Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Actions of Kingdom Love
Scripture: Luke 6:29-30
Code: 42-87

In a strange way, love is linked to hate in the Christian gospel. In fact, when Jesus spoke to His Apostles in the fifteenth chapter of John, He spoke about the centrality of love. He said in verse 17, "This I command you, that you love one another." Immediately after He said that with certainly barely a breath, the next verse says that He spoke these words, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." And then in verse 19 He removed the "if" and said, "The world hates you." Amazing isn't it? God is love. Christ is love incarnate. We are by very definition the children of God who has shed abroad in our hearts His love. We love God. We love the brethren and we love those outside the Kingdom.

And what do we get back? Hate. Light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light. In fact, they hate the light, the Bible says. And so long as that is true, and it will be true throughout all of human history, so long as it is true that people love darkness rather than light and as so long as Christ is presented as the light and believers are also the children of light, we can expect to be hated...and most particularly and specifically by, I guess this is the surprising part, religious people. Most of the world is religious. Man, in fact, is wired for worship. He is incurably religious. Atheism is a bizarre anomaly. It is an uncommon idea and belief, foreign to the very nature of man who one way or another worships some God, if not the true one, one of his own making, or one manufactured by demons.

And religious people hate the truth. And they hate the proclaimers of the truth. And so here we are mandated by God to love the world the way He loves the world, granted supernatural capacity to do that, and we find that what we get back is what He got back, hate. And there's a reason for this. Here's the reason: nothing is more precious to a religious sinner than the illusion of his virtue. You see, the religious person is constantly engaged in building in his own mind his lofty position before his God. Sinners, religious sinners build a king of Tower of Babel, a personal ziggurat, a monument to their own praise. Through their morality and their attention to the duties of religion their pile of brick upon brick upon brick, building a firm and high tower, and to live in the illusion that some day when death does come they will step right from the pinnacle of that tower directly into the throne room of God. Such a religious sinner has succeeded in bottling the early insolence of his conscience, establishing victories over that conscience which once continually accused him of sin and shame and guilt. But has by his relentless rejection of that message become silenced and by superficial morality and attention to religion, the sinner has a string of victories over a now weakened voice of conscience that has for all intents and purposes been so continuously misinformed and ignored as to have its

voice reduced to a faint whisper.

In fact, his conscience has been trained not to accuse but to excuse. And his conscience now falls in line, agreeing with his sinful mind that God, frankly, looks down on him with nothing but admiration. Then we show up, we Christians and we come to the religious sinner with one purpose, our goal...to borrow a bit of the temporary vernacular...is to fly right into his religious tower and bring it down to ground zero. And our goal is essentially to deprive him of his illusion of virtue, to obliterate his identity, to destroy his sense of goodness and well being, to shatter his hope of heaven.

In fact, we are called to do successfully what his tormented and muffled conscience with all of its internal advantages couldn't do. The religious sinner has effectively slain the Goliath of his conscience. He has constructed this self-righteous edifice, worked hard, built hard, fought hard and it's formidable. And we show up and we tell him he is a sinner, outside the Kingdom of God, a rebel, an outcast, a hypocrite, lost, doomed to eternal judgment and he has never been anything else and if he continues in the path he's currently in, he never will be anything else. And then the happy end of the story is, he's headed for hell. And the fact of the matter is, no matter what he thinks of himself, he has no true worth before God. He is literally being devoured on the inside by the cancer of self-esteem and false religion and there's no hope for him. This is not an easy task for us.

To convince the religious sinner of all of this goes against the grain of everything he has crafted so carefully. And that's exactly what Jesus did when He came to apostate Judaism and they killed Him for it. They tried to kill Him after one sermon in His own hometown synagogue in Nazareth...one sermon that smashed their babble to the ground. And so Jesus said in that same 15th chapter of John, "If they persecuted Me, they will also...what? Persecute you." There's no way you can make the gospel popular to a religious sinner, and most men fall into that category. They murdered Jesus. It wasn't because they resented His healings, they liked those, it made people happy. It wasn't because they resented free food, feeding multitudes. It wasn't because they resented His ability to cast demons out of people and bring them back to sanity. It was because they hated the idea that He smashed their towers of self-righteousness.

