

Extreme Love – Luke 6:27-36

Last fall we kicked off our “Be Amazed” theme for the year fr Hab 1:5 . . .
We’ve been focusing on the life of Christ as found in the book of Luke . . .
Amazed all over again, or for the first time, at who Jesus is and what he did

This morning – Luke 6, about 1 ½ years into Christ’s ministry
Having spent most of his first year in and around Jerusalem . . .
We catch up with him at the beginning of his famous Sermon on the Mount, in the
region of Galilee in the north
We’re going to find in these next several chapters that Jesus describes the life and
attitudes of his followers, as one of **Extremes**
As in, there’s nothing neutral, blasé, nothing middle-of-the-road about living for Christ
It’s a life characterized by extreme forgiveness, allegiance, mercy . . .
And in Luke 6, Extreme Love (EL)

Luke 6:27-36

OT teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Lev 19:18)
Jesus said that we could fulfill the whole Law if we could just love God with all our
heart and our neighbor as ourselves
But here, Jesus takes it a step further and tells us to love our *enemies*
That’s a problem
Either so far out there that we ignore it, or so difficult we refuse to even try

Can’t read this passage and take it to heart without feeling incredibly uncomfortable
It’s extreme

Jesus is saying you’re going to have enemies
But instead of hating them like they hate you – he wants you to *love* them
Not just ignore them, or steer clear of them – but actually love them
That’s about as extreme as it gets

Let’s just be honest about it . . .

It’s hard to swallow (27-31)

Hard to accept; It doesn’t make sense; It’s not natural
It cuts against the grain; Goes against every fiber of our being; Contrary to our nature
It’s counter-intuitive; It’s counter-cultural
Because the natural thing is to . . .
Fight back when you’re opposed; Lash out when you’re hated
Get mad when you’re cursed; Get even when you’re abused
Take revenge when you’re attacked; Insist on justice when you’re robbed
Turn away when you’re begged; Demand blood when you’re wronged
The natural thing is dog-eat-dog

But Jesus is like – uh-uh; That’s not my way; That’s not how I want you to live; I say . . .

• Choose to love (27a)

When he says, *love your enemies* – not talking about having a natural affection for them
Not talking about romantic love (eros)
Not talking about the love of friendships (philia)
He’s talking about *agape* love – the love of service and sacrifice
Love that supersedes natural inclinations, and often exists in spite of them
Love that is a deliberate act of your will, even when you don’t feel like it

In other words . . .

Choose to give of yourself for their benefit – time, effort, energy, thought
Choose to put your enemies ahead of yourself by serving them, sacrificing for them
and showing them kindness and interest
That’s the agape love of choice
That’s hard to swallow

• Help those who hate you (27b)

Agape love is the inward part, doing good to them is the outward part
They go hand in hand – you’re only halfway if you adjust your attitude but don’t do
anything about it

Story of Erich Honecher (Hughes Comm, 227)

Erich Honecher is one of those infamous figures of history that was largely forgotten
Head of Communist Party and leader of E. Germany in 1989 when Berlin wall fell
Stripped of his office, privileges, money; Even his house, unable to get another
Because he was an enemy of the state
Within matter of weeks he and wife Margot were destitute and literally homeless
Uwe Holmer, pastor of a Christian shelter north of Berlin
As unpopular as it was, Pastor Holmer thought he should help them, even though the
Honecher’s hated believers
It was Margot Honecher’s policies as head of the Education Ministry in E Germany
that prevented 8 of Pastor Holmer’s children from continuing their education
But instead of giving them beds in the shelter, they took them into their own home
I don’t know what the rest of that story is, but that’s what it means to help those who
hate you

• Return curses with compliments (28a)

Return the acidic venom of anger with soft answers
Return put-downs with encouragement
Return obscene gestures with a look of ache in your soul for hatred they must have
Return accusations with apologies

• Pray for those who mistreat you (28b)

Ask God to bless them; To intervene in their life
To show them such kindness that they are irresistibly drawn to him
I think this is as much for our sake as theirs
Praying for someone who mistreats you or abuses you, is perhaps the only way
you can have the mind of Christ when thinking about them
The only way you can refrain from hating them and abusing them yourself
EL may be hard to swallow, but it’s for your own good

• Do whatever it takes to keep the peace (29a)

His reference to being struck on the cheek probably refers to an insulting blow, either
physical or emotional, by someone who takes exception to your allegiance to Christ
When that happens – withhold retaliation/revenge, even if it means enduring more
suffering
Revenge is mine says the Lord; Not yours
Yours is to love your enemy for the sake of peace, and leave the punishment to God

He is not condemning self-defense if you're physically attacked
That's necessary sometimes; Even the apostles carried swords on occasion
He *is* condemning a vengeful attitude toward those who attack you
He *is* saying that we should *never* take the initiative to retaliate
He *is* calling us to do whatever it takes to avoid an escalation and keep the peace
If that's not hard to swallow, I don't know what is

- **Always be merciful (29b,30b,36)**

I love the story of the priest in Les Miserable of a priest who offered sanctuary to a hardened, but wrongly accused criminal named Jean Valjean . . .
Only to find in the morning that he had stolen some of his silver
When the authorities caught him, they brought him back to the priest
Much to their surprise, the priest told Jean Valjean that he had mistakenly left behind the rest of the fine silver, and proceeded to give it to him
What mercy! It softened Jean Valjean's heart
You never know what effect mercy will have on a person who is desperate

