Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we continue a sermon series titled, “So You Can Know For Sure.” It is a study through the Gospel of Luke. The text we are studying today is ▶ Luke 6:27-36.

This text is made up entirely of the words of Jesus about love. His words spoken to his disciples are hauntingly beautiful. And shocking. I am simultaneously drawn to them and overwhelmed by them.

Let me show you what I mean. In ▶ Luke 6:27, Jesus says,

> ESV Luke 6:27 “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies . . .”

Jesus is the only person in all the Bible to say, “Love your enemies.” In fact, as far as we know, Jesus is the first teacher in world history to say this.[1] It is shocking. It is unparalleled. It is matchless. It explains why this is the single most cited teaching of Jesus in all existing literature dating from the second century.[2] That’s an ancient version of going viral.

Loving your enemies as a moral code was unprecedented, and it is still largely unpracticed. When we do a little more digging, we can see why.

The original Greek word translated “love” is ἀγαπάω *(ahgaw-PAW-oh)*. It is a love that has little to do with sentimental feelings. It involves choosing to serve the best interests of others, often at considerable cost to ourselves. And the “others” in this case are our enemies, those who are hateful and hostile toward us. Jesus says, “Love your enemies.”

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[1] DelHousaye, John, *The Fourfold Gospel, Vol. 2: From Summons to Signs* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 227-228.
[2] Ibid, 228.

In the last part of ▶ verse 27 and all of verse 28, Jesus clarifies the idea by offering three more ways of saying the same thing.

> ESV Luke 6:27 ". . . do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

Of these three commands, ▶ "do good those who hate you" and "pray for those who abuse you" are the easiest to understand. And they corroborate that loving enemies is not about feeling something; it is about doing something—something for the benefit of one's enemies. It is not just about forsaking revenge; it is also about responding to evil with good that is undeserved and shocking.

Probably the most difficult command for modern hearers to grasp is ▶ "bless those who curse you." To better understand this, it is helpful to consider the historical context. By the time the gospel of Luke was written and circulated, Christians were formally cursed in local synagogue services as a part of worship. We have a copy of a curse traditionally believed to have been written around AD 80-110. It is a curse directed at heretical groups, particularly Jewish Christians, who were considered dangerous to the non-Christian Jewish community. It reads . . .

> *And for apostates let there be no hope; and may [they] perish quickly; and may they be erased from the Book of Life and may they not be inscribed with the righteous. Blessed be thou, Lord, who humblest the insolent.*[3]

This is an example of how early Christians were being cursed. In response to such cursing, Jesus calls his followers to do the opposite—to bless instead. To bless is to call down God's gracious favor upon the very enemies who curse you. That's loving your enemies.

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[3] Ibid, 231.

This is also a good place to point out that the enemies in view in our text are primarily enemies as a direct result of our relationship with Christ.[4] This is corroborated by the immediately preceding context. In ▶ Luke 6:22, Jesus says,

> ESV Luke 6:22 "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!"

The reason for the opposition faced is "on account of the Son of Man." We have learned that this describes adversaries faced as a direct result of living for Jesus. Jesus says we are to love these enemies.

Back in our text, Jesus gives some illustrations of what loving our enemies can look like. In the first part of ▶ verse 29, Jesus says,

> ESV Luke 6:29 "To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, . . .

This likely describes a back-handed slap in the face. This was a characteristically Jewish way of insulting or shaming someone considered to be inferior. In a culture obsessed with honor and shame, this was a severe afront to a person's dignity.[5]

In the face of such an egregious offense, Jesus doesn't just say "Don't retaliate." He goes further. He bids us to freely offer our offender the other cheek also—to keep loving in a way that leaves open the possibility of further abuse.[6]

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[4] Bock, Darrell L., *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 588.
[5] DelHousaye, John, *The Fourfold Gospel, Vol. 2: From Summons to Signs* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 223; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 197-198.
[6] Bock, Darrell L., *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 591.

This is shocking. And the shock waves keep coming.