And then in that same passage in John 15, Jesus gave...well He actually gave the same basic law of discipleship that for us is usually a positive. He said this, "What they did to Me, they'll do to you." To put it in the words of Luke's gospel later on, "When a man is fully discipled he will be like his teacher." That's the basic principle of discipleship. You're going to be like the one who discipled you and you're going to be treated like the one who discipled you. Jesus said, "What you should expect is exactly what they gave Me."

It's a tough message. It's a devastating message. In fact, Jesus said, verse 25 of that same fifteenth chapter of John, "They hated me without any reason." The fact of the matter was, I was bringing them the good news. I was bringing them the gospel. I was telling them what they had to know. I

was rightly diagnosing their spiritual condition. I was offering them the divine and only cure and they hated Me for loving them. So the question then is...how do we get these people to buy into this? How do we overcome this hate? How do we overcome this animosity, this bitterness, this penetrating resentment?

The answer is...Love. Now at the risk of being thought simplistic, let's go to Luke 6 and look at our text and see how really profound this is. How do you shatter that man's power? How do you break down, in the language of Paul in 2 Corinthians 10, how do you smash the fortress? How do you bring down that religious illusion?

You do it by demonstrating, watch this now, you do it by demonstrating a supernatural life that undergirds a supernatural message. They think they have a word from God. They think they have a message from God. They think they have a supernatural religion. They think they have divine truth. How can you convince them they don't? By the demonstration of a supernatural life which they can't live. And the key to that life is a supernatural love.

Bottom line, the believability of the gospel is tied to our loving in ways that sinners can't love. Later on in verses 32 to 34 in Luke 6, Jesus defines the love of sinners. They love those who love them...verse 32. They do good to those who do good to them...verse 33. They lend to those from whom they expect later to borrow in order to obligate people. In all three of those verses He says, "That's how sinners love." Whether they are religious or irreligious and the vast majority, of course, are religious, they have limits on their capacity to love because of their fallen nature. We step into this environment and we demonstrate a love that is not CW, conventional wisdom, it's not PC, politically correct, it's not even normal, it's not even human, it's not even possible. And this love then becomes the evidence of divine invasion and transformation in our lives. It is the platform that makes the message believable. We are to love evangelistically.

Now this is what Jesus is teaching to those Apostles. In our text we find ourselves in the Sermon on the Mount as its called, Luke's summation of the Sermon on the Mount from chapter 6 verse 20 through verse 49. Matthew has a larger summation of that sermon which certainly when it was originally delivered was larger than the summary Matthew gives, or the summary Luke gives. But Luke is rehearsing the main points of that sermon that day which by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are so instructive for all of us. And what he is saying in verses 27 to 38, this section of the sermon, is all about love. Verse 27, "I say to you who hear," that is to say those of you who having been regenerated, those of you having been transformed have the capacity to receive and understand and apply divine truth. He's got a large group of listeners, some true disciples, some false, some moving toward genuine faith, some turning their back and beginning to drift away. It's a mixed multitude. But for those who were regenerate, for those who believe, for those who were transformed, they had an ability to apprehend and comprehend what the unconverted cannot. And so He speaks to them and He tells them to love their enemies. Love, then, becomes critical. It is the distinguishing attitude of

Christians. It certainly is the distinguishing attitude of God who so loved the world and Christ who so loved the sinners as to give His life. And so we are also called to that same kind of love.

As we saw last time from Ephesians, the end of chapter 4, the beginning of chapter 5, since we are the children of God we are to walk in love for that manifests the very heart of God. The great truth of Christian history is that Christians have loved in the most remarkable, remarkable ways, from Stephen on who being crushed by his killers under the stones of their hatred, crying out, "Lay not this sin to their charge," in an amazing outburst of love toward his killers all the way through the history of Christian martyrdom to this very hour the world has been astonished to see the character of Christians loving their persecutors. This is a distinctive of regeneration. This is evidence of a life of God in the soul of man, to love enemies, to love persecutors, to love killers, even as God in Christ demonstrated Himself.

In this particular text of Luke 6, the Lord makes love the major distinctive that sets true disciples apart from everybody else. Now admittedly, religion is good soil to grow hatred in. And some people might say, "Well, you know what? Every time there's a war it's a religious war." You're hearing that a lot on the news today. "Every time there's a war it's a religious war." Sure the Muslims, they have their holy wars, but look at the Christians. The Christians have had their Crusades, and the Christians have slaughtered each other. And Catholics had the Inquisition when they killed the Protestants. And the Pedobaptists killed the Anabaptists and etc., etc., and the Catholics fight the Protestants in Ireland, the Protestants blow up the Catholics and what's the difference between Christianity and any other religion?

