

Payback

Luke 6:27-38

Introduction

A book titled "Authentic Christianity" (by Ray Stedman) contains the story of some Americans soldiers who were stationed in Korea during the Korean War.

While there, they rented a home and hired a local boy to do their cooking and cleaning. Unfortunately they didn't treat him very nicely. They would pull pranks on him all the time. They would smear Vaseline on the stove handles so that when he would try to turn on the stove he would get grease all over his fingers. They would put little water buckets over the door so that he would get soaked when he opened the door. They would even nail his shoes to the floor during the night.

Day after day, the young listened to their laughter at his expense... all without saying anything in response. No complaints. No blame, no self-pity, no temper tantrums.

Over time, his lack of response made the soldiers feel guilty about what they had been doing, so they sat down with their young friend told him, "Look, we know now that these pranks are not all that funny, and we are really sorry for doing them. We want you to know we are never going to do that sort of thing again."

It all seemed too good to be true, so the boy asked. "Do you mean no more sticky stuff on the stove?" "Nope"

"No more water on door?" "Nope."

"No more shoes nailed to the floor?" "Nope, never again. We promise."

The boy thought for a minute before responding with a smile. "Okay, then I promise to stop spitting in your soup."

I think there is something within each of us that feels like this boy was justified in what he had been doing as a response to all that the soldiers had done to him. In fact, we are probably a bit amazed that his only response was to spit in the soup. We admire his self-restraint!

We live in a world where a response of some sort is expected. It isn't natural to do nothing in response to the wrong things done to us. Our world thinks and acts in terms of the "Law of Reciprocity." Or in playground terminology, "payback."

Payback: "a return on an investment equal to the original capital outlay."

Eye for an eye. Tooth for a tooth. You punch me, I get to punch you the same number of times.

When Mom or Dad would break up a fight between my brother Tim and I, one of us would usually say "I owe one." We kept score. And someone was going to get a payback at some time. It was expected.

That's why what Jesus teaches in this passage is so hard for us to grasp! Jesus calls His followers to live differently – to see and respond to the world in a way that we cannot learn in any other way EXCEPT in a vital relationship with Him. Putting it succinctly:

The call to discipleship is a call to being radically different from the world around us.

Nowhere is that more clear than in this text today.

#1: WE ARE CALLED TO DO THE UNEXPECTED INTENTIONALLY

Notice how the text is filled with words of intentional action:

Love your enemies, **do good** to those who hate you, **bless** those who curse you, **pray for** those who mistreat you... **Give to** everyone who asks you... (Luke 6:27-30)

These instructions of Jesus are offered to us NOT as REACTIONS to the things done by others, but as a PROACTIVE and INTENTIONAL way of living in a world where we will experience hurt and disappointment.

You will have enemies. There will be people in this world who hate you, curse you and mistreat you. And you will have to encounter them from time to time. Because that is true, you have essentially three options:

1. You can respond in kind – payback – eye for an eye
2. You can do nothing ... just take it
3. You can do something unexpected. You could love them, do good to them, bless them, pray for them, and so on ...

The text makes it clear that our best option is the third one. But the tone of the text goes one step further. It calls on us to initiate the action – to actually pursue our enemies for the single purpose of showing them the love of Christ. You make the first move.

- Even before our enemies can do something unlovable, we should do something that demonstrates love.
- Even before people can spew their hatred, do something good.
- Pray before you get mistreated

Yes, do those things when the bad stuff happens, but do it even before then. Be intentional.

Think how our world would be different if the whole world lived like this. Think how incredibly different the whole world be if CHRISTIANS acted like this:

- The major news networks wouldn't know what to report.
- The amount of money we pay in taxes for law enforcement and prisons would decrease.
- Hallmark could create a whole new line of greeting cards. Imagine it:
Roses are red, violets are blue,

You may hate me, but I still love you.

Best of all, people would see the difference Jesus makes in the life of someone who is fully committed to living as a disciple of Jesus. They would see the love of Christ in action.

Now you might be thinking "that is impossible" let me share a couple of examples:

God himself set the example:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He took a moment to heal the ear of a soldier who was about to arrest Him:

And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. (Luke 22:50-51)

#2: WE ARE CALLED TO BE UNSELFISH SACRIFICIALLY

Two times in this text, Jesus points out that living this way might cost you something.

... If anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back... lend to them without expecting to get anything back. (Luke 6:30, 35)

And the rationale is simple:

And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. (Luke 6:34)

And our motivation is equally as simple:

Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:31)

The Golden Rule. In our worst moments we always are hopeful that people will be gracious and understanding to us, so treat them that way.

A fascinating study on the principle of the Golden Rule was conducted by Dr. Bernard Rimland, director of the Institute for Child Behavior Research. Rimland found that "The happiest people are those who help others."

Each person involved in the study was asked to list ten people he knew best and to label them as happy or not happy. Then they were to go through the list again and label each one as selfish or unselfish, using the following definition of

selfishness: a stable tendency to devote one's time and resources to one's own interests and welfare--an unwillingness to inconvenience one's self for others."

In categorizing the results, Rimland found that all of the people labeled happy were also labeled unselfish. He wrote that those "whose activities are devoted to bringing themselves happiness...are far less likely to be happy than those whose efforts are devoted to making others happy" Rimland concluded: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

APPLICATION

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to be different. Any person in any situation should be able to look at you and say "I can tell you are a Christian."

That is a very high standard – one that you cannot achieve on your own. You can only do it as you grow deeper in your own relationship with Jesus. If you choose to live that way, two things are going to happen.

1. Your life will bring glory to God.
2. A whole lot of people are going to think you have lost your mind.

A few years ago a pastor colleague of mine shared the following in his devotions at the start of the denominational "Life-to-Life Discipleship" Team meeting I was attending. When he shared it, I thought it was a "keeper," so I got a copy and put it in my file.

If the world is sane, then Jesus is mad as a hatter and the Last Supper is the Mad Hatter's Tea Party. The world says, Mind your own business, and Jesus says, There is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says, Follow me and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully — the life you save may be your own — and Jesus says, Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, Get and Jesus says, Give. In terms of the world's sanity, Jesus is crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under a cross than under a delusion. (Frederick Buechner in Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations)

I conclude by re-reading a portion of today's gospel ... this time from the Message Paraphrase. I offer it just as a reminder of how crazy God calls us to be:

To you who are ready to hear the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously ... Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-

of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that ... I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never regret it. I promise. (Luke 6:27-38, The Message)

Amen.