

Living Radically in a Conflicted World

Luke 6:27-36

When you hear the word radical, what comes to mind? It may bring to mind political activists or social anarchists. There is radical surgery and even free radicals in science.

The term radical means something that is very new and different from what is traditional or ordinary. It wasn't too long ago when extreme sports became very popular with certain types of teens and young adults. Searching for the ultimate adrenalin rush they radically changed sports from skiing to snowboarding to motorcycle racing, even language. "Like, whoa, dude that was a gnarly, radical run." Stuff they did wasn't traditional. It was out of the box. They are not satisfied with the routine. They made their own path down the slopes and around the trails. They pushed the boundaries and become edgy in what they did, even in what they believed.

Another definition states that radical means to have extreme political or social views that are not shared by most people. I want to carry that a bit further to the spiritual realm and suggest that what Jesus taught was radical living. It was not anti-Biblical, but it did go against the traditional views held by many of His day, even in our day. Our passage today in Luke 6:27-36 is about living radically in a conflicted world.

Today I want to discuss just two points:

A radical love that is divine
A radical life that is different

I. A RADICAL LOVE THAT IS DIVINE

The life and ministry of Jesus ran right into the teeth of the religious establishment. He didn't compromise His message or change His methods. He went right at the heart of the religious status quo not to teach them something new or bring a new religion, but to remind them of the truth, in essence to correct error. For a couple of centuries the

Pharisees had taken the truth of God's Word and supplanted it with the traditions of man, passing them off as truth, as if God Himself had said it. Tradition superseded God's Word. Follow their rules and regulations and you'll find merit with God. But people were left with an empty shell of religion that gave them no lasting peace or joyful satisfaction. Such rules and regulations create fear and cast doubts if they did everything correctly.

Jesus came along and in what He taught and did, invoked a radical change to the heart of those who would listen, of those who would obey. Such a radical change to the heart would bring about a radical change to life, different from what was traditional.

In this Sermon on the Plateau, Jesus challenged His hearers to radical love and radical living. He began by challenging their traditions, the things they had been taught.

Verse 27 - "But I tell you who hear me..."

In Matthew 5 He couches it in this way: "You have heard that it was said...but I tell you..."

I'm sure that piqued their interest. In the crowd that day, as there are in any large crowd, are those who will consider what Jesus said with differing responses. Some will hear but will automatically reject it because they can't bring themselves to accept something that is new. They like the old way thank you very much. In the classic movie "Fiddler on the Roof" Tevye is faced with changing times as we periodically hear him sing about tradition.

Some would like more time to think about it before making a decision. Over time they will either come to accept it or reject it. Their minds haven't been made up yet.

Still others hear, see and welcome, even embrace the change.

Paul faced that on Mars Hill when he talked about the resurrection. Some rejected what he had to say as foolish nonsense, the words of a man who was mad. Others wanted to think about it some more and still others said they would like to hear more of what he had to say.

Jesus said “But I tell you who hear me...”

A short English lesson is in order as a reminder.

The word “but” is known as a coordinating conjunction. It’s a word that connects other words, phrases, and clauses in sentences, specifically independent clauses. It often introduces something that is contrary or opposite of what was just said. Your boss tells you the meeting started at 3 and you respond but I thought you said it got changed to 4. Your teacher says the grading scale goes like this, but I’m going to change it.

The policeman says you were speeding, but tells you he will let you go this time without a ticket.

When we consider what Jesus said in Matthew’s account of the Beatitudes He begins with one idea or thought that comes from traditions taught by the Pharisees – “You have heard it said”. He then counters it with another thought or idea – “But I say to you.” He had just introduced some radical thoughts, different from what they had been taught; different from what the world believed would bring happiness.

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness

Blessed are those who mourn

Blessed are those who are persecuted on account of Him.

The Beatitudes are a call to consider one’s own personal relationship with Christ, a relationship that brings a radical change to the heart and with such a radical change to the heart there would also be evidence of a radical change in their life as well. He gives them some marks, some evidence of the radical change that should be evident, change that in

a sense defies tradition, defies what they had been taught, even defies what might seem logical.

Let me just add that the word “hear” as used in this passage refers not just to the cognitive understanding of what is said or even just an intellectual agreement to it, but insinuates obedience as well, that you go out and do it right away because it is the right thing to do.

