)?
 1. It’s not that He is at first reluctant to love His enemies and only finally comes around to the idea at the end of His life. It’s that His ever-constant love for His enemies called for different expressions with different people at different times.
- C. Love is always the Master Principle of our Savior’s life. But, as the Father guides Him, it takes on different forms.
 1. When He slips away from violent men or turns away from those begging Him to stay, it’s not out of self-regard, it’s not to save His neck or get His way.
 - a. He says it Himself: It’s so that the gospel can be proclaimed to more people! “I can’t die yet, I can’t stay here, because: ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose’ (Luke 4:43).”
 2. Or when He withholds bread from the crowds, it’s not because He’s trying to hoard up bread for Himself—He’s thoroughly satisfied doing the will of His Father ([John 4:34](#)).
 - a. He withholds physical bread from these people because He’s trying to awaken them to their deeper, spiritual need.
- D. So it turns out that, upon closer examination, even His acts of resistance are acts of great love. Not self-preservation; not self-defense; not self-regard. But love for His Father, His neighbor, and even His enemy.

Palm Sunday

- A. That’s why when Palm Sunday arrives in [John 12](#), and the Father comes to Him and says, “Son, now’s the time when love for your enemies means going to the cross”—Jesus doesn’t hesitate, He doesn’t push back.

1. Instead, listen to what He says in vv. 27-28: “²⁷ Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.²⁸ Father, glorify your name.”
- B. And so from this point on, in this the final week of His life, [Luke 6](#) is going to get painfully literal for Him.
1. He would be struck on the cheek, and He would turn and offer the other ([John 18:22](#); [Matt 26:67](#)).
 2. The soldiers ripped His garments from Him, and John goes out of His way to note that they even took “His tunic” ([19:23](#))—so that we know He hung on the cross all but naked—exposed and shamed.
 3. He would give for unworthy sinners, the precious blood that flowed through His veins.
 4. And He would let His enemies take from Him not only His possessions but His very life.
5. And in it all He would do good, He would bless, He would pray: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” ([Luke 23:34](#))!
- a. And He would do all of this in love for His enemies. For me, and for you.
- C. Have you had that moment yet when you finally realize that you are the enemy of God—but that God in Christ has loved you anyways?!
1. There’s a line from a modern hymn that always brings me to tears: “Behold the Man upon a cross, My guilt upon His shoulders, Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice, Call out among the scoffers.”
- a. I’m the enemy! I’m the one slapping, and stripping, and scoffing, and crucifying.
 - i. “It was my sin that held Him there, Until it was accomplished, His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished!”

(3) What All this Means for Me

The Impossible Is Possible

- A. This is how we start to make our way towards the impossible lifestyle of [Luke 6](#). This is why we sign up to follow after Christ and live like this! “I was the enemy and He loved me. Now I want my enemies to see His love as well. And I’ll lay down my life if that’s what it takes!”
- B. So does Jesus mean us to take these four illustrations in [Luke 6](#) literally? Yes...and no.
1. No, love for our enemies will not always take on these forms literally. But yes, we must always be willing to lay down our lives literally for them.

2. No, these four illustrations are not to be interpreted as unflinching, inflexible commands, that must be obeyed literally at every point. But yes, they do show us the extent to which we must be willing to sacrifice (literally) should love and the Spirit of God dictate.
- C. If and when we speak up at that board meeting, call the police, say “No” to someone who begs from us, it is no longer out of love for ourselves—for our person and our possessions. God will take care of that.
1. Now, we can do everything we do from love for Him, for neighbor, and for enemy.

3 Things

A. It seems to me three things are required if we are to fulfill what Jesus is calling us to here:

(1) We Need to Be Born Again

- A. The only way to live like Christ is to have Christ living in you. If you have received Jesus, you can be sure, He is committed to helping you grow in love, even for you enemies.
1. Let His life and love overtake yours.

(2) We Need to Be Surrendered

- A. We dismantle the whole engine of the Christian life when we refuse to be crucified with Christ. Indeed I would argue that the Christian life cannot even begin until we take up our cross and follow Him. We are living sacrifices.
1. We’ve already made the trade in our hearts: “Take the world but give me Jesus.” Our lives—our person and possessions—have been surrendered to Him. We are quite ready to obey [Luke 6](#) in literal terms if God should call us to.
 - a. (And this leads to the third thing...)

(3) We Need to Be Listening

- A. No, love for enemy will not always take on the forms of [Luke 6](#), but at some point it might. The only way to know how God would have us love at a given point is to be listening to Him in it all.
1. The only reason the Son slips through the crowd in [Luke 4](#) and then surrenders to the crowd in [Luke 22](#) is He was listening to His Father. “What does love look like here? What does love look like here?”
- B. Are we listening?