

**Monday, August 10, 2020**

**SERIES: REWRITING JESUS**

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**TITLE: Love Your Enemies Pt. 1**

**"How should we deal with those who hurt us?" Luke 6:27-36**

I want to share a story with you about a little old grandma who loved and influenced her enemies in an unlikely manner. This woman had lived in California her whole life. She loved her community. She had a church. She was connected to her neighbors. She felt safe. It was good. And then the neighborhood changed. Over the course of a few years, people moved out, and new people moved in. These people who moved in were different from this grandma. They were tattooed; spoke in more colorful language. They were simply different.

Well, it wasn't too long before the apartment building started to be vandalized. The young men and women were breaking hallway lights, sometimes breaking windows, and painting on the walls. This grandma started to get very angry, but didn't know what to do. She didn't want these kids to destroy her home and community, but what could she do?

Her pastor challenged her congregation that Jesus said to *go and make disciples of all nations*. Well, now their church community didn't need to go, because the nations were coming to them. He challenged them and asked, "How can you introduce people, your neighbors, to Christ in your natural way?" She thought and prayed about it. She knew she was a home baker with famous blueberry muffins. It seemed that in the mornings before school, these young men and women were hungry and bored, and that was when they were tearing up the apartment. She decided she would bake a fresh batch of muffins and deliver them to the kids in the morning. The next morning, they grabbed muffins like they were in limited release. They asked, "Why are you doing this?" "Because Jesus loves you," she said.

She baked and delivered muffins the next day, and the next day. The kids started inviting other hungry kids. Eventually, the apartment building stopped experiencing vandalism, because the kids felt valued and were now taking care of the property. Slowly one by one, these enemies of this grandma slowly became friends. In fact, many became followers of Christ. **You see, this grandma decided to love her enemies, and she influenced them to Christ.** And that's what we want to talk about today.

Today we are looking at the topic of "How should we deal with those who hurt us?" How we respond and deal with them will have an impact on our enemies, and those who are watching. **In fact, I believe that Christians can influence their enemies and encourage fellow believers by obeying 3 directions from Jesus.**

So today, let's walk with Jesus in the book of Luke. We will be picking up in Chapter 6 and beginning in verse 27. Here in Chapter 6, we find Jesus early into His ministry and He has already been busy healing the afflicted, and walking with His disciples throughout Galilee. He is now teaching the crowds and His disciples on a hillside. Here He's giving His famous Sermon on the Mount. Let's begin in Chapter 6, verse 27 (NLT).

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

Jesus wasn't afraid of teaching the unpopular and controversial. Jesus' teaching was always true and objective; therefore controversial. But I love how He even begins this part of His teaching. He says, **to you who are willing to listen**. It's as if He's saying, "Look, there are some (if not most) who aren't going to want to do this, or embrace this teaching. But if you are one of the faithful, one who wants to do what I say, rather than rewrite Me, listen up". Jesus knows our stubbornness.

And then in verse 27, he gives us the first direction: **Be loving**. That's something that goes against our nature. He says, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you."

Let's be honest: Jesus' words in verse 27 bug us. Why should I love my enemies? Why should I love those who hate me? Why shouldn't I hate those who hurt me? Why should I love someone who steals from me? In other words, "Jesus, I don't want to forgive those who hurt me. I don't want to love them. I want justice."

I know this is what we are all thinking. But let me ask you, as well as myself, "Do we really want justice?" Do you want justice for your enemies? Well then, you'd better be ready to receive it first. I find it funny and convicting how we want justice for everyone else, but we only want grace and mercy for ourselves. We cry outrage, when we see our enemies escape due punishment, and then cry for the mercy, when justice is coming our way. We are regular Jonahs. Remember, Jonah was told to go preach against Nineveh. He tried to avoid the job, but God persuaded him to go forward. When Nineveh repented, and they received God's forgiveness, he cried out to God, "Oh I wish I was dead!" We are no different.

So, Jesus challenges us to rehab our hearts and motives. He challenges us to remember the love and forgiveness God has shown us. We, as Christians, were enemies of God before becoming His adopted children. We should want to show our enemies the same love that God has shown us.