From time to time you might hear me or other pastors tell you or you may read books about the marks of a true follower of Jesus. They may and should include such things as prayer, Bible study, church attendance, repentance, bearing spiritual fruit, obedience, spiritual growth just to name a few, but the fundamental mark of the believer is found in that opening statement on how we treat others and not just certain people that we like or who are like us or who like us. He tells us that the mark of a genuine believer is in how we treat even our enemies.

The fundamental mark for a Jesus follower is to love and especially love one’s enemies. An enemy primarily denotes hatred or being hateful. It comes from a root word that is akin to hostility. It is to have strong dislike or ill will toward another that goes so far as to consider wanting something bad to happen to that person or even considering wanting to do something bad to that person. We want to take revenge because of our hatred toward them.

Joseph Stalin is arguable one of the most brutal and vindictive dictators of the 20th century. What he had to say captures the essence of revenge. “To choose one’s victim, to prepare one’s plan minutely, to slake (satisfy) an implacable vengeance, and then to go to bed – there is nothing sweeter in the world.” Revenge didn’t bother him in the least.

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine that you are in a waiting room, any waiting room and you are all alone. As you sit there thinking about

whatever it is you think about when sitting alone in a waiting room, you hear footsteps coming down the hall. The footsteps grow louder and then pause outside the door of the waiting room and you notice the door knob move (this is the stuff suspense movies are made of). As the door opens up you notice walking into the room the person you most adore. Who would that person be?

Now, imagine the same scenario: waiting room, alone, footsteps, opening door, but this time in walks the person you least want to see, the person you dislike even detest because of something either real or some perceived ill treatment they did toward you. If ever you had an enemy, if you ever wanted revenge on someone, that would be the person. You may not think of them this way, but I'm going to call it like it is and say it's your enemy. Who would that person be?

The boss who makes work miserable

The former spouse who turned a custody battle into a nightmare

The teenager who tore your family apart

The parent who abused you

The teacher who falsely accused you of cheating

The next door neighbor who threatens your family

The player who caused an injury that ended your career

The person you thought was your friend who stabbed you in the back by spreading gossip about you

The person you can't forgive

That is the person who would be your enemy.

Jesus says straight up that's the person you are supposed to love. There are no qualifying statements or conditions, no exceptions to the command, just flat out love your enemies. If I were a betting man I'm willing to bet if you thought long enough about it, you could come up with at least one name, one person who would fit the bill.

In Jesus' day is it is in ours, loving one's enemies was absurd. Even the Jews believed it was a Biblical principal to hate your enemy and therefore

sanctioned, even encouraged. It was called the law of retaliation and many cultures followed that principle. We read about it in the Old Testament "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" and so on. If you knocked out my tooth then I get to sock you one so that you lose a tooth. We'll come to that principle of the Golden Rule in a moment. But what Jesus taught was radical. And we know from Scripture and History, He not only said it, He lived it – this, love your enemy thing.

Did the Beatles get any of it right when they sang that all you need is love? They missed the point when they failed to mention what kind of love you needed. The Greeks had three different words for love. One speaks of passionate or romantic love, a love that would be shared between say, a husband and a wife.

Another speaks of friendship love that would be between two best friends. It's demonstrated in the deep friendship between David and Jonathan in the Old Testament.

A third speaks of unconditional love that is seen in loving another in spite of how they treat you.

So what kind of love is Jesus speaking of here that a person should have toward his or her enemies? The Greek language gives us the answer. It's not the kind of love that would cause you to take the enemy in a passionate embrace and smother them with kisses. It's not the friendship kind of love that brings you together around a camp fire to roast marshmallows and sing Cumbaya. The word Jesus uses is the kind of love that is unconditional, the kind of love that says you can't do anything to me that will make me love you less and anything that will make me love you more. Jesus goes on to explain just what that kind of love looks like.

This love is not inherent in us and is vastly different from the kind of love sung about by the Beatles or any other pop artist yesterday, today or tomorrow.

