

Part 19: The Look of Love

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Hans Christian Andersen once wrote a little fable called, "The Emperor's New Clothes," which focused on an emperor who loved to adorn himself in the most stylish apparel.

One day two weavers came into town who promised to weave the world's most majestic clothes. But there was something powerful about their clothes. They were made out of such a special fabric that it was invisible to anyone who was unworthy or foolish. The Emperor saw this as a unique opportunity. Not only would he be dressed to the nine's, but he'd quickly be able to tell who was qualified to work in his position and who was a sham. The only problem was, these weavers were conmen.

So as the Emperor told his kingdom about this new outfit being made for him, the whole area responded inquisitively. But one after another, the Emperor would send someone to check on the work of the weavers. Despite the fact they had set up looms and were working day and night, it appeared there was nothing being created, no clothes anyone could see. But each person who was sent realized that if they couldn't see the garments, they were the fool—so in their arrogance and fear they brought reports back to the Emperor about how gorgeous the clothes were.

Then the big day came for the Emperor to be presented to his people, and he realized himself that he couldn't see the fabric. He bought into the lie everyone else did, that he must not let anyone know he couldn't see otherwise he would be seen as the fool.

Anderson's story concludes this way: **So off went the Emperor in procession under his splendid canopy. Everyone in the streets and the windows said, "Oh, how fine are the Emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection? And see his long train!" Nobody would confess that he couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool. No costume the Emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success. "But he hasn't got anything on," a little child said. "Did you ever hear such innocent prattle?" said its father. And one person whispered to another what the child had said, "He hasn't anything on. A child says he hasn't anything on." "But he hasn't got anything on!" the whole town cried out at last. The Emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, "This procession has got to go on." So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.**

The point of the story is ironically, visible enough isn't it? That there is no greater fool who professes to be dressed splendidly while at the same time walking nakedly throughout the streets.

Today we hear one of Jesus' most popular and seemingly simplest commands—the golden rule, as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

The banner under which this flies is the banner of love. Jesus opens up this portion of teaching with a command nearly everyone approves: love your enemies.

Our world talks often of this kind of love. We put it on our yard signs, we sing of it in our songs, we write about it on our Facebook posts, we preach on it in our churches. Yet I wonder if the simplest

examination of a child might show that we have puffed out our chests, rolled out our robes, and have walked out into the world naked while thinking we are clothed.

In a world where love and peace seem to be everything, what do we actually see?

We live in a world where it is openly known that billion dollar social enterprises hire the brightest minds to capitalize on our anger and our hatred online. We turn on the news and not only do we see the battlefields of Buffalo, New York and the Supreme Court, but we see even more bloodshed in the comments as different sides of the debate lob grenades at each other hoping to sterilize the public square. Ballots are cast not based off competing ideologies for the mutual good, but as battle lines between our brothers and our sworn enemies.

In a world where love abounds, so does the category of enemy. In light of our text today I want us to soberly ask ourselves—what are we wearing? And does it look like Jesus' view of love? Or does it look like the naked love which runs rampant in our world?

Jesus already cuts off our minds and our reflections in the first few words of this text **Luke 6:27**: "to you who hear." Already Jesus shows he's not after your thoughts on their love, he's after your own sober assessment of your own love. Do you love your enemies, do you do good to those who hate you, are you generous to those who wish to take from you?

What we read today is so stunningly simple and confoundingly clear that it is profoundly dangerous. Dangerous in that we might easily think we've done it, believed it, and practiced it. Despite the danger there is hope for those who feel lost in a world of naked love. That hope is seen in Jesus' contrast in this text: Christians love differently. Why? Because Christians have been loved differently.

True love, enemy love, biblical love, gospel love is for those who have eyes to see the miracle of mercy. This is our big point today: **Gospel love is a humble view of self and a clear view of salvation.**

We are going to address this today in three parts. First, I'm going to give us a **Preface**. If we want to understand this text rightly we need to first deal with some misunderstandings and misapplications we might have about it. Then we will examine a **Humble view of Self** in verses 27-31 and then a **Clear view of salvation** in verses 32-36.

