

Radical

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
(Matthew 5:27–28 ESV)*

*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.
(Luke 6:36 ESV)*

*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:20 ESV)*

Radical Love

September 1st, 2019

Luke 6:27-36

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I’d love for you to open your Bibles now to Luke 6:27-36; that’s on page 862 in your pew Bibles. This is our fourth message in the Radical series but I would contend that this passage takes us into the heart of the most radical thing that Jesus ever said. You recall that we are using the word “radical” in its technical sense. The word means “change at the root” or a “fundamental departure from accepted norms”. What we are trying to get at here are the things that Jesus said that **FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGED** the trajectory of the covenant community – and nowhere do we see a more radical change in trajectory than right here in the passage we are looking at this morning.

Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 27 of Luke 6.

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

³²“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:27–36 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

You notice that our passage begins with that phrase we’ve seen a time or two:

“But I say to you who hear....”

Jesus is making it clear here that what he is teaching represents a fundamental departure from the accepted wisdom of the day. The Pharisees tell you this – but I am telling you this. In Matthew’s summary of the Sermon on the Mount he actually preserves what the Pharisees said. Matthew 5:43-44 Matthew has Jesus saying:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Matthew 5:43–44 ESV)

So this is a **WHOLE NEW WAY**. Jesus is teaching a **NEW ATTITUDE** and a **NEW APPROACH** and it **LITERALLY** turned the world upside down.

Now, some people dismiss this teaching as unrealistic. They say that this is an **IDEAL** that we not intended to take seriously. If we took it seriously there would be absolute chaos, they say. Imagine a world where no one paid back their mortgages and where thieves could break into your house and take all your stuff and get away with it. That’s what this would lead to – absolute anarchy and chaos.

But to be clear, that isn't what Jesus is saying. He isn't saying that there shouldn't be laws. He isn't saying that there shouldn't be courts that maintain laws. He isn't saying anything about that at all. Jesus recognized a place for government – he even advocated for paying taxes.

“render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”
(Matthew 22:21 ESV)

So Jesus said – there is a role for the government in society. The king does not bear the sword in vain. Pay your taxes so that we can have police officers and courts systems and can benefit from the order and protection they provide – thanks be to God!

But – as for you as my disciples, Jesus says, this is how I want you to live.

That's what this is about. This is not a political constitution this is a radical way of life based on a default attitude of LOVE, GENEROSITY and MERCY. That's what Jesus is talking about here. It is NOT LUDICROUS but it is RADICAL – so let's talk about that. Let's talk about HOW this teaching of Jesus departed from all known social norms.

What Is So Radical About This Teaching?

The first thing that was totally different about this teaching was its scope.

1. The scope

Everybody agrees that you should love those who love you. In every culture there is an ethic of loving those within your circle. We are tribal creatures. Love for our UNIT is embedded in our essential nature.

Love that kind of love isn't new – and it isn't interesting – that is just DEFAULT HUMAN RELIGION.

And that is exactly what the Pharisees taught. Pharisaic Judaism was basically just baptized human paganism. That's why Jesus rejected them. They SAID that they were influenced by the

LAW – by the Old Testament – but that wasn't true. They didn't even understand the Old Testament. In point of fact, Jesus contends – you guys are just PAGANS. You are just putting a religious varnish upon essential fallen human nature.

The Pharisees told people to love their inner circle – to love their tribe – and to be suspicious toward everyone else. They modelled a disdain for the poor, for sinners and for the Gentile dogs - that was Pharisaic Judaism. But Jesus is demanding something totally different – something almost otherworldly.

Leon Morris says helpfully here:

“His follower cannot be selective in his love. He must love all, including his enemies, in the spirit of the Master, **a widening of the scope of love that appears first in the teaching of Jesus.**”¹

No one had ever said this before Jesus. This was a completely new direction.

There was no precedence for this in Judaism and there was no precedence for this in Roman paganism. Jesus was the FIRST person to SHATTER the boundary of family and tribe and to say that LOVE should be extended to all people irrespective of their race, their ethnicity – and irrespective of their relative VALUE to you as a person.

That was radical! That was a foundational change – thanks be to God!

The second radical thing about this teaching has to do with the ACTION that is here demanded.

2. The action

Look at verses 30-31:

“Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” (Luke 6:30–31 ESV)

¹Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 149.

Now most of you will recognize verse 31 as The Golden Rule. We teach The Golden Rule to kids in Sunday School – and well we should – the Golden Rule is the **DISTINCTIVE HEART** of Christian ethics.

