

The Gospel According to Luke
November 25, 2018
Reading: Matthew 5:38-48

Sermon #24
Luke 6:27-38

True Christian Character

Benchmarks of Christian Character

So far we have learned from Luke and the words recorded of Jesus that there are a number of characteristics or benchmarks true of Christians. I think the list would begin with one being broken by the knowledge of their sin and they repent before their holy God. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “[For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.](#)” (2 Corinthians 7:10) This realization of who we are and who God is results in our humility. James quoted Proverbs 3:34 of God’s attitude, “[God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.](#)” (James 4:6) It is these traits that change one and enables one to begin living for the glory of God. As Paul instructed believers and as he himself strived for in his life, “[whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.](#)” (1 Corinthians 10:31) In order to live for the glory of God one must bathe new life into their heart, soul and mind, by time spent connecting to God spiritually. The scriptures teach believers that they are to be, “[praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance ...](#)” (Ephesians 6:18) Becoming alert to God’s desire for our lives leads us to spiritually separate from the world and view life from the precepts of God’s Word. James taught, “[... friendship with the world is enmity with God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.](#)” (James 4:4) Once we separate ourselves from the ambitions of the world to live for the glory of God we are able to grow spiritually leading us on that path of sanctification. Through Christ we are spiritually born anew and “[Like newborn](#)

infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.” (1 Peter 2:2) This new life, this new purpose allows us to begin to share the gospel with the world that desperately needs the Savior. Jesus said of those of true faith they understand he is our source of life and believe, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. . . . ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” (John 15:5 and 8) As one grows spiritually they understand we must live in obedience to God and His Word. Jesus was clear when he said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)

As believers whose whole purpose in life has been changed we are given new birth spiritually and this develops a hunger for God’s Word because it breathes life into our souls. It is all these things that transform us from people of the world to followers of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It gives full meaning to “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18) All of these characteristics are critical to the life of a Christian. But, the foundation of a Christian’s life and the foundation of all these characteristics is love, not as the world loves, but as we begin to love differently, as we come to know the love of God and his agape love changes everything about us. First and foremost we love God who through his unconditional love, grace and mercy sent his only Son to atone for the sins of the world. What Jesus taught was true for him, while he was on earth, and is true for all believers for all time until his return, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38) To love the Lord with all ones heart is foundational for Christians.

Another sign of the love believers are given is the love they exhibit towards fellow believers; for Jesus said the world would be watching and take notice of how believers treat each other. Jesus taught, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) This is a commandment from our Lord and to not show a deep love and affection for other believers is to sin and the world is watching. What is the witness of the “broad church” to the world? What is the witness of the “remnant church” to the world in how they love each other? The final love sign of believers is for them to love unbelievers - for we were once as they are. We are to love unbelievers and yet Apostle John teaches, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:15-17) We are to model our lives after Jesus who loved those who rejected him. From the cross Jesus pleaded to God the Father, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) Jesus expects us to love unbelievers with the same commitment.

To live faithfully and to be a good witness for Christ in this world one needs the Fruit of the Spirit of which love is foundational. Paul laid this out, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” The

first fruit is love and is the foundation of the rest. When we surrender to Christ and the Holy Spirit these things become possible and protect us from “the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:22-24; 19-21) God has separated believers of the influences of the world through Christ and by his power the Holy Spirit.

This Thanksgiving we should know why and what to be thankful for – God’s salvation through his Son Jesus Christ, the blessings of family and the community of church. But God wants us also to be people of action – action fueled by his love, grace and mercy. God wants to protect us by his power so he indwells us with the Holy Spirit, but we are not to be isolated from the world. It is the truth found in the Scriptures that God commands us to be his ambassadors, agents of change to the world. Jesus wants us to understand the perils of the world, but not isolate ourselves; we are to engage in a cosmic battle until his return. Jesus commands his followers with the following - “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20) To live, as a Christian, in this world is the opposite of isolationism, hating ones enemies, being judgmental and living with an air of haughtiness towards unbelievers. To engage in Jesus’ cosmic battle founded on love for the souls of people brings us to his teaching this morning found in Luke chapter 6 from verse 27 to 38.