Now I think it's important that we pause and qualify the word "enemies". Who is Jesus referring to? Well, the answer is earlier in Luke Chapter six. Jesus says in verse 22, "**Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.**"

When we choose to follow Christ, we are, in fact, turning our backs against the world. This doesn't mean that we don't care for the world; this doesn't mean that we don't love our friends and family who don't know Jesus. But by becoming a Christian, we go from being an enemy of God to being His child. We go from being a sinner to a saint. So, the underlying reason for the hatred and insults and malicious attacks, is because of our relationship with Christ.

In Matthew 6, verse 16, Jesus said, “[Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves.](#)” He compared their opponents to be like savage wolves. We know that He would say they would be punished in the courts and synagogues.

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: So let's bring in Cara and Arnie. Now there is no getting around the fact that Christians always have and always will have enemies. So Arnie, why is it so important to remember the reason for our enemy's hatred?

A: If we behave properly in times of battle, or at times when people are cursing us, if you will - they hate us because of our response, because a lost world can't understand grace, and can't understand forgiveness. And this is a revenge society that we have and a shame-based one. And if you can fight the good fight, and make a stand that is loving, and turn the other cheek, which is oftentimes hard to do, the world will hate you for it. They won't admire you; they'll think you're weak and stupid.

N: So do you think because of our identity in Christ, and knowing that's the real reason for their hatred, do you think that actually helps us live like we should? Or does it inhibit our behavior?

A: My problem, when it's really pronounced, I go like on autopilot; then it's easy. You know, I'm talking to myself, I'm coaching myself. It's the really radical stuff that I can handle. It's the subtle - in Nebraska I call it passive-aggressive - seems like, you know, they're nice, but they're really not. And you know they're talking behind your back, and they're laughing at you, but you don't see. That's the stuff that's really that toxic poison kind of stuff. That is much, much harder, because your autopilot doesn't go on. You don't gear up. It's just you kind of, it's a slippery slope - and that's much, much harder for me.

N: And I think we experience that every day in one way or another. Now, Cara, you've had some experience with this. What are some of the ways to love your enemies?

C: I have experienced it. I usually just end up praying for them, because I notice when I'm in prayer, I'm in conversation with God, and then it helps me out as well. The other thing, and this might sound really strange, but I actually visualize standing in front of Jesus, and Jesus saying, “Go away. I've never known you.” And that actually puts it into perspective for me. So then I really want to pray for them, because that's permanent, that's forever. And I don't want them to get there. And also too, it helps me to go, “It's not personal. They don't know me. They just don't like the light.” Because with anything, when you turn the light on, in a dark room, the cockroaches scatter, you know, and our light, if we're living with Jesus in us, and we're doing the best that we can do, I think when they see that standard, it reminds them how much they don't

measure up. Where we go, “Oh, I’m a sinner”, they’re not seeing that yet. All they see is the cockroaches, the parts about them that are wrong, but they don’t want to address those. They just want to find people that agree with that lifestyle. So, you know, it’s not personal. I don’t know. Maybe that will help people, to envision them going to Hell forever. That to me, I don’t hate anyone that much, right?

N: Yeah. That’s a frightening thought. And I think we do need to continue to remind ourselves of that, and put names with that. Think about those friends and family that you know, even those who don’t like you because of your faith. I know we’ve experienced that as a family. And yet the reality is, apart from Christ, it is Hell forever. It’s not a day. It’s not a week. It’s not a year. It’s forever. And I think you’re exactly right. We need to keep that at the forefront of our minds.

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Now, let’s look at a deeply troubling passage in Luke 12. For anyone who paints Jesus as a peace-loving hippie, Who gave out flower necklaces ... listen to this! Luke 12, beginning at verse 49: “I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup> I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! <sup>51</sup> Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. <sup>52</sup> For from now on in one house, there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup> They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law" (12:49-53).

Our decision to follow Christ will not only impact the everyday relationships, it will impact our very families. In fact, it divide us over the identity of Christ. When we declare our allegiance to Jesus, we are saying, “what He says goes” *above* the preference of the family. When we follow Christ, we say what God says trumps *my* opinion and my family’s opinion. When we decide to follow Christ, we draw a line in the sand, and this line will divide families. I’ve seen this. And maybe you’re experiencing this as well.

The hatred we experience as believers is because of Jesus Christ. The world hates Jesus. That’s why Jesus said in John 15, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world. Therefore, the world hates you.”