Well, the difference is, those people aren't real Christians. Often and sadly the name "Christian" has been dragged into such wars and supposed Christians are killing other supposed Christians. But that is a devilish counterfeit of the true Christianity. That is satanic use of the name of Christ to smear our holy Lord. True Christians love even their enemies. They love them evangelistically because they understand that that love which is inexplicable on the human level, which is impossible on a human level is the greatest proof that they have been divinely transformed.

So, we're looking at this love. We're looking at the character of it here. Now last time we looked at the commands of Kingdom love, we're calling it Kingdom love, verses 27 and 28. Let's go back to that text. The commands of Kingdom love, you have four commands in verses 27 and 28. Love your enemies, that's one. Two, do good to those who hate you. Three, bless those who curse you. Four, pray for those who mistreat you. Now these are things that we initiate. We are here called to a certain feeling, love; a certain action, do good; a certain speech, bless them; and a certain appeal, pray for them. We feel in a loving way toward them. We act in a loving way toward them. We speak in a loving way toward them. And we pray in a loving way toward them. But the key here is your enemies and those who hate you and those who curse you and those who mistreat you.

For Jesus to say that was absolutely revolutionary. In fact, to the Jewish establishment it was not just revolutionary, it was heretical because the rabbis taught according to Matthew 5:43, Jesus said this, "You have heard it said," "You have heard it said" is a little statement introducing rabbinical tradition, "You have heard it said love your neighbor and hate your enemy." That was the Judaism of Jesus' day. Hate your enemy. They knew Leviticus 19:18 said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." They knew that. But they had narrowed neighbor down to an exclusive little tiny nitch in which the neighbor was somebody who treated you in a harmless way, who agreed with you on everything...that was your neighbor, a Jew who agreed with you about everything.

And if you were outside that definition, they had a right to hate you. In fact, they had developed the idea that this was a...this was a virtue, this was part of the nobility of their religious zeal. They had a truncated view of neighbor so that their love was the typical limited love of which sinners are capable. Love your neighbor in this narrow definition and hate everybody else, that they viewed as a virtue.

Where did they get that? Oh, they said, God told them when they came into the land, "Drive out those Canaanites, Medianites, Moabites, Ammonites and other pagan people." Didn't God hate all of those enemies? But did we forget that those ancient inhabitants of Israel were among the most vile, the most corrupt and depraved people known to human history? They were unbelievably immoral, cruel, idolatrous, human sacrifice was part of their worship, even the incineration of their babies burned alive in an offering to pagan deities. They were a cancer that had to be cut out in order to save God's people from utter moral and spiritual corruption and that that was an act of God Himself who can do what He chooses to do. And at that time He chose to use Israel as an instrument of judgment against those evil idolatrous nations.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "And rightly, the wars of Israel were the only holy wars in history for they were wars of God against the world of idols." God had constituted Israel as a theocracy and He did use Israel as a sword. There were times when they acted in behalf of God as instruments of God's judgment. But never in the Old Testament did God permit evil for evil, cruelty for cruelty, hatred for hatred on a personal level. The idea that people outside the religion of Judaism should be despised and hated was an idea that came out of the apostate heretical Judaism that developed. It didn't come from God's Word. But it was their belief.

And so when Jesus said, "Love your enemies," this was immoral, this was irreligious, this was ungodly, this was heretical. And yet that's exactly what He demands of us. It is this kind of love that is inexplicable humanly. It makes the power of God manifest. Well, that's just a brief review of what we looked at last time...the commands of love. Let's look at the reactions of love, this morning, just briefly.

Those things we can initiate. We can choose to love. We can choose to do good. We can choose to speak blessing. We can choose to pray. Those are things we initiate by love. But there are going to be things in our lives that we don't initiate and so we come in the second point in this wonderful teaching of Jesus, verses 29 and 30, to the reactions of Kingdom love...the reactions, when you're not the initiator, when you're the object of what is being initiated.

Look at verse 29, "Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also. Whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back."

Now here are four illustrations of responding to what somebody else initiates. And here, too, is another way, maybe a more dramatic way, to demonstrate Kingdom love. First of all, "Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also."

