



"Mercy Me: Be Unexpected"

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Luke 6: 27-42

February 24, 2019

9:15 AM Service

Luke 6:27-42 (New Living Translation)

²⁷ "But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. ³⁰ Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. ³¹ Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

³² "If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! ³³ And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! ³⁴ And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.

³⁵ "Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. ³⁶ You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.

³⁷ "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.^[a]"

³⁹ Then Jesus gave the following illustration: "Can one blind person lead another? Won't they both fall into a ditch? ⁴⁰ Students^[b] are not greater than their teacher. But the student who is fully trained will become like the teacher.

⁴¹ "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye^[c] when you have a log in your own? ⁴² How can you think of saying, 'Friend,^[d] let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

Scott's List of Lifestyle Bible Verses: Retirement

As I am contemplating retirement, I've been searching the Bible for some lifestyle verses to give me insight and direction. Here's what I've come up with at this point:

Retirement

Many Christians observe that the word "retirement" does not occur in the Scriptures. *Au contraire, Mon Ami.*

I came across this during Advent. It referred to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist...but I take it to refer to me, too.

Luke 1:23 "And when his time of service was ended, he went to his own home."

Thinking about exercise:

The information on retirement often includes the recommendation to remain physically active. You know, the old "use it or lose it" aphorism. But this verse caught my attention:

Proverbs 28:1 "The wicked run when no one is chasing them..."

Well, that pretty much puts running or jogging in a bad light. None of that for me.

If not jogging, how about golf?

I found this description of a golfer in Revelation 19:

He seeks to rule with a rod of iron; sharp words come from his mouth with which to strike down the nations. (Rev. 19:15)

Taking care of grandchildren

Lynda says we'll have more time available for grandchildren, but there is this cautionary verse that I think relates to taking care of infant grandchildren:

¹ Corinthians 15:51 We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.

Wintering on the Florida Shore?

But then I found this:

Acts 21:5 After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

John 21:8,9 Jesus met his disciples on the beach (not at the hockey rink or snowmobiling or in an ice fishing shack)

So maybe, in fact, being on the beach *is* the perfect place for prayer!

Familiar Bible Verses and the Uncalculating Mercy of God

Those verses of Scripture might not be familiar.

Other verses, however, are very familiar.

Most would say that John 3:16 is the most familiar:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but will have eternal life.

The passage before us today, the heart of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6) contains what I believe are two verses even more familiar than John 3:16. These are Bible verses known not only within the confines of the Christian community, but far beyond. And, though they are familiar and are included in Jesus' teaching here, it is pretty clear -- unexpected, really -- that there is another verse here that provides the foundation for them both.

I hope you will see very quickly that we're really not interested today in counting Bible verses -- whether obscure or part of our common culture. We are most interested in what Jesus teaches about how we are to live -- deliberately, practically and particularly in relationship to one another. Last week I

noted that the Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-26), in identifying what is blessed and what is cursed, has most of us thinking -- on the whole -- we'd rather be among the blessed than among the cursed. The next section of Jesus' teaching, which we encounter today, identifies what living that blessed life will look like.

Think of a Cherry Cream Cheese Danish Coffee Cake



So, here's how we will proceed briefly today.

Think of a wonderful cherry cream cheese Danish coffee cake. Or raspberry. Or apricot.

The two familiar verses I'll call the ends. You know somebody will eat the ends, but the real heart of the matter in a coffee cake like that is the center -- where most of the filling is located. I know this because I grew up with four brothers and my younger brother had a knack for getting to the coffee cake first. We would know this because a generous slice of the center was removed by the time, we had gotten to it.

Two Things Jesus Taught That Everybody Seems to Know About

So, what are these two things Jesus taught that everybody seems to know about?

The first is this:

"Do to others as you would like them to do to you." (Luke 6:31)

This verse is actually the summary of his teaching to be done with the ways of retaliation and keeping score on who has offended you, how badly the offense, and what sort of pain you should inflict upon them to even the score. The Old Testament law provided what is called the *lex talionis*, the "law of the tooth" -- and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:23-25). This is the moral law at work, for example, in much of the gang violence in our country: you hurt me and I hurt you...so that you quite hurting me because you don't want me to hurt you. Jesus' summary, often called the "Golden Rule", has lots of variations that come from many traditions. Often it is stated in the negative based on accumulated human wisdom in diverse cultures: "do not hurt others, or they will hurt you". The assertive and dominant often make it pre-emptive:

"Do one to others before they do one to you."