I want to begin today with our **Preface** on the text and it's best to dive into that after we read the text in full once more: **Luke 6:27-36.**

So there are three quick notes I want to make in regards to this text. First, ***This is a political message.***

All week as I prepared this sermon I wanted to make the statement that this is not a political message. But that would not be true. We are in the middle of Jesus' extended sermon to his disciples and do you remember how he opened this message last week: **Luke 6:20.**

This is a political message. It is for those who belong to the Kingdom of God. For those who are ruled by King Jesus this is our binding constitution.

As Christians we are called to live life on earth as citizens of another Kingdom. We are glimpses into what life will be like in a world where hatred, abuse, and enemies are no more.

But there is a big difference between being a citizen of the Kingdom of God and living in the Kingdom of God. This world is not the Kingdom. The reality of hate, harm and hostility is real. To help mitigate those realities this side of heaven, God has established governments, courts and authorities to limit harm and protect justice.

Paul says in Romans 13 that rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. He also says in 1 Timothy that we are to pray for our authorities so that we might govern us in such a way which produce peace.

So this text is a gospel-politic not a general-politic. It isn't meant to dictate how courts act, or if we should have an army or not. It is after how gospel-kingdom people respond to real-world trials.

In Luke 3, soldiers come to John the Baptist asking him how to repent and he doesn't say, "Well there's no need for courts, punishment, or defense, so quit." Instead he addresses their own hearts and says, "Don't extort, don't be a fearmongerer, and be content."

Main point, this text isn't to govern the corporate halls of congress but the individual heart of believers.

Second point of preface, ***This is a submission to God message.***

This will be supremely clear by the end of this passage, but Jesus also makes it clear in his opening statement: **Luke 6:27-28**.

We will only be able to love enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you if we believe that there is a God worthy of our prayer.

This text is not calling us to love hate. It's not calling us to ignore injustice. It's not calling us to blindly forgive and forget. It's calling us at the end of the day to trust God alone to vindicate the good and to punish the evil.

Look at what God says in **Isaiah 61:8**. God isn't asking us to call evil good. He's not wanting you to get rid of justice. He's just asking that you trust the one who hates sin, evil, injustice and oppression, more than you ever could, to be the one who gives perfect retributive justice in the end.

This allows us to pray real prayers. God doesn't want boiler plate prayer lives. In the Psalms, David prays for his enemies, and he's not praying for their flourishing! He's often praying for their destruction. But there's a difference between praying that God would punish and taking up the role of punisher ourselves.

There's a movie franchise out which is like four or five movies now. Its popular because it's basically entire films of one man battling an endless stream of enemies. Do you know why this process started? Because someone killed his dog, and he wanted to take vengeance into his own hands. Once he started the process of getting right on his own terms, it exposed more problems, more enemies, more storehouses of bloodshed. The point is that if you think you're life and you're problems will be solved by taking justice into your own hands, you will only find unending work and zero rest.

God will judge the evil. 2 Peter tells us that God is tarrying history so that more people might be saved and yet it will not come at the expense of judgment of the wicked. This message depends on God's sovereign power and justice. That's the beautiful relief of beginning this text in submission to God.

My final point of preface is this, ***This is a wisdom message.***

The ESV translates the Greek word "*epereazo*" as "abuse" in verse 28. Other translations render the same word, "threaten" or "mistreat." All of these are good descriptions of the word, but the term "abuse" today no longer broad and general, now it has come to be used in a very narrow sense of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

This is not the way this word is used here, even though the heart response of verse 28 should be the same in that circumstance! We cannot offer comfort to those who are in situations of abuse if we cannot also lead them to the God who hates abuse and promises to care about that harm.

This text isn't saying that if you are being abused, you should continue to keep silent and stay in a dangerous place. In the same it's not saying that if you're robbed, you should find the robber and give him all of your household as well. It's not saying that you must give to every person everything that's asked of you every time you are asked!

Jesus is after your heart in all these situations. He is after a radical reorientation of our gut responses in the heat of the moment. But Jesus as the source of true wisdom, doesn't erase all wisdom in this Bible. Jesus himself will share the story of the Good Samaritan later on and I'm sure the Samaritan would be seen in a different light if he witnessed the man getting assaulted, stood by and did nothing until after the attackers left, and then went and cared for the man.