I'm not saying, and neither is Jesus, that criminals shouldn't be punished
Especially in light of Rom 13 – where governments are in place to punish evildoers
They should be punished; But we don't have to hate them
Always find a way to extend mercy – it may be the very thing that softens the heart of your enemy toward God and toward you
Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful (36)

- **Show much compassion (30a)**

He is not advocating a class of rich, lazy beggars
He's saying that we should cultivate a spirit of compassion and generosity toward those who lack basic needs
Need to use much discernment in this, so as not to enable those who don't *want* to break out of their poverty
But if you have to err, err on the side of compassion
I'm growing in this
Can't count the number of times that inconvenience has kept me from showing compassion
It's hard to swallow and hard to do

- **Practice the Golden Rule (31)**

Regardless of how others treat you, treat them right
I think most of the time we read this passively – we *don't* do bad things to others that we wouldn't want done to us
And we think we've fulfilled the Golden Rule
We are to *do* to others, especially our enemies, what we yearn for ourselves
It's not a passive thing, it's an active thing

That's going to extremes, don't you think?
So extreme that it's hard to swallow
But swallow hard we must, because it's the standard Jesus calls us to

Kent Hughes tells the **story of missionary couple** on furlough (Luke Commentary, 229)

Desperately needing to get away from things and take a break from years of ministry
Moved into a town home-like apartment with a large patio
It was the patio that the wife was most fond of – creative, decorated, sanctuary
All was good for 2 months, until new neighbors moved in next door
Crass, crude, played loud music, yelled obscenities, urinated on the front lawn in day
Crisis came when she returned home one day to find that the neighbor kids had spray painted her precious patio with bright orange paint
Needless to say, she had a hard time with them
She began to hate them, harbor bitterness in her heart toward them
As much as she knew it was wrong, she could not shake the hate
Until God reminded her of Col 3:14 – *Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony* [unity].
Convicted by that, she made a list of all the things she would do for her neighbors if she *really* loved them – bake cookies, baby-sit for free, have coffee with the mom, etc
Decided to do them – as she did, God began to change her heart
She began to understand them; Their pressures, situation
Started to like them because she chose to love them
So much so, that when time came to return to the mission field – wept at leaving them

That's the EL you and I are called to; Do you need to make a list? And at least try to do it?
See what I mean that it's hard to swallow?

The good part is . . .

It sets you apart (v32-36)

Read v32-36 – he's trying to shake us out of our doldrums
To break us of our comfortable, status quo thinking; Separate us from the herd
The whole idea is to love like the saint you are, not the sinner you used to be
There's no benefit in that
There's no praise for loving only those who love you
Doing good to those who do good to you
Lending to those who can easily repay
That's love based on merit – "I'll love you as long as you love me"
It's the furthest thing from the extreme agape love that's neither based on merit nor performance

Jesus calls us to a higher standard; A standard of EL that . . .
Sets you apart as a son or daughter of the Most High (35b)
Leads to great reward – like earthy joy and heavenly bliss
We don't love in order to get rewards, like we spend on our credit cards to get miles
But looking forward to and enjoying God's blessings, in whatever form they come, is how he made it
And receiving them sets us apart

Pursuing that standard of EL is simple, but it's not easy; It starts with . . .
An all-consuming *desire* to please God
To please him by doing what he says – *Love your enemies*
A rock-solid *trust* that God's way is best – *as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them*
An unshakable *confidence* that God will take care of you – *your reward will be great*

HBC – nothing will set us apart as a church, like loving those who don't love us
I well know that many of you already do this
But I'm pretty sure that many of you don't; That you struggle with it just like I do
What would our church be like if every single one of us without exception loved our
enemies, blessed those who cursed us, prayed for those who abuse us, and did good to
those who hate us?
You think there's a buzz *now* about all that God is doing among us!
We haven't seen anything yet

Let's commit today to be set apart by showing love in the extreme, no matter what the cost
Can we do that – individually and together?

If you're thinking, there's no way; I can't love like that; I don't have it in me
You're right; None of us do, because . . .

It comes from God (1 John 4:7-11)

You can't manufacture EL – **read 1 John 4:7-10**

7a – *Love is from God* – Extreme love comes from God

9-10 – God sent his Son into this world to suffer and satisfy God's wrath (propitiation)
for people like you and I who didn't even love him; That's *extreme*

11 – we should love one another, enemies included, just like he loved us

Just like this (hold up bread and cup) – this was extreme love

EL that was hard to swallow

As in – *Father, take this cup from me*

EL for us, his enemies – *while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by
the death of his Son* (Rom 5:10)

EL of praying for those who cursed him

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. (Lk 23:24)

If you're the recipient of that kind of EL this morning, join us at the **Communion**

Eat/drink in remembrance of him

If you can't say that, let the elements pass

Consider what's keeping you from embracing the EL of Christ

Maybe it's lack of belief; Lack of faith; An unwillingness to turn from your sins

Whatever it is, deal with it now; Don't wait; Don't test the patience of God

Get answers to your questions, humble yourself, and run to him

Distribute the bread and cup; Hang on to them; Take a few minutes to . . .

Get right before God; Thank him for the EL he showed you in Christ

Consider the EL he's calling you to

When the time comes, I'll lead us in taking them together

Pray for bread and cup

Take the elements

*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the
propitiation for our sins.* (1 Jn 4:10)

Let's eat in remembrance of that

Then the cup – which represents Christ's blood and the life he gave to secure our salvation

That's extreme love – let's drink in remembrance of that

Close

Building; DG's; Christian Barbosu