This love only comes from God and is only produced in those who belong to God. God's love means that He eternally gives of Himself to others with their best interest in mind. His love gave to those who didn't deserve, but certainly to all who need it. His love is never self-seeking. God is love and love comes from God and Scripture says so. I John 4:7-10

By His very nature, God is love. Everything He does, every act, every thought, every motive stems from His love and any person who mocks God by asking how a loving God could allow something horrible to happen to innocent people, especially children doesn't know God, nor know His love. His actions and attitudes always stem from His love because that is His nature.

When God forgives, it is out of His love.

When God judges, it is out of His love.

When God disciplines, His love is at the center.

His grace and mercy stem from His love.

His justice stems from His love.

His sovereign acts stem from His love.

God is love - that is His nature. He both defines what love is by His attitudes and motives, exhibits what it is by His actions, and sets the standard of what love is because He is love, and this is all demonstrated toward His enemies. He does not love us because we are loveable or because we love Him. He loves us because that is His nature.

Scripture clarifies that by stating that we love Him only because He first loved us. As a matter of fact Scripture even goes so far as to point out that we are His enemies and yet God still loved us. That love was demonstrated to us when His only Son died for us. Love does not make Him who He is, He makes love what it is.

Here's what Jesus is saying. The way that God loves us is the very kind of love that we are to have for those who are considered our enemies, the ones who blatantly oppose us in some way, the ones who hate us maybe because we are more successful, or more athletic, or smarter, or who got the promotion,

or who are more good looking, or who have the nicer home, but then maybe that's why they are our enemy, because they are more successful or who have the nicer home and so on. Jesus says we are to love them unconditionally.

We need look no further than John 3:16 or Romans 5:8 to understand that God's love prompted Him to do something about the curse of sin that has plagued mankind since the very first sin.

Ephesians 2:4-7

That, my friends, is the perfect demonstration of love. He couldn't love us anymore and He wouldn't love us any less and we are told to love our enemies in the same way. This kind of love comes only through a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact John goes so far as to say that if we don't love our enemies we don't love God. How can we say we love God whom we haven't seen if we can't love those who we can see?

I John 4:11-12, 16, 19-21

I John 5:1-5

If we want to overcome hatred for our enemies then we must obey God's command to love them.

One day Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was. His response came from Deuteronomy 6:5 which says to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." And oh, since you're asking, I'll tell you the second greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. That's found in Leviticus 19:18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." Then He told the story of the Good Samaritan, the passage Randy preached on a couple weeks ago. The Pharisees literally took Leviticus 19 to mean that a fellow Israelite couldn't be an enemy, but they read between the lines and concluded the verse said nothing about the Gentile.

So they were free to have him as an enemy.

Elsewhere Jesus summed it up with these poignant words in John 13:34-35 “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

In John 14:21 He stated that if you love God you’ll keep His commandments.

We could go on and take a month of Sundays and talk about this thing we call God’s love and that love being the kind of attitude and action we are to have toward others, even our enemies. But the bottom line at the end of the day, at the beginning of the day, in the middle of the day is to love your enemies. It is a divine love that can only come from God, a love that is radical from our way of thinking. It is to be without exception and without excuse.

The world says if someone hates you, hate them back.

The world says if someone treats you badly, treat them badly as well.

The world says if someone falsely accuses you, tell some lies about them.

But Jesus says love them. Love isn’t just an attitude, it’s an action. It’s not just a noun, it’s a verb. It’s not just something we feel, it’s something we do.

Living radically in a conflicted world means we have a radical love that is divine.

Living radically in a conflicted world means we have a radical life that is different.

II. A RADICAL LIFE THAT IS DIFFERENT

From Luke’s account we begin to see what Jesus means. He shows us how that kind of radical life is different from the rest of the world’s thinking. Notice what our passage in Luke says.

A radical life is radical in its goodness toward others.

A radical life is radical in its blessing toward others.

A radical life is radical in its prayers toward others.

A radical life is radical in its mercy toward others.

Jesus tells us we are to do good toward those who hate us. Of the two Greek words Jesus uses the word that means intrinsically good, goodness that is ethically good, right, noble, honorable. It always seeks to take the high road. It sometimes was used of metal to speak of its being genuine or without flaws. The good we do to our enemy must be genuine.

Towards those who hate us we are to act in the manner of God. God has treated even those who hate Him by giving to them the same rain on their soil as He does to the just. How can you do good? Out of spite does your neighbor blow his leaves onto your yard? Do good by raking his yard. Out of hate does a co-worker belittle you to the boss? Do good by offering to take one of his projects.