The Bible talks often and openly about how you are to respond when you see others being oppressed. In these areas we are to be people of action. But this text is explicitly about your responses. Part of our right response is to also be wise. The book of Proverbs calls us explicitly to steer clear of the fool, steer clear of the hater, steer clear of the scoffer, the abuser and the angry person. This text isn't calling anyone to sit in the abuse, it's calling you to respond in the moment with biblical love deferring judgement to God, and then to continue to apply godly wisdom in the moments which follow.

Jesus is spending his time teaching us because we need to be people who are taught, we are constantly needing the word of God and the wisdom of God to speak into the whole ecosystem of our life. Texts like these are not writing on a wall texts which give us clear action in any situation. Texts like this are actually the flashlight which illuminates every situation itself so that we might apply wisdom to what we now see clearly.

With that said, let's look at our next point today: **A Humble View of Self**. Read with me the **Luke 6:27-31**.

In 1971 a black pastor by the name of John Perkins drove to a police station where many of his parishioners had been arrested on their way home from a non-violent protest. When he arrived at the police station he was told to wait outside and the sheriff would come out and speak to him. Instead the entire precinct came out, handcuffed Perkins, and violently assaulted him for an extended period of time.

He recounted specifically the eyes of the men who struck him and said, "I saw the evil of racism in the eyes of those white folks." As he was driven to the hospital, hatred grew in his heart. He was resolved to

never see a white person again. But when he arrived at the hospital it was a white doctor, and white nurses, the same skin color who just violated him, where now the ones healing him.

In that moment he prayed that if he were to ever get out of that hospital room, that he would "preach a gospel that would save us blacks and whites together."

Our world loves these kinds of stories. But look at our clothes. We live in a culture which will cancel and permanently banish people for the smallest offenses or slightest divergences from their own side's talking points. But here is a man who was nearly beaten to death and was not only overcome with love, but sought to do good to those who hated him.

We might admire, and even long for, that sort of conviction but did you notice the position in which such clarity came? Devastating humility.

John Perkins may not have died in that hospital bed, but his pride did. In a world of instant villainization, public vindication, and personal gratification we will never be able to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, or lend to those who take from us until our pride is seen with gospel clarity.

When we look soberly at gospel-love, it is offensive to the world because it is offensive to our own view of self. Gospel love looks different because gospel shaped people view themselves differently.

Consider how Paul describes this in **Romans 12:14-21**.

Did you see what Paul included in the middle there? Never be wise in your own sight. He opens this section by saying: **Romans 12:3**.

Now do we better understand the nature of Jesus' words in **Luke 6:31**.

Do you see the humility this requires? We read this and assume the best about ourselves! We assume the golden rule means that we deserve to be treated better! But the context of this comes as if to say: "What if you were the hater, what if you were the enemy, what if you were the thief, what if you were the beggar, what if you were the scoffer, the curser and the angry man!"

In those moments, how would you want to be treated? You see we are motivated to love our enemies when we realize that to some people we will, by nature of our sin, become their enemies.

This is the basis of Christian charity, the word the King James Version uses to define Christian love. Christian charity begins by realizing that we will simultaneously be ones giving charity and ones in need of receiving it.

Look at what James says about our own hearts in **James 3:2a**. We all stumble. We all sin. We cannot love sinners unless we ourselves realize we too will be and have been the enemy.

It's in this paradox we see one of the most defining marks of Christian love—it is elective.

Husbands, what happens when you see a woman at work who is more attractive than your wife? Wives, what happens when you wake up one morning and don't feel like you're in love with your husband anymore? How can we love our enemies when they are unworthy of love? You elect to love them.

Biblical love includes emotions, but biblical love is driven by choice. Jesus here isn't calling us to love what is easy, he's calling us to choose to love what is hard. We love others because we know others will need to choose to love us. There's nothing more fear-inducing than an economy of love based off our present performance. Christian love, is love that reaches beyond performance and loves others because God loved us irrespective of our own performance.

He loved us when we were his enemies. He loved us when we were the scoffers and the haters. This is why it's not only a sober view of self which sets apart Christian love but also and chiefly **A Clear View of Salvation**.

We love others not only because we all find ourselves in need of love from others. But we love others because each and every one of us has found ourselves in need of mercy from God.

