

Introduction

We are studying the fruit of the Spirit. It is an important topic because here is what God's people should be. Here is how you will recognize genuine believers. Here is how you can test yourself. Here is where your heart should be oriented in terms of what you desire most to see in yourself. Here is where your true happiness will be. It is in the production of fruit in your life by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. In past weeks we have considered love, joy, peace, patience, and gentleness—that last one being out of order since we turned to it on Palm Sunday. Today we turn to kindness. The Holy Spirit that regenerates the believer indwells the believer and works to produce kindness. Kindness couples the heart with actions in order to do others good. It seeks to benefit and augment the welfare of others. One of the touching displays of kindness in the scripture is set before us by Mark here in chapter 6:30-42.

[Read text and Pray]

Studies of this text usually focus on the miracle performed by Jesus. However, Mark 6 also treats us to a moving illustration of godly kindness. I can't imagine anyone disagreeing with the idea that feeding hungry people is an act of kindness. But there is even more here. Together with his disciples, Jesus exhibits various aspects of kindness so that we are able not merely to conclude that Jesus is kind, but we are able also to understand what kindness involves. We see kindness not just in living color but in real life in ways with which we can connect. As a result we may better grasp the beauty and fullness of biblical kindness. So we proceed to consider the various aspects of biblical kindness.

We will begin with ...

I. The Orientation of Kindness.

Biblical kindness has an orientation; it has particular position or viewpoint from which it operates. It is situated in a certain posture. And the posture of kindness is to be bent toward others. What I mean is that kindness involves an intentionality to be thoughtful about others, to be aware of them, to notice them, to consider them.

In Mark's narrative of Jesus' feeding the five thousand, Jesus and the disciples involve themselves in doing for others. That is really the heartbeat of what is going on. Jesus had divided the disciples up into groups of two, and having given them authority over unclean spirits, he sent them out to minister among the Israelite people. They taught the people the truths of the gospel. And they had cast out many demons and had seen many afflicted persons receive healing. And now they have returned to Jesus and they are telling him about everything that happened. The crowds are relentless. They are following everywhere Jesus and the disciples go. And, well, that is what it is about, is it not—doing for others.

When Jesus looks on the crowd, he takes notice of the people who make it up. He doesn't look through them or look past them. He sees them to be like sheep without a shepherd. He sees them. Kindness sees others. It considers others. It is keenly aware that there are people out there, needs out there, hurts out there, opportunities out there. And kindness considers that we were put here for such a situation as this.

So my contention is that kindness is rooted in an outward orientation, an others mindset, a conscious awareness that folks are around me and that I have something to offer them. Race horses are often run with blinders. Well, I learned that they are called blinkers. They do not fully blind the horses but keep them from looking beside or behind them. What they observe is only in one direction. When it comes to others, human beings are born with blinkers on. We are naturally oriented in one direction. We think about ourselves; we are consumed with ourselves. We encounter this reality whenever we get out here in the city. Have you noticed how people avoid looking at each other. It is like nobody else is around. Well, we know they are, but we tend to pay them little to no attention both outwardly and inwardly because we are so consumed with our own selves. I want to encourage you this morning to work on orienting yourself to an outward awareness of others. See other people. Look beyond yourself. The Holy Spirit has been given to you to do this. Pray for a greater attention to who is out there in this world besides just you. This is where kindness begins.

II. The Heart of Kindness.

Kindness begins with noticing others, but there is more to it than that. Jesus and the disciples could not help noticing the people that were relentlessly following them. They did more than notice they were being followed, however. They were sympathetic toward the crowd. Seeing they were like sheep without a shepherd, Jesus had compassion on them. Seeing that they were in a desolate place and the hour was late, the disciples recognized they would be getting hungry. Knowing they were hungry, Jesus had an even kinder plan than sending the multitudes into the surrounding villages to obtain food.

The heart which displays kindness is considerate. Upon noticing people it feels for the people it notices. It considers their situation, their feelings, their weaknesses, their challenges. And it has compassion. The kindness of Jesus is emphasized in the word compassion. In Ephesians 4:32, Paul connects kindness and compassion. He says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted." Compassion is tenderheartedness.