Any Roman soldier could order a Jew to carry his gear one mile out of town. It didn’t matter how inconvenienced the person was. He could be feeding his flock or hoeing his garden or in the middle of a business transaction. He had to drop what he was doing and carry the gear. Jesus said that person shouldn’t do what is required, but do what is unexpected – go an additional mile.

The world tells us to hate the person in return. But Jesus tells us to do good to them. I find, and maybe you have to, that when you begin to show kindness or do good to someone who hates you for whatever reason, our attitude toward them changes. Where once we may have wanted to retaliate in the same way, a radical change takes place in our heart and then in our actions toward them. Now that may not always work, but that doesn’t give us an excuse to stop doing good to those who continue to hate us.

We are commanded here to do good.

I know this would never happen, but just suppose for a moment if Jesus were to show hatred toward those who hated Him? We would all have a different destination that would not be pleasant.

Proverbs 25:21-22 “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.”

Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Galatians 6:9-10 “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

Do good to those who hate you, because God’s Word is clear according to I John 3:15 that if you harbor hatred toward another you are considered a murderer. Do good instead.

Radical living is also seen in our blessing those who curse you.

A curse is wishing the worst on someone else. I don’t know about you but I have had people curse me. A curse is nothing more than a verbal form of hatred. Jesus is telling us that we need to turn that curse into a blessing – for the other person. Can you deliberately choose to bless them in return? It may come in the form of kind words or doing some kind of good deed to them to show that even though they may think the worst of you, you want the best for them.

The co-worker who gossiped about you to other peers or who maligned you before the boss is to receive from us some form of blessing. Maybe it’s

telling the boss something good you noticed about that person. Rather than thinking the worst we think and say the best about them and to them. We approach them with kindness. We are to genuinely wish the best blessing on them. That is radical living.

Radical living also comes in praying for them. Jesus tells us we are to pray for those who mistreat us. If you have read anything about the life of Corrie ten Boom through her experiences in the concentration camps of Hitler’s Germany you know how she struggled with that, but eventually was able to pray for them.

Praying for someone who mistreats us also changes our attitude toward them. How can we effectively pray for someone if we continue to harbor ill will toward the ones who mistreat us? How can God bless us if we do not pray for them with a right spirit?

Pray for the boss who under pays or under values you.

Pray for the neighbor kids who vandalized your home or car.

Pray for the co-worker who gossips about you. Radical living will pray for those who mistreat you.

Radical living shows mercy to others.

Mercy is simply not giving what is deserved. We are to be merciful to others as God is merciful toward us. We are to emulate His character of mercy. In essence, it means we are to be like God. Peter reminds us that we are to be holy because is holy. That is radical living.

Radical living loves ones enemies.

Radical living does good to those who hate him.

Radical living prays for those who falsely accuse.

Radical living blesses those who curse him.

Radical living shows mercy.

Jesus gave examples of how this is done.

If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn the other.

If someone takes your coat, give him your shirt.

If someone asks you for something, if it is in your power, give them what they need.

If someone takes something from you, don't demand it back.

As a matter of fact "do to others as you would have them do to you." We know that as the Golden Rule. This is the law of love reduced to its simplest form.

Soviet Premier Khrushchev once stated "There is much in Christ that is in common with communism, but I cannot agree with Him when He says when you are hit on the right cheek turn the left cheek. I believe in another principle. If I am hit on the left cheek I hit back on the right cheek so hard that the head might fall off. This is my sole difference with Christ."

The code of Hammurabi among others, including Jewish teachings put a negative spin on it. If you don't want someone to harm you, then don't harm them. Jesus put it in a positive light by telling us we should treat others with respect and kindness just as we hoped they would in turn treat us.

Jesus says it's easy to love and do good to others who are loveable and who love you and do good in return. Even the unrighteous person does that. Jesus is calling us to demonstrate a character that is beyond what is typical, even traditional. He is calling us to live radically.

So, how about it? Do you have any enemies? These principles are not natural for us. In fact we would rather do the opposite or nothing at all. Jesus calls us to a radical love that is divine and He calls us to a radical life that is different.

This week let's go out and show the world what real, radical love is like and show them the Father through how we love those who are our enemies.