Jesus' command, however, is positive and absolute: "Do to others as you would like them to do to you."

When this prohibition shows up in conversation in our own day, it usually shows up as a question: "Who are we to judge?" or "Who are you to judge?" Basically, it is used as some sort of divine warrant to suspend all dialogue about personal behavior, morality, or, what we believe distinguishes right from wrong.

That isn't what Jesus was talking about, however.

The Greek word here, *krino*, includes the meaning "to condemn" or as a judicial term, "to hand over for punishment." In addition, *krino*, like our word, "judgement" can mean not only something like *condemn* or *punish*, but also *discern* or *determine right from wrong*, or *separate from what is unjust, oppressive, or evil*. The point of Jesus is clarified in his second, parallel command: "Do not condemn and you will not be condemned."

At issue here is the hypocritical attitude with which we rationalize our own behaviors and yet condemn others.

Following Jesus means expressing the unexpected and uncalculating mercy of God. The image Jesus provides is how God treats us:

A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over... If you use that kind of measure in the way you treat others, God will use the same kind of measure with you. (Luke 6:38)

The image here is a merchant who gives more than expected; not the stingy dealer who shorts the amount in the measure, but one who presses it down, shakes it together, and then adds the unexpected extra that spills over the side and on to the floor.... just because there is more than enough.

The Unexpected and Uncalculating Mercy of God

This brings us to the heart of the matter. It's the middle of the coffee cake where the filling is abundant.

Treat others as I want to be treated? Why not beat them at their own game, overwhelm them, out run, out jump, out achieve, out plan, out spend, out earn them? Why not remind them that I'm better than they are? Why bother with being generous to them when I'd much rather be generous to myself?

And forego condemning others? Are you kidding? When they are so deserving of being condemned? So clueless and corrupt, so immoral, so destructive, so unworthy?

The heart of the matter is how the God's heart of compassion is received by us and passed along in our compassion toward others.

"Compassion" is a compound word meaning a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.

Why would we want to respect others enough to treat them the way we would like to be treated? Why would we be compassionate instead of condemning?
Because this is the way God has acted toward us.

Remember that very familiar verse, John 3:16?

Don't forget the next verse:

"God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

God's way:

Redemption, not retribution

Compassion, not condemnation

Generous, not holding grudges.

If we have been rescued ourselves by the mercy of God, then, finally, it becomes unimportant that you hit back (Anne Lamott).

As the late Eugene Peterson wrote,

Getting the juicy bits of scandal to slander others is not gospel work. Witch-hunting is not gospel work. Shaming the outcast is not gospel work. Forgiving sins is gospel work."

Mercy is not just tolerance. Tolerance is not always a virtue. Jesus, as the Gospel of John as it, came with grace and truth – the truth about us and our ways as well as the grace of God that saves us. God's grace and mercy, as the Apostle Paul put it, is not a license for unjust, immoral, arrogant, or destructive behavior. God's grace is intended to lead us to repentance, to change our ways, to receive and live within the love of God.

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. ² And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. ³ Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? ⁴ Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? (Romans 2:1-5, New Living Translation)

Being an Unexpected Christian

The survey evidence concerning the perception of Christians is that we are judgmental, narrow-minded, and hateful toward others. I believe a lot of that is stereotype; but some of it is pretty accurate.

So how about attempting to be the unexpected Christian?

The Barna research group recently reported that over sixty percent of non-Christians and used-to-be-Christians are open to talking about faith matters with someone who listens without correcting or

condemning...but only one-third (34%) has found that the Christians they actually know can listen without correcting or condemning. Similarly, most of the conversations these non-Christians and used-to-be-Christians have had with Christians they know seem to force conclusions, demonstrate little interest in the stories of the lives of others, and make statements rather than ask questions.

If that is what is normally expected from followers of Jesus Christ, how about being a community of unexpected Christians? Not that we abandon all beliefs and scuttle all morals, but instead we treat others the way we want to be treated, we don't lead with our judgment of others before every getting to know them, and, in so doing, we might be accurate representatives of the God who has been so compassionate to each of us that we have been given grace and mercy pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing with abundance.