What is tender is highly sensitive. The moderate and sunshiny weather we have been having over the last week has been so invigorating. Last Sunday, the temperature got up to 80 degrees and the sun was brightly shining. A lot of you have been outside in it. I can tell because some of you look a little red. You went out and got sunburned. There is nothing like sunburn to make skin highly sensitive. Remember those times as a kid that you were out swimming all day in the summer. Those shoulders turned bright red and hot and they were suddenly highly sensitive. Someone would come along and pat you on the shoulder, and you would cry out in pain. What normally you would hardly notice now is extremely noticeable. A tender heart is a heart like sunburned skin. Its awareness is highly intense. It is touched by the pain, the fear, the concern, the weakness of others. It feels it deeply and intently.

Jesus was tenderhearted. He noticed people in their disadvantaged state. He felt what they felt. Their plight was his plight; their pain was his. This is part of God's plan. The writer of Hebrews draws attention to the suffering of Jesus. He makes it a major point that because Jesus has been made like us and has suffered like us, he is able to sympathize with us and come to our aid. Just think. That forty-day fast in the wilderness acquainted Jesus with what it was like to be hungry. Now, looking at this multitude, he is aware that these folks would be famished; he could sympathize with them. This is what we are talking about when we say that the heart of kindness is tender toward others. The things you and I go through that break us down, expose our weakness, and bring us pain are experiences that can help us be tender towards others. As we pursue growth in the area of kindness, let us notice others, but let us be tenderhearted toward them as well. Let us

walk in the Spirit that our compassion toward others might deepen and develop that we might become more like our Savior.

Having considered the orientation of kindness and the heart of kindness, let's turn to ...

III. The Essence of Kindness.

So kindness begins with noticing others and being sympathetic toward them. But it involves more than feeling and noticing. Kindness without action is not kindness. Noticing that the people were like sheep without a shepherd and feeling compassion for them, Jesus taught them many things. Aware that the people had been unable to eat for an extended period of time, Jesus along with the disciples felt the need and DID something about it. Jesus involved his divine miraculous power to provide for a need. They were hungry, Jesus fed them. The essence of kindness is DOING GOOD for others. Considering the situation of others, kindness desires to maximize their happiness. It wants to minimize their pain and distress. It wants to assist them in their weaknesses. It longs to augment and encourage their strengths. It behaves in a benevolent manner towards them; it seeks their true happiness and welfare.

When I think of the essence of kindness, one biblical figure that comes to mind is Boaz. Naomi returned from the land of Moab with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, in tow. Both were widows and without means. So Ruth went to glean in the fields. Learning who she was, Boaz approached Ruth and encouraged her to stay in his fields. There she would be protected. Whenever she wanted a drink, she was to help herself. He gave her bread and wine at mealtime. Like the multitudes Jesus fed, she had more than enough. Boaz even instructed his reapers to pull some grain out of the bundles for her to take. Boaz showed true kindness to Ruth and Naomi.

Another person who manifested kindness in tangible ways was Dorcas in the New Testament. Also known as Tabitha, Luke tells us that she was full of good works and acts of charity. She died, and they called Peter. He came and entered the upstairs room where her body had been laid. There stood a number of widows weeping. They were showing him tunics and other garments Dorcas had made for them. After Peter raised her back to life, I am sure she returned to a life of kindness.

Showing hospitality is a manifestation of kindness. Feeding the hungry and giving water to those who thirst are actions of kindness. In Jesus' day so was the washing of feet. Feet became dirty as people walked the dusty pathways. Mary washed the feet of Jesus; Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Think of the various kinds of ways we can show kindness today. It is any initiative to do good to another human being. It can be as simple as acknowledging someone with a smile, a wave, or saying the words, "Hi" or "Thank you." Kindness might encourage an elderly person or greet a child. Kindness steps back to let someone else go first. It takes a meal to someone who is down, bakes cookies just to say, "you're loved and thought of." Kindness takes steps to make others feel included. Who could count the ways we can show kindness? It starts with noticing others. It intensifies by sympathizing with them. It culminates with actions that seek their welfare. It teaches and it feeds.

