

13. Living for Christ

Luke 6:32-49

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

We are continuing from last time, re. the Sermon on the Plain. This sermon is similar to the Beatitudes, but it takes place at a different setting. Matthew 5:1 says that the Beatitudes were spoken on the mountainside. Luke writes that this talk was given at the bottom of a mountainside (6:12) when **“He went down and stood on a level place”** (Luke 6:17). Matthew’s talk is 107 verses long; whereas, Luke’s is only thirty verses in length. The site of this level place is traditionally thought to be near the northern end of the Sea of Galilee and on the side of a hill as it levels out. This message may have been spoken at a later time than Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. It omits some of the details that we find in the sermon in Matthew’s account. Also, remember that there were many people clamoring around Jesus at that time, trying to hear Him and be touched by Him. It is possible that He came down the mountainside and repeated some of His message because the crowd was too great for everyone to hear Him at once.

Overcoming Evil with Good

Let me preview the passage we are studying by saying that the Christian life is one of learning to overcome evil by the power of the Spirit of God who dwells inside the believer. In the book of Revelation, re. the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor, to each church was given the expectation by Jesus to overcome evil. To paraphrase the Scripture, **“To him who overcomes, I will give...”** and each church is told of various rewards for overcoming that are given to them (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; and 21:7). We should not consider that this means to work harder in mustering up our strength to overcome, for we can only overcome evil by trusting and relying on the One who has already defeated evil. It is His Spirit that will empower us to overcome. John the Apostle wrote, **“Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God”** (1 John 5:5).

In talking about the end of the age just before Jesus comes, we are told of certain believers living at that time who overcame him [Antichrist] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony in that they loved not their lives to the death (Revelation 12:11). The Lord expects us to overcome every form of evil. This is what Paul the Apostle wrote about. We are to **“overcome evil with good”** (Romans 12:21). Now that we have come to faith in Christ, to overcome this world, our sinful nature, and the devil, we are to live differently, no longer living by the ways of this world but choosing to live by a higher power—the royal law of agape love flowing out of our relationship to Christ:

²⁷But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹If 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. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴And 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. ³⁵But 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 children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:27-36).

This statement is very radical. To love one's enemies (v. 35)—how can anyone do such a thing? Who had ever before heard of such a thing? This was radical thinking. It goes against the grain of human nature. Sure, there have been other statements made by people that advocated restraint. For example, the great Rabbi Hillel, said; "What is hateful to thee, do not to another." Philo, the great Jew of Alexandria, said; "What you hate to suffer, do not do to anyone else." Or Confucius who said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

The teaching of Christ went further than that. In Christ's teaching, He went the extra mile. His teaching did not consist merely in refraining from certain things; rather, He encouraged a lifestyle of unselfish giving. Jesus did not just give us a set of rules saying, "Don't do this." He commissioned us to repay evil with good and to live a different way. Jesus advocated loving even our enemies and leaving our justification and our rewards to the Father. Not only does the Lord tell us how to live, but also He gives us the power through His spirit to live this way.

Once we have come to an understanding that our eternal life cannot be taken away, i.e. that no one can pluck us out of the hands of the Father (John 10:28-30), then we are empowered to leave any reward for living unselfishly with the Father and lending to those who hate us without expecting anything in return (v.35). Three times in verses thirty-two to thirty-four, the word *credit* is used. The Greek word is *charis*, which is mostly translated with the word "grace." Loving our enemies brings great grace, favor, and reward from our King. We are becoming just like Him when we live in such a way. "Your reward will be great," He says in verse thirty-five. When we live by giving of ourselves in a spirit of grace, more grace is given to us (James 4:6), and we are going against the flow of this world.

This kind of unselfish love will be noticed. This kind of giving is done for the joy of the giver and not as an exchange, which expects a return. Do you really believe that you have received eternal life from the Lord Jesus Christ? If you do, you no longer have to live for this world; you can rest your life in Christ. As you live for His glory, you can experience great freedom and joy as you walk with Jesus through this life. You will carry a weight of grace upon you that will cause others to turn their heads and take notice. They will wonder, "What is different about this person?"

Question one: How can this strategy of paying good for evil work in our personal relationships, at work or even with those we do not know? What practical things can be done to shower kindness on those around us? Do you have a personal example of this?

Jesus Modeled Unconditional Love

The kind of love that we are talking about here is unconditional love, i.e. the kind of love that Jesus displayed often. The Lord modeled to us what He taught in saying, "Love your enemies." When he was being arrested by His enemies in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter had cut off the

ear of Malchus, the High Priest's servant. Jesus healed the man's ear (Luke 22:51). On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus still washed Judas' feet, even though He knew what Judas was going to do (John 13:5, 26). When on the cross, He prayed for those who were sneering at Him and deriding him. He said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34-35).