It went way beyond the ethical demands made in Judaism and in paganism. The famous Jewish Rabbi Hillel said:

“Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you.”²

Similarly the Chinese philosopher Confucius said:

“What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others”.³

Those are **NEGATIVE** moral codes based on the principle of **HARM**. Do not **HARM** others in a way you would not wish to be **HARMED** yourself. The action called for there is essentially **NON-ACTION**. Don’t do **HARMFUL THINGS**.

That is the highest achievement of Jewish and Pagan moral reasoning before Jesus Christ. Don’t harm other people.

But that isn’t what Jesus says here – listen again to the **ACTION** being called for in this passage:

do good to those who hate you (Luke 6:27 ESV)

bless those who curse you (Luke 6:28 ESV)

pray for those who abuse you. (Luke 6:28 ESV)

Give to everyone who begs from you (Luke 6:30 ESV)

²As cited by James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 207.

³ <https://blogs.transparent.com/chinese/confucius-says-pt-2-analects-and-golden-rule-子曰/>

And as you wish that others would do to you, **do so to them**. (Luke 6:31 ESV)

Are you hearing that? That is a RADICALLY DIFFERENT MORAL PRINCIPLE! That is a principle based on POSITIVE ACTION! He says: DO GOOD. BLESS PEOPLE. PRAY FOR THEM. GIVE TO THEM. ANTICIPATE THEIR NEEDS AND SERVE THEM.

No one had ever said that sort of thing before. It was radical!

The third radical component of this teaching has to do with the ATTITUDE that is being called for.

3. The attitude

In verses 32-36 Jesus contrasts the attitude he expects from his followers as compared to the attitude that was prevalent in Pharisaic Judaism. In Pharisaic Judaism people loved only when they could reasonably expect to get love in return. They gave only when they could reasonably expect to receive in return.

But that's just paganism, Jesus said.

You don't need the Bible for that – you don't need God for that. That's just basic self-preservation.

The Pharisees were loving AND HATING just like the pagans. If someone hit them – they hit him back. Again Matthew provides a little more detail. Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew 5:38–39 ESV)

So once again, Jesus says, the Pharisees are misunderstanding and misapplying the law to justify their essential paganism. The “eye for an eye” law had nothing to do with personal vengeance. It was a law intending to govern the courts. It was saying basically that the punishment has to fit the

crime. If you steal a loaf of bread we aren't going to cut off your hand. The punishment should fit the crime – that principle has been enshrined in our own legal system. It's a good law. But it has nothing to do with personal vengeance. The Pharisees have misappropriated that law in order to justify doing to other people whatever was done to them.

They are basically just overgrown children aren't they? This is exactly what your kids say to you when you call them on their behavior at the dinner – she did it first! She started it!

That's paganism – that is the default moral code of every fallen son and daughter of Adam.

And the Pharisees had codified it!

They were telling people – you get to do to other people whatever they first do unto you. That's the law of the children's table and Jesus calls them on it and he rejects their interpretation and instead he offers a **TOTALLY DIFFERENT WAY**.

A way of non-retaliation.

I. Howard Marshall says here, commenting on this verse:

“The thought of blessing persecutors is found in Romans 12:14; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Peter 3:9, but apparently has no Jewish antecedents.”⁴

Are you hearing that? He is saying that the attitude of non-retaliation is taught here in the Sermon on the Mount and again in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 4 and 1 Peter 3 **BUT NOWHERE PRIOR TO THAT IN JUDAISM**.

Meaning – no Jewish person had ever said this before Jesus.

And then all the sudden – Christian Jews – Christ followings Jews started saying this sort of thing all the time.

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 259.

It was RADICAL.

This teaching CHANGED OUR SELF UNDERSTANDING AS A COVENANT COMMUNITY.

The second century Christian Apologist Tertullian put it this way:

“To love friends is the custom for all people, but to love enemies is customary only for Christians.”⁵

That’s what I mean by RADICAL! No one had ever said this before Jesus and it literally CHANGED the world.

It set us – as a covenant community – on a completely different. From this point on we were the TURN THE OTHER CHEEK people. We were the love your enemies people. We were the give to those who don’t deserve it people. We were the serve the stranger and the alien people. We were the protect the poor and vulnerable people.

Not always perfectly – but by fits and starts, by one degree of glory to the next – by the grace that God supplied – this is WHO WE BECAME as a people.

This is what became known as CHRISTIAN LOVE – and it is a love that changed the world.

Let’s take a minute and talk about that.

How Did This Radical Teaching Change The World?