Read with me **Luke 6:32-36**.

Our world loves to market to us the patented privilege of a product: "Buy this because we have this patented technology no one else has." What is the patent of Christian love? What separates it from everything else? The experience believers have with God the Father through the Son.

This produces a distinction in our value system. Christians love differently because they've been loved differently. We love different people for different reasons than the world does.

Jesus says sinners love those who love them. Sinners do good to those who do good to them. Sinners lend generously to those who will lend generously back to them the same principle.

But Jesus asks a really profound question here. He actually asks it three times too. Did you catch it? What benefit is it to you do live like that? What credit is that to you? What credit is it to you if you get back what you give?

It's a rhetorical question though isn't it? The credit is huge by worldly standards. It's safe. There's no risk in extending love, extending action and extending generosity to those who are ready, willing and able to reciprocate it. In fact in our day and age it's costly to love, do good, and be generous to our enemies.

When we lose a corporate category of sin, we encounter people as problems which need to be exterminated instead of individuals in need of redemption. When we lose sin it becomes a zero sum game. If we want peace threats must be purged.

Which means that our attempts to reach back with affection instead of aggression will always be seen as a threat to progress instead of the solution.

But our reward, our credit is of a different nature. We don't live to be affirmed by the world or paid back by those we love. Our benefit is of a different nature. Look back at **Luke 6:35**.

This is nothing short of gospel logic. Expect nothing back and enjoy your reward.

What is that reward? You will be sons of the Most High.

This word is neon light in the book of Luke. This phrase "son of the Most High" has only been used once in the book so far. It's when the angel appeared to Mary and told her this: **Luke 1:31-32a**.

What is the reward of loving others in costly ways? The reward is that we are loved by God himself in the same way Jesus is loved by God himself. We are loved by God the Father with the same love he loves Jesus the son. In other words we love in costly ways not because we want the reward of sinners, we love in costly ways because we have been awarded the love of God.

We don't love fearing it not coming back. We don't give fearing we will be left with nothing. We don't do good anxious that good will not be done back to us. Why? Because by the blood of Jesus we are children of the Most High. We lack nothing.

What is this called? Mercy. Look at how Jesus concludes this **Luke 6:35-36**.

Now careful when you read this. The grammar of this sentence isn't "God is kind to those ungrateful and those evil people." It says, "he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." Who is "the" in this sentence? It is the "you," who are sons of the Most High.

You see Jesus isn't saying be kind to others because God will be kind to them too. He's saying love, do good, be generous to your enemies why? Because God was kind to you. You were the problem.

You see there's a difference between mercy and grace. Our culture is fine with grace. Grace is simply getting something you don't deserve. It would be gracious of me to give each of you in here a hot cup of coffee. But it wouldn't be merciful for me to do that.

Grace is getting something you don't deserve, it's an unmerited gift. But mercy is not getting what you do deserve, it's the withdrawing of just punishment.

God's kindness to us was that he gave mercy to our ungrateful and evil hearts. He didn't ignore the wrong. He didn't ignore the evil. He didn't wipe the ungratefulness under the rug. Instead he poured out all of that deserved vindication, deserved retribution, and deserved justice on the very man who uttered these profound words.

You see Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to extend mercy, because Jesus was the very mercy which would forgive his own enemies.

Our world cannot love like this because our world has no mechanism for true mercy. Without a sovereign God, any mercy we give out is mercy apart from justice. Because of that we can't imagine loving, doing good, and giving to our enemies because they really did wrong! To forgive them is to simply belittle their sin. But the cross is the mechanism of mercy which produces love.

My car was ran into just a few days before Christmas and it wasn't my fault. I got out and interacted with the woman and my whole goal was to say, "It's ok, this doesn't ruin Christmas, are you alright?"

Now in that moment it's not that she didn't hit my car. It's not that I wanted to pay for the damages. It's just that I knew there were procedures in place, insurances and authorities who would deal with that. Knowing that at the end of the day justice would be applied allowed me to focus on being kind, gracious and loving.

This is why worldly love is always limited. It desires mercy, but presents no justice, so instead it settled for the naked love. But we are children of mercy. We are children who have seen the clothes of love on the cross of Jesus. We love because we have first been loved. We love because while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.