Two blessings will follow in the life of believers if they love their enemies as Jesus instructed with both words and action:

- 1) Their reward will be great (Luke 6:35).
- 2) The ultimate blessing is for those who love unconditionally. They will be known as the sons of God (v. 35). Why? Because showing kindness regardless of our treatment, i.e. repaying blessing for evil, is consistent with God's character.

There is a spiritual dynamic that happens when agape kindness is extended. The kingdom of darkness is pushed back. Agape love is different from the world's love. I am persuaded that it is supernatural in nature, stemming from God. Things happen when agape love is released! Something supernatural with creative energy comes into being. We are an extension of God's love.

It is interesting to know that there are four different Greek words that are translated into our one English word "love." There is *eran*, which describes passionate love. It is a derivative of *eros*. We get the word erotic from this Greek word. Secondly, there is *Storgeo*, which is natural love. It was used for family love. Mostly it was used to denote the love between parents and children. Then, there is *philein*, a derivative of *phileo*, which is brotherly love. We get Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, from this word. One loves something in this way because he finds qualities which appeal to him and create a warm and personal fondness for that object. The fourth Greek word is *Agapan*, or *Agape*. "This word describes a feeling of benevolence toward another person. It means that, no matter what that person does to us, we will never allow ourselves to desire anything but his or her highest good, and we will deliberately and with set purpose go out of our way to be good and kind to him" (William Barclay).

This is the word that is used in the first verse of our passage. This is a supernatural kind of love. In our humanity, it is unnatural to us. To seek the highest good of even our enemies when they curse us, slap us on the cheek, and steal our possessions is not possible, in my opinion, without having God's agape love in our hearts. We are told that God is love (1 John 4:8), that is, that God's very nature is unselfish love (agape love). He is continually looking for our best. We talk about falling in love as something that happens to us, but the kind of love about which we are talking, i.e. love for even our enemies, is something that is not a feeling but an act of the will. We can choose to love like this, and God will pour His love through us. It is obedience to a higher law, the law of love.

On November 17, 1957, in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King gave a sermon entitled, "Loving Your Enemies," using a similar sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, as his text (Matthew 5:43-45). He began, "I want to turn your attention to this subject: 'Loving Your Enemies.' It's so basic to me because it is a part of my basic

philosophical and theological orientation -- the whole idea of love, the whole philosophy of love." First, Dr. King outlined three ways to go about loving your enemies:

1. Look within yourself to realize that you are not perfect and that something you have done might have sparked their hatred,
2. Discover the element of good in your enemy, and
3. When the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy, that is the time that you must not do it.

Then, he considered the reasons why you should love your enemies:

1. Hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe,
2. Hate distorts the personality of the hater, and
3. Love has within it a redemptive power.

Finally, King concluded that oppressed people faced three choices:

One of them is to rise up against their oppressors with physical violence and corroding hatred. But oh, this isn't the way. For the danger and the weakness of this method is its futility. Violence creates many more social problems than it solves....

Another way is to acquiesce and to give in, to resign yourself to the oppression... But that too isn't the way because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.

But there is another way. And that is to organize mass non-violent resistance based on the principle of love. It seems to me that this is the only way as our eyes look to the future. As we look out across the years and across the generations, let us develop and move right here. We must discover the power of love, the power, the redemptive power of love. And when we discover that we will be able to make of this old world a new world. We will be able to make men better. Love is the only way.¹ (Direct quote from Martin Luther King.)

Mahatma Gandhi did something similar in 1930-1931. To gain independence from Britain, the Indian people, led by Gandhi, instituted a policy of non-violent resistance to the British in India. There were a number of occasions when they faced guns with no weapons at all. Nelson Mandela was another who won Independence for the people of South Africa through non-violent means.

We face a similar situation in our day. As a people group, we are fast losing our freedoms. Laws are being bypassed, and evil is incrementally being introduced as normality. We are in a situation, which has been compared to a frog in a pan of boiling water. The water gets hot so gradually that the frog does not realize it until it is too late, and he is cooked! Evil will continue to fall, and we who are followers of Christ are growing accustomed to living with the darkness. At some point as a Christian, you may find yourself facing persecution. At that time, you will need to make up your mind how you will resist. The way of Christ is always the most powerful.

¹ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_loving_your_enemies/

We should resist evil by doing good to those who hate us. We can also speak out about things that are unjust and evil. I trust that God will give us great grace and wisdom when we need it. When Jesus was speaking of his disciples, he compared them to sheep being sent out among the wolves, and He said:

¹⁸On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, ²⁰for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:18-20.)

Question Two: How far should one go in tolerating evil treatment and “turning the other cheek?” How do you know when to draw the line?