True vs. Worldly Love

True disciples of Jesus love with his supernatural ability – even those who are the enemies of Christ. Reading Luke 6, verses 27 and 28, “**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.**” Vengeance belongs to the unbelieving world. The world makes heroes of those who do not take guff off of anyone. The movies have developed what are referred to as “dark heroes” for they not only protect their own interests, but they stand up to all those who oppose them and punish them. Many look down upon Hitler for his massive atrocities – do they do so because he lost the war or because of the evil he committed? Stalin was equally evil and yet many in Russia view him as a hero for building a strong Russia. Stalin desired revenge and took it against any that opposed him. Stalin said, “**To choose one’s victim, to prepare one’s plan minutely, to slake an *cruel* vengeance, and then to go to bed – there is nothing sweeter in the world.**” Stalin spent his vengeance on millions and millions suffered and died through torture, exile and brutal death. Russia was economically stronger and became a world power, but at what cost and built upon what foundation?

Let me tell you - little was different in Jesus’ time. Yes, you say, we know the Romans ruled with an iron fist, brutally killing any that stood in its way. Yes, this is true, but I was thinking of Israel. Judaism was intolerant of any who did not follow its narrow way. Israel hated its enemies, especially Gentiles of whom the Romans they hated the most. There is a Talmud truism that a Jew is not to save a Gentile that falls into the sea. Jews were to let the Gentile world destroy itself and have nothing to do with those they considered Israel’s enemies. This is why many Jews, especially those in positions of power, viewed Jesus’ command to “**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray**

for those who abuse you” as inconceivable and deplorable. Jesus knew in a world full of hate that hope both here on earth and for eternity future had to be based on love. Both Paul and God made clear to believers, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ ” (Romans 12:19 quoting Deuteronomy 32:35) Jesus’ teaching was not a new teaching for in Proverbs we read, “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.” When one shows love towards their enemy it will convict them of their need for God, that is the reason the next verse reads, “for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.” (Proverbs 25:21-22) The Lord rewards acts of love not violence. We are to spend our energy and time praying for the salvation of the lost and the enemies of God for it is hoped that they will repent and we will be able to call them brother and sister. We are to care for their needs and show kindness.

Northern Pakistan had a massive earthquake in 2005. Many of their villages look like the 18th and 19th century villages of New Mexico with houses and buildings made of adobe bricks. The difference is that they do not use wooden beams to strengthen the structures. The earthquake shook the buildings and they came apart. Make no mistake Islam is an enemy of God, but Jesus says we are to “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” This is exactly what the underground Christian church did at the risk of being exposed and attacked by the government. One village lost an entire generation – the children were in school in a 2-story adobe building, it collapsed and all the children of the village perished. Pakistani Christians arrived with insulated tents because it was winter and they brought food and medicine. One village elder asked where were their Muslim brothers, where

are the Saudi's with all their oil money? Because of the efforts of Christians a few things resulted. First, many Muslims who had either feared or hated Christians began to think differently about Christians. Second, some began to listen to the gospel; they became what we call seekers willing to listen. Third, a few came to know Christ as their Savior and the foothold was created to birth a new church community in several villages.

Jesus goes beyond saying love you enemy – this is not so hard to do when people are peaceful. Jesus says in verse 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.**” For those who respond in unkind ways, not just rejecting the message of the gospel and those sharing it, but respond in violence we are called to respond with peace. We may not see the result of our acts of love and peace, but our Lord says this is the way of life for Christians.

Let me tell you a story of someone who gave love amid violence and the result. Telemachus was a monk who lived in the 4th century in rural Italy. He felt God wanted him to do something, but was not sure what. So he prayed and prayed and after some time he felt God was saying to him, “Go to Rome.” Out of obedience he left his monastery. He put his few possessions in a sack and journeyed to Rome. After weeks of travel he arrived in the city. As he entered people were flooding into the streets. He felt he had arrived at the exact time God had wanted. He asked why all the excitement and was told that this was the day that the gladiators would be fighting and killing each other in the coliseum, the day of the games, the great circus. He thought to himself, “Four centuries after Christ and they are still killing each other, for enjoyment!” He prayed to God, why do they remain so lost? He then ran to the coliseum and heard the gladiators saying, “Hail to Caesar, we die for Caesar” and he thought, “Lord this isn't right.” He

jumped over the railing and went out into the middle of the field, got between two gladiators, held up his hands and said, “In the name of Christ, this must stop!” The coliseum was designed and built so that one could be clearly heard throughout the arena. The crowd protested and began to chant, “Run him through, run him through.” A gladiator came over and hit him in the stomach with the back of his sword. It sent him sprawling in the sand. The monk got up and again shouted, “In the name of Christ this must end.” The crowd continued to chant, “Run him through.” One gladiator came over and plunged his sword through the monk and he fell into the sand and it began to turn crimson with his blood. The crowd was at first excited at the sight of blood, but then grew quite. One last time this gentle monk gasped out, “In the name of Christ – Stop!” At hearing this monk’s plea, a hush came over the 80,000 people in the coliseum. It became deadly quite. Soon a few people stood and left, and then more left, and within a short time all 80,000 had emptied out of the arena. It was the last known gladiator contest in the history of Rome. This monk died before seeing 80,000 people changed and the history of the gladiators ended, but by faith he lived and by faith he died to the glory of God and history was changed. Did he understand exactly what God planned – I don’t think so. Did he have doubts – most likely! But he was obedient to death just like his Lord and Savior. As Paul wrote 300 years earlier, Jesus [“being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”](#) (Philippians 2:8)