In the last part of ▶ verse 29, Jesus gives another illustration of what loving enemies can look like. He says,

> ESV Luke 6:29 ". . . and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either."

A "cloak" is an outer garment. Today, we might call it a coat or jacket. A "tunic" is an undergarment worn next to the skin. Today, we might call it underwear.

The picture here is one of robbery. When an enemy robs us of our outer clothing, we should not resist or retaliate; rather, we should freely relinquish our underwear, too.

That would leave us naked in public. It would certainly be an embarrassment today, but even more so in the Jewish culture of first-century Palestine, in which such nudity would be an unthinkable dishonor.

And Jesus is not done with his shocking illustrations. In ▶ verse 30, he says,

> ESV Luke 6:30 "Give to everyone who begs from you, . . ."

The term "begs" may suggest that panhandlers are in view. But the original Greek word is αἰτέω *(eye-TEH-oh)*, which is a general term for asking for or demanding something. It can include begging, but is not limited to it. Given the general nature of this verb and the fact that the context is about loving enemies, panhandlers are probably not specifically in view because panhandlers are not usually enemies.

Instead, this is a general call to give to every enemy who asks for something.

An ancient example would be Roman soldiers occupying Palestine, who were generally considered enemies by the Jews. Tax revenues did not completely cover the needs of the Roman army, so soldiers could requisition whatever they lacked from local Jewish inhabitants. Essentially, these enemies could demand things from locals. As you can imagine, there were abuses.[7]

Jesus says, "Give to everyone who asks from you." There are no caveats or exceptions given. I looked it up; the original Greek term translated "everyone" means "everyone." If any antagonist asks for something, just cough it up.

And if this doesn't make you uncomfortable enough, Jesus adds one more illustration in the second part of ▶ verse 30.

> ESV Luke 6:30 ". . . and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back."

This is about being a victim of theft. Jesus seems to say, if you get ripped off by an enemy, Lerner and Rowe is ***not*** the way to go. Forget justice. Don't even try to get your stuff back. Just eat it.

Right about now, you are thinking there must be a catch to all this. "Bob, help us here; I brought guests." You're *hoping* there is a catch.

And there is. Sort of.

[7] Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 199.

Jesus is employing something called rhetorical overstatement. It is hyperbole. He is exaggerating for effect to heighten the importance of what he is saying.[8]

The illustrations are deliberately shocking because the love Jesus commands is culturally shocking. And that's the point. Jesus calls for a love that is way outside the norm—a love that is completely out of step with the world.

Jesus is not giving a to-do list; he is administering a heart check that assesses our priorities.

In each illustration, Jesus is simply saying nothing should be more important than demonstrating the shocking love of God to others, including enemies.

In all the illustrations of loving enemies in verses 29 and 30, a hypothetical enemy is taking something of great cultural value—our honor or our property. For example, when slapped in the face, we suffer a loss of personal dignity; we are degraded. And yet, we are not to let that indignity dissuade us from continuing to love our enemies because demonstrating the shocking love of Jesus is more important than our dignity.

If there is a choice between defending our honor and demonstrating God's love, love always wins.

If there is a choice between keeping our property and demonstrating God's love, love always wins.

[8] Ibid, 195; Stein, Robert H., *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 208.

That is the message Jesus embodied on the cross. Through his crucifixion, Jesus is essentially saying, “Nothing is more important to me than demonstrating my love for you—not my honor, not my dignity, not my physical wellbeing, not my comfort, not my very life. The opportunity to demonstrate my love for you is more important than all else.”

Jesus would endure all the illustrations he gives in our text. He would allow his enemies to shamefully slap him in the face. He would allow his enemies to strip him naked. He would allow his enemies to take everything from him without resisting.

His submission is poignantly and prophetically pictured in ▶ Isaiah 53:7:

> ESV Isaiah 53:7 . . . like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

He did it on purpose to demonstrate his shocking love for his enemies.

You may be thinking, “Yes, but I wasn’t his enemy.”

The apostle Paul begs to differ. In ▶ Romans 5:10, he addresses believers, saying,

> ESV Romans 5:10 . . . while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son . . .