It is my personal opinion that it is not wrong to take a stand against evil, and to protect your home and family when threatened. This is a natural and honorable response to an evil threat. To protect the innocent from a harmful attack also shows courage. I believe that desire to protect another is God-given. There are many such instances in Scripture and in history. Although we are told to seek peace with all men, there may be times when we need to stand against evil to protect ourselves, our loved ones, or other innocent people in a situation.

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

In some instances, others choose not to follow peace, and we are not in control of other's choices. For this reason, I do believe there is a time to take a stand against evil. In doing this, we must remember who our real enemy is. We seek the best outcome by following the way of peace first of all.

Judging Others

³⁷Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” ³⁹He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. ⁴¹“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴²How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (Luke 6:37-42).

Jesus is telling us to be careful about judging one another. Notice that He does not instruct us *not* to help our brother remove the speck from his eye, but to first check ourselves. If you are blind yourself, how will you see to help your brother? We have often heard of the phrase, “The blind leading the blind.” When Jesus said it, I think it was such a preposterous picture that people would have seen the humor in it. He gives a ridiculous picture to His listeners of a man with a

huge beam that is in his eye, one to which he is somehow oblivious! He makes it even more ridiculous by saying that he's trying to get the speck out of someone else's eye (v. 41). This is the picture of the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day. They were just so unaware of their own need of righteousness, but they were vainly trying to help others, i.e. the blind leading the blind with beams in their own eyes! They were looked up to as those who were clear-eyed and knowledgeable about godliness, yet they could not see the logs of pride that everyone else saw. First, we ourselves must know where we are going; then, we can help others. By the grace and power of God, learn to overcome our own habits and sins; then, we can lead and guide others to the place where we ourselves have been fed and watered.

It comforts me to know that Jesus had a sense of humor. This scenario may have caused some people to laugh, but the point was driven home. It is obvious from these two illustrations that we are not to find fault with our brother and sister, but is Jesus telling us not to get involved at all? In my opinion, some have quoted this without taking the whole verse into account. With an attitude of respect and humility, we are to be a help to our brother. It is only as we truly have the other person's interest at heart that we can help our brother or sister with a right attitude. We sometimes need each other to show us our own "blind spots." However, Jesus points out that we can only help each other achieve a level of maturity that we have already achieved. Two things stand out for our instruction.

One, we should choose our leaders carefully. Whoever you choose to follow and imitate will have a direct impact upon your life. Jesus makes this clear when He says that everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. This is very sobering, especially when we consider the impact of media in our culture today. It is important to be aware of how our media affects our thinking and the thinking of our children. What are you allowing yourself to be taught? Do you seek out godly people? Do you seek out wise teaching?

Secondly, you cannot lead someone where you have not been before. Worldly values are going to be our default if we are not deliberate about knowing and following God's ways. We are responsible for what we allow ourselves to be exposed, i.e. the things that we take in through our reading, our viewing, our internet browsing, and the people with whom we choose to be in close relationship. It is no accident that this verse also talks about forgiveness. When people hurt us, our first reaction is usually self-preservation. In talking to John Wesley, a man named John Oglethorpe once made the comment, "I never forgive." Mr. Wesley wisely replied, "Then, Sir, I hope that you never sin." Wise words! When we choose forgiveness and mercy, it makes the way for restoration and redemption to occur.

Now, I am not saying that we give people permission to hurt us again and again. It is not wisdom to allow yourself or others for whom you care to tolerate an abusive situation. However, in your heart, you may release forgiveness to that person and not "hold it over" the person who hurt you. In this way, you not only release that person, but also you are releasing yourself from the hold that bitterness and un-forgiveness can have in your life. The forgiveness does not need to be merited. We forgive others because He has forgiven us. Jesus is teaching here about giving, both in practical ways, such as blessing others, and in giving of forgiveness. In both cases, He is saying, what you give will come back to you.

Life has a way of giving back what you put into it. King Solomon wrote, “**Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days**” (Ecclesiastes 11:1). This is a poetic way of saying that, if you do a good deed not expecting a reward for it, after some time, it will surely come back to you in some way. This is called the *law of reciprocity*. When we give of ourselves unselfishly in a spirit of grace, e.g. when we forgive, it will come back to us. We ourselves will be forgiven.

The picture we are given by Jesus is that of a measure returned to us greater than we expect. Our expectation of the way this world gives is that of a measure which is short of the brim. More often than not, whatever product you buy at the grocery store is settled and hardly half filling the bag. The bags are never overfilled. Think of a bag of chips. When you release the air from the bag, the bag is not even half full. However, the Lord gives us a picture of someone buying seed that is put into a measure, shaken well to fill the empty spaces, pressed down hard, before pouring more seed until it forms a mountain on the top. Then, the whole measure is poured into the folds of clothing or bags in your lap.