There are people who laugh at this and they say it's ridiculous. If somebody comes up and, you know, punches me in the face, I'm not going to say, "Here, hit the other side." That's just not normal because built into us there are self-defense mechanisms that God has given us for the sake of self-preservation. And I agree with that. This is not about that. This is not about having somebody mug you at night somewhere when you're in a vulnerable position and you are lying down and say, "Oh, kick me again, kick me again, this is virtue, this is virtue." It's not about that.

What is it about? Jesus said in John 16, right after John 15 that I quoted earlier, "The time is going to come when they throw you out of the synagogue." He was telling His followers that, they're going to throw you out of the synagogue. We talked about that last Sunday. And they did. They were unsynagogued. That was not a small deal because Jewish society circled around the synagogue that was both the circumference and core of life. The greatest single humiliation, the greatest shame was to be excommunicated from the synagogue. You were then constituted as a reprobate, very serious. And they took it very seriously.

When someone was unsynagogued, which they were for their faith in Jesus Christ, frequently they were whipped before whoever wanted to watch. Clothes were taken of their backs and they received 39 lashes, leather thongs probably imbedded with bits of stone which lacerated their backs 39 times. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:24 says, "They did it to me five times." Five times the Jews did it to me. Acts 5:40 talks about those in the early church who preached the gospel being flogged. That was the physical punishment connected to the shame of being unsynagogued for the sake of Jesus Christ.

But there was something else that they did. The way you dishonored someone, one of the ways you dishonored someone was to slap them across the face. And while there was a real flogging, actual physical pain, there was also a symbolic humiliation in front of the synagogue congregation. One of

the officials would slap the person across the face as a symbolic indignity and humiliation. That's what's in view here. When they bring you in front to humiliate you and they slap you across the face, offer the other cheek, accept your humiliation.

Now don't get too literal with this. Turn to John 18 for a moment, let me show you something, John 18 verse 19. This is Jesus before the High Priest. He had been arrested. The High Priest questioned Jesus, verse 19, about His disciples, about His teaching. And Jesus was going to be legal about this, even if they weren't. We still have a law in this day in time about no man incriminating himself. Jesus knew that if there was to be any accusation it had to be confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses. So the high priest is really in violation of the law when he says, "Tell us about Your teaching."

"Jesus answered him," calling him back to what was right by the law, "I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple where all the Jews come together. I spoke nothing in secret, why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them, behold, these know what I said. Bring in the witnesses, they'll tell you exactly what I said, I never said anything in private." He was rebuking this man for putting Him in an illegal position of incriminating Himself rather than calling the witnesses which was the just thing to do.

The reaction, verse 22, "When He had said this, they read it for what it was, a rebuke of the High Priest. One of the officers standing by gave Jesus a blow." It's exactly the same thing. He smashed Him across the face. "Is that the way You answer the High Priest?" This is not so much punishment, this is not so much the flogging lashing which later the Lord received at the hands of the Romans as the indignity and the humiliation and the shame of the slap across the face. And you'll notice, Jesus did not say, "Here, hit the other side." He didn't interpret even His own words in that literal fashion. He answered and said, "If I've spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong. If rightly, why do you strike Me?" Why are you hitting Me, why don't you just bring the witnesses in?

So what then does it mean "to turn the other cheek?" It simply means this, when you have been treated with humiliation, when you've been treated with shame, when you've been treated with sort of the anger and hostility, when you have been despised and scorned and rejected, just keep on loving and get ready to be hit again. Don't retaliate. The love that has been called for here doesn't retaliate. It doesn't defend itself against this kind of humiliation and rejection, hostility. It doesn't get angry. It doesn't hate when it is hit. When rights and property and possessions are wrongly taken, this love is quick to love again and therefore be wronged again because the person stays in the place to continue to show the love to the enemy because he cares about the enemy's soul. So we could say this love is vulnerable. By its constant availability and openness and honesty it maintains a constant vulnerability. The other cheek then simply means you're going to have to hit me again if you don't like the way I'm loving you because I'm going to keep loving you this way. No matter how many times they hit you, keep loving them because it's that love that's inexplicable, it's that love that speaks of the

work of God in your heart. Here is this Christian relentlessly, continually reaching out to the contemptuous enemy with love for the soul of that enemy.