Most of us living in the Western world have no idea of the extent to which our culture owes its soul to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. As we’ve shown already there was nothing like this in first century Judaism – and there was nothing like it in Roman paganism either. Historian Rodney Stark says here:

⁵ As cited in *Luke* in Volume III of *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 108.

“In the pagan world, and especially among the philosophers, mercy was regarded as a character defect and pity as a pathological emotion: because mercy involves providing *unearned* help or relief, it is contrary to justice.”⁶

In contrast to that, historian Paul Johnson writes:

“The Christians... ran a miniature social welfare state in an empire which for the most part lacked social services.”⁷

Are you hearing that?

The church did life in a **RADICALLY DIFFERENT WAY** as a result of this teaching and slowly but surely they began to win people over. This teaching – this way of life – began to **AFFECT CHANGE** in the wider world – even among those who continued to hate us!

The Emperor Julian who ruled over Rome from 361-363 AD was a notorious persecutor of Christians. He hated them – nevertheless he wrote to member of his government and said:

“the impious Galileans (Christians), in addition to their own, support ours, and it is shameful that our poor should be wanting our aid.”⁸

He basically said that, while we hate these Christians, we must begin to **MATCH THEM IN CARE FOR THE POOR**. Those crazy Christians do not only care for their own poor – they care for our poor! If we are not careful they will steal the Empire of Rome out from under our very feet!

Are you hearing that?

This **RADICAL APPROACH** to **LOVE AND MERCY** literally changed the world!

⁶ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 112.

⁷ Paul Johnson as cited in *The Triumph Of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 112.

⁸ Julian the Apostate to the High Priest of Galatia as cited in Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 118.

Even our fiercest critics have had to acknowledge this. The famous 19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche absolutely despised Christianity – he wanted to return the West to the moral values of Roman paganism. He said that Christianity preserved what ought to be destroyed. It caused us to show pity on people that had no social value. He said:

“Pity preserves things that are ripe for decline, it defends things that have been disowned and condemned by life, and it gives a depressive and questionable character to life itself by keeping alive an abundance of failures of every type.”⁹

Doesn't he sound like a nice fella? No wonder that his philosophy led directly to the abomination known as Adolph Hitler.

That is your Western culture without Christianity.

Think about it – if you EXTRACT the life and teaching of Jesus Christ out of Western Civilization - as our school system, government and media appear desperate to do – what do you have left over? What is the guiding morality and philosophy?

It's social Darwinism.

It is evolution applied to human society – that's what Nietzsche wanted – he wanted the STRONG TO SURVIVE, he wanted the WEAK TO PERISH and that thinking is what led directly to the horrors of World War 2.

And yet we learn nothing.

Life before Jesus wasn't all that great friends. It was tribal. It was ethno-centric. It was violent and it was cold.

That is fallen human nature in a nutshell.

We love narrowly and selfishly.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* as cited here: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/798342-pity-preserves-things-that-are-ripe-for-decline-it-defends>

We give only to get.

We despise the weak.

We abandon the old and the infirm.

We return blow for blow – and we live in a perpetual cycle of violence and self-interest.

That was the world before Jesus – and that is the world STILL wherever the teachings of Jesus are unknown.

The philosopher Vishal Mangalwadi was born and raised in India but studied in both Europe and North America and he has become known as an astute observer of Western Culture. As an outsider he is able to see some of the beauty that we take for granted and as a result he has also become a force of reform within his own cultural context. In commenting on why there is nothing in Hinduism like the Western European commitment to deeds of mercy and compassion toward the sick he says this:

“Karma became another philosophical factor preventing a culture of care. A person’s suffering was believed to be a result of her or his karma (deeds) in a previous life. In other words, suffering, was cosmic justice. To interfere with cosmic justice is like breaking into a jail and setting a prisoner free.”¹⁰

That’s exactly WHY the Guardians of Hope program is so effective! BECAUSE IT IS RADICAL! It represents a fundamental departure from the dominant cultural worldview of everyone else around them!

The Hindu worldview says that AIDS is your punishment NOW for sins you committed in your last life and THEREFORE IT WOULD BE WRONG for anyone to help you, for anyone to care for you, for anyone to come into your house and feed you and bath you and nurse you as you are

¹⁰ Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 312.

wasting away under the devastating power of that disease. That would be LIKE BREAKING INTO A JAIL AND SETTING THE PRISONERS FREE.

But isn't that exactly what Jesus came to do?

Didn't he say that?

He said:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18–19 NIV11)

That's MERCY, that's GRACE and that's why I've come, Jesus says. I have come to set the prisoners free.

That's what Jesus is all about! He's a RADICAL! He is different! He is like nothing this world has ever seen as Christians – we are called to follow him. So how in the world are we going to do that?