What He is saying is that, whatever measure of love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness we pour out on others in this life, with the same measure it will be returned, but in greater proportion. It will come back to us often when we are least expecting it to come.

Question Three: What story of reciprocity can you recall to share with those in your group? Have you had an experience in which you received back? If not, can you think of a time where you witnessed this principle in action?

Jesus holds up the goal in front of us—to be like our teacher—the Lord Jesus (v. 40). This is the students’ end goal for their lives. You can only be as good as your Master, so in this life, we continually strive to put each teaching into practice that Jesus taught us. This is teaching that is designed for living one’s life, not just for one day a week. When we come to the day of our death, this is something that each of us hopes to have built into our lives—to be transformed into the likeness of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Tree and Its Fruit

⁴³“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of (Luke 6:43-45).

Jesus then talks about the main problem, i.e. the problem of sin. He compares our lives to the life of a tree. It is easy to see when a tree has become bad. If a tree is rotten, it cannot produce good fruit. Our lives, like a tree, can be rotten to the core through a sinful nature. A bad tree produces bad fruit. The overflow of our lives will also show what is at the core of our lives. If the root is bad, the fruit will also be bad because something has gone wrong with the central core of the tree itself, and that can only be set right by Christ sitting at the center of one’s life. What you are speaks more loudly than what you say. Make the tree good, and the outflow of our life will

be good. Unless a man is born-again or born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). There must be a death to the old root problem, i.e. the core of our lives, and a new Master is to be put in control, the Lord Jesus Christ. One indicator of this new life having started is that of words that are thoughtful, kind, and uplifting. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, said:

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check (James 3:1-2).

When a person comes to Christ, the Spirit of God within begins to curb words and phrases that are of the old life. A sign of maturity is to have control over your mouth, the words that you speak. We get rid of crude speaking and negative, critical words. In place of those words, we speak words that are gracious, kind, and thoughtful toward those listening, i.e. words that will build them up, not tear them down.

This is a victory that is gained over time. Old habits die hard. You younger men and women, do not even begin to give your tongue to words that you would not want the Lord Jesus to hear. Resist the temptation to repeat words that you hear around you that are harmful or crude. Imagine if the Lord were right there listening because He is! This is a clear directive in Scripture, yet there are many people today who do not seem to think this is important. Do you still have a problem with the outflow of words? James says that, when a person has complete control over his tongue, he is a perfect man, that is, he is a mature believer. Remember, too, that words are powerful. They have the power to create and to destroy. What are you creating or destroying by your words?

The Wise and Foolish Builders

⁴⁶Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. ⁴⁸They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. ⁴⁹But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete (Luke 6:46-49).

Question Four: Why would the foolish builder build in such a way? Why would someone build without a foundation?

Some people do not pursue a relationship with Christ because they do not want to surrender anything in their lives. They know that this will require their time and commitment. Some do not want to invest their energy, time, or money into the kingdom of God. Whether you are a believer or an unbeliever reading this, understand that God is not a kill-joy! There are true blessings in

this world as well as the next for following God's ways. The Father's heart is to bless His children.

I believe that our Heavenly Father wants His children to come into a *realization* of abundant life! What does abundant living mean to you? Does it consist of worldly possessions, fame, and notoriety? Many people have possessed these things and still had no joy or peace in their lives. Building without a foundation is much easier. It will look okay, they say. It is only natural to want to do things our own way. It may seem to be an easier way, but what happens when the storms of life come? No one would want their house to fall with their family inside! Though it may take time and energy to dig down deep, a foundation in your Christian life is crucial! Get rid of any roots of sin and bitterness and build on a sure foundation of knowing Christ, the Rock. We do this through giving our attention to His word, to following the truth we know, and being mindful of our choices. Build as a master builder. He has given us the blueprints.

Secondly, people build without a foundation because they do not look far enough ahead. Many people want to spend their lives in the here and now. Why worry about the future? However, everyone must put the pieces of the game back in the box at some time. Monopoly is a great game, but all our houses and hotels must, at some time, go back into the box. It is the same in this life. One day, all that we have will be "put back." We cannot take worldly possessions where we are all headed. There will be some things, however, that we *will* take! We *will* take with us the character of Christ that has been formed in us. We *will* take with us the Word of God we have stored in our hearts, and we *will* take precious relationships with others in Christ. Be careful how you build! Everything else that is temporary will be consumed. In many ways even now, we are all experiencing the results of our previous actions. In this life, we are building a spiritual house. We are building our character. We are building eternal rewards that we cannot even imagine. Be careful, then, how you build.

Prayer: Father, thank You that You have not left us on our own to stumble around in darkness, but You have given us the light of Your Word. You do not ask us to stand on our own, but You offer us Your strength and wisdom at all times. Help us look to You and trust You to guide us.

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