I hope that helps you understand who Jesus is referring to. It’s not the people we don’t like because of their political persuasion, or because their dog goes to the bathroom on our yards. Our enemies are not the people who wear masks, or don’t wear masks. Enemies are not the people that we just don’t like. Our enemies are also not the people that we’ve offended because of our poor behavior.

Maybe you have friends in your life that wherever they go, there’s a problem. Whether it’s a church or a job or a neighborhood – wherever they go, there is a problem. And they think that everyone else is the problem. In other words, they make enemies wherever they go, but they think that *they* are the innocent party! What they fail to realize is that they burn bridges and start

fires with their lives and their words. That's not the kind of enemy Jesus is talking about. He's talking about people who target you because of Him.

He says, love your enemies. Love the people who persecute you, who ridicule you – the people who will ostracize you and reject you and blaspheme your name, because of *Me*.

Again, in Luke 6 - Jesus gives us 3 immediate examples and ways to love our enemies. **First**, he says in verse 27, **we are to do good to those who hate us**.

The word "good" here is the Greek word "*kalos*" (Kah-lose). It means beautiful, excellent. It is the type of good actions that actually benefit them. It's not superficial or minor. It is something that is unexplainably good. It would be like driving 5 miles under the speed limit, and someone starts honking at you. They speed up to pull up next to you, and flip you off and curse at you. Instead of calling the cops for road rage; instead of just letting it go; you follow them, and when they park, you get out to thank them for being concerned about your driving, and then immediately hand them a \$100 gift card for Amazon. That is grace upon grace.

This reflects what Proverbs 25:21 says, “**If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, give them water to drink**”. Jesus knows that this posture of loving your enemy is not easy. If your enemy is that person who is persecuting you and ostracizing you because of your faith, it's not your natural inclination to love them – to *agape* them, that sacrificial love – to meet their need – to bless them. Our natural inclination, if our enemy is suffering, is to say they deserve it. Our inclination is to say, “Watch me drink this water while you're thirsty!”

But Jesus says, “because of your relationship with Me, and because The Holy Spirit lives inside of you, you *can* love your enemies. You can sacrificially give them what they need.”

And friend, there is no greater need than their need for peace with God. When you show them that sacrificial love, regardless of what they've done to you, you show them the difference that Christ makes. You show them that your faith is real. You show them that you really do care for them, despite their anger and their hostility. That kind of love prepares the soil for the Gospel. So that way, we can share God's ultimate love, Jesus Christ, with them. *Love your enemies*.

In verse 28, he says **you are to bless those who curse you**. When Jesus says to bless those who curse you, he means that you are to respond with kind and loving words to our enemy's cold and cutting remarks.

A few years ago, I was downtown, moving someone. During a break, a neighbor started shouting rude, crude, and unwarranted remarks to this person. I wanted to step up and say some choice words to this attacker. But what floored me was this person's response. They remained calm and spoke words of love and of compassion. The neighbor got big-eyed, slack-jawed, and quietly backed away. It was remarkable. They did just as Jesus taught.

Jesus goes on to say that **we are to pray for those who mistreat you**. How should we pray for those enemies?

Pray for their salvation. This is what we should be doing for every non-believer we know. Pray for their hearts to be softened. Pray for the Spirit to call them. Pray that God would remove any obstacle that keeps them from Jesus. And pray for open doors to love them.

In Kevin Harney's book, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People*, he says, "*when God's people pray, heaven shakes, strongholds are broken, and power is unleashed. More is accomplished through prayer than through all of our slick outreach brochures, multiple-step programs, and big evangelistic events combined. Don't get me wrong, though. I believe in using great print pieces, outreach training programs, and large outreach events. But without prayer, these activities are empty of power.*"

He would go on to say, "*there are all sorts of ways to pray for people who are spiritually disconnected. The issue is not finding the right way to pray but discovering creative ways for you to pray each day. One approach to pray might feel natural for a time, and then another approach might lead you to effective prayer during another season of life. Allow yourself to be creative and flexible, but always make sure that you are spending time praying regularly for revival and for people to experience life-changing grace of Jesus Christ.*"

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N: All right. This is a perfect time to bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney to talk about ways to pray for those who are *at the moment*, enemies of Christ. Cara, how do you pray for the nonbelievers in your life? Do you have a list to remind you, a certain time in the day? What works for you?