By the power of the Spirit of God and his working within us, then, let us notice others; let us be tenderhearted toward them; and let us perform actions that will do them good.

Along the way, we will understand that kindness has a cost. ...

IV. The Cost of Kindness.

People sometimes say that it is incredibly easy to be kind. And that is true to a certain extent. It is not a hard thing to be kind. It is not like lifting a grand piano with your finger. Being kind is

something all of us can do. But it is not really easy. There is a major obstacle to kindness. And that is selfishness. Humanity, because of the fall and sin, is inherently hardhearted and selfish. Kindness is not something we CAN'T DO; it is something we have to CHOOSE to do. And that is what makes it not so incredibly easy. Often it is inconvenient to be kind. It takes time we could use for ourselves. It takes the effort of looking outside ourselves and sympathizing with who we see.

Let's look back to the situation in which Jesus and the disciples were ministering. The disciples had just come from a mission trip that was no doubt very demanding. They were excited but they were exhausted and needed some rest. And yet the people kept on coming. Jesus led the disciples to go to a desolate place to take a break and recover. So many people were coming and going that they didn't even have time to get food. And though they were going to an isolated and out-of-the-way place, the multitudes just kept following. These disciples couldn't catch a break. The crowds beat the disciples to where they were going. In order to exercise the kindness that they did, Jesus and his men had to take a back seat to others. And that is the cost of kindness.

Kindness costs putting others first. Like Paul says to the Philippians, "in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." That's the cost of kindness. It took effort for Boaz to take note of Ruth. He had to speak to his young men. He had to make arrangements for her welfare. He gave up some of his grain. It took time and intention for Dorcas to knit tunics and other articles of clothing for the widows.

For those Macedonians who gave to the offering for famine-stricken Jews, it took sacrificing their own bellies for the sake of others. Paul said of them, "in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty ... overflowed in a wealth of generosity." They gave beyond their means. They gave more than they could. You know, when God's people are willing to pay the cost to be kind, it is amazing what God does with it. He multiplied the gift of the Macedonians. He multiplied the five loaves and two fish, but someone had to give up what was theirs for it to happen. Someone had to take a backseat to themselves.

No one person can meet every need in the world, and no one person is meant to do so. But we can all do something. And when we do it cheerfully, it is an incalculable blessing. Kindness in action brings joy to the one who is kind as much as the one who receives the kindness. It is pretty simple, but it is not easy. There is a cost or it's not kindness. There is a cost to the one who is kind. However, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there will be kindness. Don't let the personal cost stand in the way of reflecting the character of the one true God, who is KIND.

V. The Scope of Kindness.

We need to talk about the scope of kindness because even where we might be inclined to be kind to certain people, we might be tempted not to show that same kindness to others. We might be inclined to be kind to those whom we feel are deserving but not so much to those who are not. What does the scripture say about that?

Well, looking at the occasion before us in Mark 6, we should notice that Jesus and his disciples were feeding the very people who were keeping them from being able to eat. Verse 31 says that there was so much commotion that the disciples didn't even have time to eat. And then when the day was about over, it was these same disciples and Jesus who are making sure that the crowds have something to eat. It wasn't just a matter of inconvenience or serving when they were tired. It was serving people whose actions were keeping them from serving themselves. Who should have been

seeing to the food? Should not the multitudes have been wanting to do kindness to Jesus and his men? But somebody has to be kind first, even if it means serving and blessing the undeserving.

Paul tells the Romans that "if your enemy is hungry feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." Jesus made this point with clarity and gravity. Luke (6:27-36) tells us that Jesus instructed his audience this way. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." Think about it. One of the kindest things you can do for someone is to pray. But he went on. "If you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same ... but love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward in heaven will be great, and you will be sons of the most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

If you are doing something good for someone and it doesn't cost you, then it is not really being kind. I am not saying it is unkind; no it is not necessarily unkind, but it is not truly done in kindness. It may be doing to receive; it may be doing to manipulate someone to do what you want them to do. But kindness is kind for the sake of being kind. It does good to others for the sake of doing good to others. The scope of kindness includes even being kind to those who are undeserving. For sure that is when kindness that is a fruit of the Spirit stands far apart from the kindness of the world. Are you kind to those who are kind to you? So is the world. But are you kind even to those who are UNkind to you? Are you kind even to your ENEMIES? Are you kind to those who don't deserve it? Are you kind when there is no possibility of payback? Pray and seek for the Holy Spirit to produce kindness in you, and by his power seek to display kindness whose scope is wide open.