Jesus continues saying, [“from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.”](#) Many people owned only one cloak or coat that they wore during the day and at night it served as a blanket. To take a person’s cloak was a serious matter, in fact Mosaic Law required that a coat taken, as a pledge, be return by sundown. Moses wrote in Exodus the words of God, [“If ever you take](#)

your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down,²⁷ for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.”

(Exodus 22:26-27) To take someone's cloak and not return it was considered a serious violation, but if it happened to a disciple of Christ, they were not to retaliate. Instead they should continue to do good and minister to the one who abused them and if the abuser went further and they lost their inner shirt or tunic exposing them to the elements – again they were to continue to lovingly minister to the lost for their need for Christ is greater than the Christian's need for clothing.

Verse 30 goes further, “Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.” Since the scriptures condemn laziness here it is assumed that someone is asking for a legitimate need. But if the unbeliever does not repay the loan or return what was borrowed, again the Christian is to continue ministering to the person in hopes they will come to believe in Jesus. The 2nd half of the verse says, “one who takes away your goods” this implies a believer is robbed; again the Christian is to continue to witness and minister to the unbeliever. No matter what the circumstance the Christian does not seek revenge. This does not necessarily mean a Christian does not go through the justice system to hold someone accountable. But the followers of Christ are to respond as Jesus did, “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” (1 Peter 2:23)

Jesus then speaks of what has come to be called the “Golden Rule”. In verse 31, “And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” Jesus is calling for Christians to have selfless love, love that is more concerned with the welfare of others. To treat others as you would hope to be treated – with love and kindness

and understanding, and we are to love others in this manner even if they do not love us or even if they abuse us.

Godly vs. Worldly Witness

The next section is supported by verses 27 to 31. If a Christian does not live their life focused on loving God, loving fellow believers and loving unbelievers then they are just like the world and are no witness for the gospel. Jesus draws a comparison and conclusion to the first 5 verses, “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.” Jesus calls his followers to live by God’s standards that are opposite to the world’s standards.

We just came through a terrible election cycle where meanness was the most common theme for those running for office. This is where the world is headed but we are to be an alternative for those who desire and seek true peace and want a hope for the future beyond the next election. So lets be clear, Jesus commands we live with love for his and our enemies, spend time praying for those who need salvation, respond to unkindness and evil with love and kindness. We are to be generous to those in true need and care for others, as we desire to be cared for. If we do not live this way then the world sees no difference between Christians and the unbelieving world and as Jesus’ ambassadors we offer no hope. Jesus calls his

followers to be purveyors of hope based on the love God has shown us and the love we are able to bring to the world because of God's love in us.

Jesus closes this teaching with ³⁷ “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” Jesus is not saying we do not hold to the standard of scripture or call wrong right. In fact, Jesus taught that to believe in him means one will be persecuted, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16) However, we are not to set ourselves above others for what were we before he saved us? Not only are we not to set ourselves up as judge and jury, but the 2nd half of verse 37 means we are not to be the punisher or executioner. We are to testify to God's grace in our lives and how Jesus has changed us.

Do you understand what it means when Jesus said, “Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap? For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” Jesus audience would have been very familiar with this process. When measuring grain there was a pattern that was followed. The seller would fill the bag about $\frac{3}{4}$ full and give the bag a good shake and rotating motion to insure the grain was settling down. He then would fill the bag to the top and give it another shake and twisting motion. Then he would tap the bag on the ground and press down on the grain with both hands. Finally, he would pour out a cone of more grain rising above the top of the bag. Once again pressing, shaking, taping and swirling to ensure the buyer that no more grain could be placed in the bag – giving the buyer a full measure.

If this is how you live and deal with people then you are giving a full measure and a full measure will return because your reputation and honesty will gain you the ability to speak gospel truth into people's lives. Living in a way of not accepting the standards of the world and showing God's standards and yet, blessing through love, kindness, mercy and forgiveness. This lifestyle filled with the love of Christ will speak volumes to the world about how God's salvation changes even the most wretched people like me into persons that love more than they ever dreamed possible. Amen!