C: I really don't set a time. They're part of my life. So I have continual contact with people, and then I'm reminded to pray for them when I see them; or, you know, social media people pop up all the time - I guess they know I follow Jesus. So when they're falling on hard times, they kind of always reach out to me. They actually appreciate prayers, which I find odd, but I don't know. I don't have that many enemies. I just don't.

N: Right, well, and that's one of the things we always have to remember, is the reason why they are enemies, is simply because of who Christ is in our lives. It really has nothing to do with us. At least we hope it's not; we don't want to add more offense to the Gospel.

C: Look, I'm not going to go live in the toilet with them, but I'm certainly familiar with that environment. So they can - you know, I just try to stay in communication with people as much as I can. [Right.] Any nonbelievers from my past, especially right now, when there's no explanation for anything that's going on, I just try to stay out of politics and just keep it hopeful. And it seems to resonate with them.

N: I think you have a very organic way of approaching outreach and your prayer life with them. And that's ultimately what we strive to do, is just have an everyday approach to prayer. Talk to God whenever, however, about whatever. And for some, it definitely is helpful to have a reminder at a certain time and at a certain repetition, but regardless, we just need to be praying

for the people in our lives who don't know Christ. Arnie, what does it take to love your enemy and where do you even start?

A: You know Nat, it takes really the hand of Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit. For me, if I know somebody's lost, that frame of reference actually helps me a lot. My problem is when the enemy is amongst us. So somebody who has made the claim of Jesus' name, but then is behaving in such a way, that maybe they don't even know Him. And it's just that stuff is pretty mind boggling. And that's much harder for me, but like Cara, you know, praying for people is probably the most helpful thing to do. And sometimes at least for me, I have to force myself, especially for people in leadership who I have thought were Christ followers, and maybe they are, but they're just totally messed up individuals, who are not finishing very well. And there's many.

N: Absolutely. Well, I think that's something I really hadn't thought much about in this discussion, are those wolves in sheep's clothing - the people that are amongst us. And they're the people that Cara even mentioned earlier. You know, "Lord, Lord." "I never knew you". You know, that's a scary thought. It seems like at times, those people can be harder to love, because we have this mindset of, well, you should have known better, but if they are not actually believers, then they're living just like they should. And what's natural to them. But I think the call is still for us to love our enemies, no matter whether they're in our circle, or outside, on the boundaries. So I'm curious, do either of you have a story to share about loving your enemies, and about the impact that it had?

C: I think everybody does, but I would say, many people have the wrong idea of what it means to follow Jesus. So when you don't give them the reaction that they assume you're going to give them, or your behavior doesn't fit that narrative - that you know, that we're hateful - I know that will make a huge impact on people.

A: I've got a great one, and this happened early on for me as a Christ follower and I'm a brand new believer. I just got finished in this big arbitration. It wasn't a lawsuit, but it was an arbitration thing, where I prevailed, felt a little guilty about it. But my brother - a strong believer, a late in life conversion - he had a rental equipment company. And some guy who's known in the community of faking accidents, faked an accident, and sued my brother, and got an ambulance chaser law firm. And instead of fighting it, like I thought my brother should have, he offered to pay the people twice as much as the guy was asking, and the attorney - I mean, it just, the legal system does not work that way. They were just totally blown away. And of course, the guy being the lowest form of creeping thing, he took it, you know; he took the money gladly. But afterwards, the law firm that represented this creep, they called my brother and asked what church he went to. And they gave all of their fees, which I think was a third of the proceeds, which was a significant amount of money, to his church. And his testimony rang through. And just as a new believer, it just totally blew my mind that - and you know, my brother kept saying, you know, quoting the Old Testament, you know. And in my mind, it's like, okay, dude, that's the Old Testament. You don't have to be stupid. You don't have to, but he did it. And it had a tremendous testimony throughout the community. So that's my story, sticking to it.

N: And that's a great story. And maybe that's going to be something you'll experience as well, as one of our listeners, but chances are, you might not. But the point is, find a way to love your enemy, and try it, and allow God to direct the course of that relationship, and what happens with their heart. But today, try something.