The second reaction in verse 29 is another abuse that happened to Christians and still does, in some forms. "Whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Whoever takes away your outer garment, don't withhold your inner garment." This is very similar to Matthew 5:40 to Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, and this goes back to an issue. Many of the people, of course, living in Palestine were not wealthy. It was common that people had one outer cloak. They didn't have wardrobes like we do today. And they needed that outer cloak to protect them, to keep them warm and even to use as a blanket at night. Exodus 22:26 and 27 says, "If you ever take your neighbor's coat as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets for that is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in?" You don't want him lying at night in the cold.

One of the ways they persecuted the believers, the early believers, was to take their cloak so that they were left naked. Believe me, the land of Israel can be very cold in the winter. It snows in Jerusalem. This was a severe abuse of these believers. He says, "If they take your cloak, keep loving them even if they take your shirt."

Don't retaliate. Don't seek vengeance. They never really are the enemy, they are always the mission field. This goes for abortionists, homosexuals and lesbians and all the people that pervert and corrupt our culture. Don't forget, they may hate our faith and hate our gospel, they aren't any different than these people. They have to be loved. And it's not a love that tolerates their iniquity, it's a love that continues to speak into their life the gospel no matter how evilly they treat us.

This is graphically illustrated. Jesus came to be crucified and one of the things they did when they crucified Him was they took His garment, didn't they? What did they do with it? They gambled for it. They took His outer cloak and took His inner cloak and they put him up there stark naked. What a graphic illustration. They've taken everything, He's naked. And there He is and out of His mouth comes this, "Father...what?...forgive them." That's that relentless love. You can take my coat, you can take my shirt and I will love you anyway, whatever the cost.

Third illustration is in verse 30. "Give to everyone who asks of you." This is in a borrowing context. Somebody comes and says, "I want you to lend me something. I'm in need." Do it. That context is made clear down in verses 34 and 35 because Jesus cycles back through these illustrations and there makes it clear that He's talking about lending to someone who may never pay you back. This again is self-denial. The person has a need. The person comes and says, "I have a need, I can't meet the need, can I please borrow." This isn't a...this isn't a beggar, this isn't a professional beggar, this isn't some beggar or some kind of a con man, this is somebody who apparently has a real need but they're going to take advantage of your generosity. They're going to say, "Oh, you're a Christian, so give me this and give me this and give me that." Go ahead and give it to them. This is a crucial

illustration of grace, isn't it?

And then He closes with a fourth illustration of theft. "Whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back." One of the things that also happened to these early believers was people robbed them. They humiliated them, slapped them, mistreating them, abusing them in that fashion. Took away their clothes. They came trading on their goodness, borrowing money they never intended to pay back. And they robbed them, and they still do, even up until modern times Christians in some parts of the world have their possessions taken. That's happened all through history. Christians persecuted, their personal belongings taken, their homes looted. When they do that, don't demand it back.

The world doesn't know anything about this kind of love. This is not possible to them. I mean, worldly love would say, "I'm going to love you as long as you don't hurt me and harm me, as long as you don't abuse me, as long as you don't defraud me by taking and not paying back, and as long as you don't rob me I will love you, but, boy, the day you abuse me, you're done." And we've elevated that attitude to a virtue.

And this is a great time in the world today to love with this kind of love because the world doesn't understand it. Sinners can't love this way. How are you going to smash down this ziggurat, this Tower of Babel? How are you going to convince them that this truth that we possess is, in fact, the life- transforming truth of God and the only truth? By demonstrating to them the power of that truth to produce in us a love that they cannot comprehend.

First Peter chapter 2 so beautifully summed up, verse 21, 1 Peter 2:21, "You've been called for this purpose since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Here's the example that Christ left us, "Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth. Therefore He was really killed without cause and while being reviled, mocked, scorned, repudiated, vilified, humiliated, He did not revile in return. While suffering He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." He just put Himself in God's hand and then He went on and bore our sins in His body on the cross. He actually in the midst of receiving all of this vilification from sinners, went to the cross and died for the sinners who were thus treating Him, therefore demonstrating love in its purest and highest form.

He loved them while they were hating Him. This is an astonishing kind of love. Not possible for the world. And Jesus is saying...when you love like this, there is no explanation except transformation. This makes the gospel believable.

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