Beginning To Do The Impossible:

Jesus was always telling people to do impossible things – and this might be the most impossible thing he ever asked of anybody. This is contrary to our nature, this is contrary to our culture, this is contrary to every instinct and inclination that we have as fallen human beings – so how in the world are we supposed to do this?

Let me make just a few humble and prayerful suggestions. I say humble because I find this just as impossible as everyone else. I say prayerful because if God doesn't help us then none of this is going anywhere. But if he does help us – if he does answer our prayers for mercy and grace on this – then I suggest we do the following:

1. Start somewhere

One of my concerns in preaching on anything radical is that reasonable people will immediately talk themselves out of doing anything by way of application.

“I’m 65 years old. I’m on a fixed income. I’ve done my part. This message is for the younger folks. There is nothing I can do at this point.”

But there is!

The most radical part of this whole passage is the attitude of non-retaliation – you can do that, no matter how old you are or what stage of life you are in. When your wife or your husbands says something unkind to you today – decide not to return evil for evil. Decide to eat it. Decide to pray for her and to bless her and to serve her – like Jesus said to do in this passage. Be where it stops today in your marriage.

That would be radical and you can start there and make a huge change in your life today.

2. Work as a team

The thought of GIVING to the POOR or loving the unlovely can be scary. What if the unlovely person tries to eat me? What if he is drunk or dangerous? Those are fair questions - so work as a team. Volunteer to peel potatoes in the kitchen. Ask Craig how you can support an orphan in South Africa. Ask Miranda how you can contribute to Family Circle – talk to Suraj today about our partnership with Guardians of Hope. None of the people you would be giving to through those programs will likely ever be able to pay you back – but you can give to them – you can show ACTIVE LOVE AND MERCY to them as part of our team.

3. Seek counsel

Almost every commentary I read on this passage warns the reader about the danger of making foolish application of this passage. Leon Morris puts it this way:

“If Christians took this one absolutely literally there would soon be a class of saintly paupers, owning nothing, and another of prosperous idlers and thieves. It is not this that Jesus is seeking, but a readiness among his followers to give and give and give.”¹¹

So before you sell your house or cash in your child’s RESP please go to your elder or to a pastor – or just to a wise Christian friend and ask them if you are making APPROPRIATE APPLICATION of this passage. Just like Jesus didn’t actually want us to gouge out our eyes when we were talking about adultery – so too there is a foolish application of this passage that will not bring honour upon the name of Christ – so when in doubt, seek counsel.

4. Review often

It is so easy to SLIDE OUT OF RADICAL CHRISTIAN LOVE and into selfishness, materialism and isolationism. It is easy because that is how we are naturally wired and that is the natural direction of our culture. That’s why if you STOP STRIVING for Christian love you will immediately begin to drift out of it. This is an UPSTREAM CHRISTIAN VIRTUE. So if you aren’t striving you are SLIDING – so review and evaluate often.

How are you doing with your finances? Are you still giving generously? How are you doing with your home? Is it still open to the orphan, the widow and the stranger? When was the last time you invited someone over for dinner who will never be able to invite you back?

Those are good questions.

Ask them often of yourself.

And then lastly, keep your eyes on Jesus.

5. Study Jesus

Jesus says at the end of the passage:

¹¹Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 150.

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:36 ESV)

So God is the STANDARD for our lives of love and mercy – but of course as Christians we know that JESUS is the perfect demonstration of God’s love and mercy – so obviously, we should be studying him.

We should be reading the Bible – particularly we should be reading the Gospels. This is why I love the RMM Bible Reading Plan because it has you read the whole Bible once – all of it – every year – but it has you reading the New Testament TWICE. That means you read the Gospel of Matthew – TWICE. The Gospel of Mark TWICE. The Gospel of Luke TWICE. And the Gospel of John TWICE – that’s a lot of Jesus!

But that’s exactly what we need.

Because my flesh BENDS IN THE EXACT OPPOSITE WAY. I am a counter puncher. I am an eye for an eye kind of guy. I am a love my family and my tribe kind of guy. I am a write people off who offend me kind of guy. I am a let the poor rot in the pit they have dug for themselves kind of guy.

Are you with me?

So I need a lot of Jesus.

I need to see him, study him and repent of all the ways that he is beautiful and merciful and loving – and I am not.

I need that. A lot. And I’m guessing you do too.

So let’s fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith – who for the sake of the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame and is seated now at the right hand of the throne God.

Let's look at him. Let's study him. Because HE IS THE WORD OF THE LORD. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.