There it is. Jesus died for us while we were his enemies, not yet reconciled, still at odds with him. Two verses earlier, in ▶ Romans 5:8, Paul said the same thing.

> ESV Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus didn't love and die for us because we were on good terms with him. He loved and died for us because that is who he is.

You may be wondering if all this is a dangerous recipe for enabling abuse. A battered wife may be thinking, "I guess I must continue to allow my husband to beat me."

No!

Remember, the priority is to demonstrate the shocking love of Jesus to others. We must exercise discernment and wisdom, perhaps in consultation with godly leaders, to determine if our response is truly loving or something less, like enabling. In the case of spousal abuse, often the most loving thing a victim can do is call the police and get out of harm's way so that the abuser can be helped, or at least disarmed.

Having provided the salvo of shocking illustrations, Jesus issues the golden rule in ▶ verse 31,

> ESV Luke 6:31 "And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."

This idea of treating others the way you would want to be treated is not unique to Jesus. Some extrabiblical sources say much the same thing. Neither does it seem to be as shocking as what Jesus has said previously.

By itself, and as it is understood in secular circles, the golden rule seems to carry an implied quid-pro-quo, a reciprocity, a moral symmetry—I do good to you and, in turn, you do good to me.

But that is not what Jesus is talking about. Remember, enemies are in view. So, in context, the golden rule becomes, "Treat enemies the way you would want to be treated, even though they mistreat you." There is no

moral reciprocity or symmetry in view. Jesus makes this clear, beginning in ▶ verse 32.

> ESV Luke 6:32 “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.”

> ▶ ESV Luke 6:33 “And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.”

> ▶ ESV Luke 6:34 “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.”

The term “sinners” is not used here to distinguish people who sin from people who don’t, because everybody sins. It is used to describe the secular populace, the people of the world, the pagan culture.

The point is: Everybody embraces the golden rule if there is reciprocity. Loving people who love you back is neither extraordinary nor Christlike. When I love someone with the expectation of a return from them in kind, I am not demonstrating the shocking love of Jesus. Quid pro quo love is of no benefit in representing Christlike love.

Jesus issues a corrective in ▶ verse 35.

> ESV Luke 6:35 “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.”

Jesus touches on two great benefits of demonstrating his shocking love to others.

First, ▶ “your reward will be great.” Jesus is referring to reward given to certain believers in heaven for living for him, including loving enemies. We discussed such reward in our study of the immediately preceding context from which we drew the big idea: Living for Jesus is well worth the trouble. The great heavenly reward includes things like commendation, honor, a greater capacity for joy, and a greater participation is the glorious reign of Christ in the kingdom to come.

The second benefit is easy to miss or misunderstand. It’s where Jesus says, ▶ “you will be sons of the Most High.” Our text is addressed to believers who already have God, the Most High, as their Father. Believers are already “sons.” Therefore, the verb translated “will be” should be understood to mean “will show yourselves to be.”[9]

When we demonstrate shocking love to our enemies, we show ourselves to be children of God. This is because God himself shows shocking love to his enemies. The last part of ▶ verse 35 explains, “for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”

Jesus summarizes in ▶ verse 36:

> ESV Luke 6:36 “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

We are to be merciful, particularly to our enemies, because it shows the world who are heavenly Father is. God’s shocking love is manifest in us.

And his shocking love draws people. Jesus explains the dynamic in ▶ John 12:32, when, in reference to his own crucifixion at the hands of his enemies, he says,

[9] Stein, Robert H., *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 209; Bock, Darrell L., *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 603.

> ESV John 12:32 “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

The connection between the cross and shocking love is undeniable, and this shocking love is an attractional force that draws people to Jesus.

The drawing force of shocking love was felt by a Roman centurion who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. The centurion had likely witnessed many others crucified. He knew the typical responses of the men tortured and humiliated in this way.

Yet there was nothing typical about Jesus.

The centurion looked on as his own soldiers, along with Jewish religious leaders, mocked and shamed Jesus hanging naked on the cross.