I feel like I have to add a comment here in light of the world and society in which we live. To be kind is not to affirm people in their sin. I still see the signs that people put in their yards back in 2020. No human is illegal. Love is love. Science is real. Kindness is everything. The kind of kindness they are talking about is not the kindness the Bible speaks of. These are the folks who believe that kindness supports and affirms deviant and sinful behavior. In fact, it is unkind to affirm people in the things that separate them from God and will send them to hell. Biblical kindness does not condone wrongdoing, but neither does it shrink from doing good to those who do wrong. That's the scope of kindness; it is not limited by what people deserve.

VI. The Impact of Kindness.

Kindness fulfills God's will for our lives and reflects him. But kindness also exerts a positive impact upon folks. The gospel according to John provides another account of the massive feeding event we are studying in Mark. We learn from John that the multitude was so impressed by Jesus' kindness and power that they wanted to take him by force and make him king. He had to withdraw by himself to keep that from happening. During the night he went with the disciples back across the sea to the other side. And as soon as the people realized where they were, they came after them again. When they arrived, Jesus said to them, "You seek me because you ate your fill."

When folks are kind, it opens doors. Fill their bellies and it may well open their minds. When you do good to others, they appreciate it, and often you will win the right to be heard. Here is just an added incentive for cultivating this godly fruit in your life. Christians are called to have an impact on the world. We are to be salt and light. But often the world looks at us as harsh and hostile. All they hear is us saying how bad and wrong the world is. All they seem to hear is that we are against them and don't like them. Make no mistake, the world needs to hear our call to repentance. A sinful world going crazy in a downward spiral of immorality, lawlessness, injustice, and insanity needs to

hear the truth. But if we are unkind, we have no reason to believe they would even want to listen to what we have to say.

Most of you know who Rosaria Butterfield is. But in case you don't, she was a tenured professor of English and Women's studies at Syracuse University. Allured by feminist philosophy and LGBT politics, she adopted a lesbian identity. Her impression of evangelical Christians was that they were poor thinkers, judgmental, scornful, and afraid. In response to a newspaper article she wrote, Rosaria received a lot of judgmental and scornful letters from people identifying themselves as Christians. But she also received a letter from a local pastor that was warm and civil. It reflected kindness even though it expressed disagreement. It was the kindest letter of opposition she had ever received. It became an influence God used to turn Rosaria from her lostness and sin to Christ. May God have mercy on us and work in us so that the world will want to listen because His people are at least kind-hearted toward them.

Before I close this morning, I want us to consider ...

VII. The Greatest Display of Kindness.

Whatever kindness we display, it pales in comparison to the kindness of God. Psalm 145:17 declares that "the Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works." In Jeremiah 9:24 the Lord himself tells us that he delights in kindness." And the greatest display of the kindness of the Lord is spelled out in Titus 3:4. It says that despite our sin and disobedience, "when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us ... according to his own mercy ... through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Jesus Christ coming to live among us as one of us, dying and rising for us is the greatest manifestation of kindness that could ever be conceived.

If you are united with Christ Jesus by faith, you have received the greatest kindness from God himself. God in his outward/others orientation has had compassion and has worked for the welfare of persons who don't deserve it and have done everything they could to forfeit it. The cost to himself could not have been greater. He gave his only begotten Son so that whoever believes might not perish but have eternal life.

Conclusion

If you have not received that eternal life, I urge you to welcome the kindness God has shown you and turn from your sins and trust in Jesus Christ that you might be justified and inherit eternal life.

If you have received eternal life—you are trusting in and living for Christ—how will you respond to the kindness of the Lord? I hope you will respond by praising and magnifying him in your life. I also pray that you will respond with a fresh and hot pursuit of cultivating kindness in your own life by the power of the Spirit of God. And know this. The kindest thing you can do for another person is to share the gospel of the kindness of Christ with them.