Surely, the centurion never heard anyone bless the very enemies who mocked and crucified them. As Jesus was dying, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34, ESV).

The shock of such love on the centurion is reflected in ▶ Mark 15:39.

> ESV Mark 15:39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

Theological arguments for the deity of Christ did not persuade the centurion. Shocking love did.

When we demonstrate the shocking love of Jesus to others, it has the same effect. It draws them to Jesus. And that brings us to the big idea of my sermon: ▶ The shocking love of Jesus in us draws others to him.

Of course, not everyone is willing to go where they are drawn. But sometimes, his love in us is the very thing that brings someone to faith.

Some years after the crucifixion of Christ, Stephen was a man described as "full of grace and power." He lived for Jesus, which made some enemies. After preaching about Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin, he was stoned to death. As Stephen was dying, he applied the words of Jesus in our text and followed his example on the cross. ▶ Acts 7:60 records,

> CSB17 Acts 7:60 He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And after saying this, he died.

Stephen's shocking love for his enemies was felt by a certain young onlooker who happened to be taking care of the outer garments shed by the witnesses who stoned Stephen. ▶ Acts 7:58 explains,

> ESV Acts 7:58 . . . And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Saul would eventually become the apostle Paul. We are not told explicitly what effect Stephen had on young Saul. But it is not a stretch to assume that Stephen's demonstration of Jesus's shocking love softened Saul's heart in preparation for faith.

Which brings us back to the big idea: ▶ The shocking love of Jesus in us draws others to him.

In 1915, about a million Armenians, many of them Christians, were systematically slaughtered by the Turks. In one village home, after murdering the parents, a Turkish officer kept their eldest daughter as his personal slave. Over many months, he repeatedly abused her sexually. Eventually, she was able to escape and rebuild her life. She became a nurse, working in an intensive care unit.

Years later, a badly wounded man was brought into her unit, requiring her round-the-clock care. She recognized the man as her abuser, the one who had murdered her parents. After the man recovered, his doctor pointed to the nurse and said to the man, "What a fortunate man you are. Without her constant care you would have never made it." The Turkish officer recognized the nurse.

Later, when they were alone, the Turkish officer said to her, "I don't understand. Why didn't you kill me when you had the opportunity? Why didn't you just let me die?"

The nurse replied, "Because I am a follower of the one who said, 'love your enemies.'"[10]

The shocking love of Jesus in us draws others to him.

In 1996, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was convened in the wake of South African apartheid and the associated atrocities. The rules were simple and gracious: If a person committing a racially motivated hate crime voluntarily faced his accusers, confessed his crime, and fully acknowledged his guilt, he could not be tried and punished for that crime.

A white policeman in South Africa named van de Broek was on trial. He confessed to shooting an eighteen-year-old black boy and then burning his dead body. Then van de Broek further confessed to seizing the boy's father and forcing his wife to watch, as her husband was bound to a woodpile, doused with gasoline, and burned alive.

The courtroom fell silent when the judge turned to the widow and bereaved mother and asked, "What do you want from Mr. van de Broek?"

[10] Recounted by DelHousaye, John, *The Fourfold Gospel, Vol. 2: From Summons to Signs* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 229.

She said, “Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. And I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real.”

As the woman stood up and made her way to van de Broek, some in the courtroom began to sing “Amazing Grace.” Mr. van de Broek fainted.[11]

The shocking love of Jesus in us draws others to him.

If you are living for Jesus today, it can feel like enemies are increasingly trying to take things we value: our honor, our freedom, our voice, our rights, our heritage. In response, it can be sorely tempting to grab the reigns of earthly power, forsaking all the while the greatest power we already have that no one can take: the shocking love of Jesus in us.

We can bemoan the apparent advance of our enemies. Or we can see it as our greatest opportunity to show them the shocking love of Jesus. It is the only power that will prevail.

Let’s pray. Lord, may our shocking love show through us to our enemies so that they may be drawn to you. Amen.

[11] Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World: What on Earth Are We Missing?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 223-224.