

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*What It Looks Like to Love Our Enemies.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse, and we find ourselves at Luke 6:29.

Before we look at the verses, we're going to begin w/ a lesson that's very important for interpreting Jesus correctly...

LESSON 1: WE HAVE TO KNOW WHEN TO TAKE JESUS LITERALLY.

You might remember last week I told you that as your pastor...

- I want to provide you w/ sermons each week that hopefully teach you God's Word, and leave you w/ a better understanding of Scripture than when you arrived.
- But I also want to give you tools – or principles – that benefit you not just Sunday mornings, but any time you read God's Word.

This lesson is one of those principles. This applies to the verses we'll be looking at this morning, but I hope you keep it in mind any time you're reading the Gospels.

Jesus had a very, very difficult ministry for a number of reasons:

1. First, He had the religious leaders trying to murder Him.
2. Second, He was rejected by His own people that He was trying to save.
3. Third, He spent more of His ministry doing one thing more than almost everything else combined, and that's teaching.
 - a. And I think something that must've made Jesus' teaching very difficult is the amount He was misunderstood.
 - b. Whether Jesus was talking to Jews, Gentiles, or the Twelve Disciples, He seemed to be constantly misunderstood.

And many times when He was misunderstood, it's b/c people took Him literally when he was speaking figuratively. Let me give you a number of examples...

Matt 16:6 Jesus said to [the disciples], "Take heed and beware of the leaven (or yeast) of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Now is Jesus warning the **disciples** to be weary of the cooking of the religious leaders? No!

- **Leaven** – or yeast – is a picture or type of sin, and it's referring to the **doctrine** or teaching of the religious leaders as Jesus will explain in a moment.
- Jesus is letting them know the religious leaders' sinful teaching could influence them the way **leaven** influences **bread**.

But listen to what the disciples said...

⁷ They reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread."

It's almost comical. They actually thought He was talking about **bread**!

⁸ But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? ⁹ Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? ¹⁰ Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?"

In other words, *“I don’t have any trouble getting bread for the group. Don’t you remember how much bread I was able to miraculously make before? That’s not what I’m talking about!”*

¹¹ How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—*but* to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹² Then they understood (finally) that He did not tell *them* to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine (or teaching) of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Here’s another example...

John 2:18 The Jews...said to [Jesus], “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”

¹⁹ Jesus [said], “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Did Jesus mean the large, physical structure? No, but they took Him literally...

²⁰ Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

Here’s another example...

John 3:3 Jesus...said to [Nicodemus], “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Is Jesus talking about actually being born again?

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus had to explain to him that He was speaking of spiritual birth.

Another example...

John 4:10 Jesus...said to [the woman at the well], “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him (in other words, if you knew who I am, you’d ask ME for water!), and He would have given you living water.”

Is Jesus talking about physical water? No, He’s talking about salvation. He’s talking about spiritual water that will keep you alive eternally.

But listen to how she interprets His words...

¹¹ The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? ¹² Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?”

¹³ Jesus said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into EVERLASTING LIFE.”

Here’s another example...

John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

Now does Jesus mean this literally? Is He encouraging cannibalism?

⁵² The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us *His* flesh to eat?”

⁵³ Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

He’s using figurative language to describe how He’s to be consumed by us, but spiritually. I’m not going to read the rest of the verses, but these people took Jesus so literally, they deserted Him b/c they thought He really meant to **eat His flesh and drink His blood.**

And the final example...

John 11:11 [Jesus said], “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.”

Does Jesus mean this literally? Was Lazarus sleeping, only to wake up in a few hours? No, he’s dead!

¹² Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” ¹³ However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.

¹⁴ Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.

He had to make it perfectly clear to them.

Now I don’t want to sound too hard on these people who couldn’t tell when Jesus was speaking literally, b/c sometimes it’s hard for us to tell too. So here’s what you need to know:

- Sometimes Jesus spoke very literally. His words couldn’t be more literal.
- But there were other times Jesus spoke figuratively, or used hyperbole or exaggeration...and it caused problems when people tried to interpret Him literally.

So one question is, WHY? Why did Jesus speak figuratively or exaggerate if it would cause problems? There are two reasons...

First, let me tell you about a situation that took place the other day during our family bible study. I received Ricky’s permission to share this...

Ricky said, “*Why didn’t Jesus just speak clearly? Why did He make things so confusing?*”

- Maybe you’ve had the same question!
- The disciples had this question! In **Matt 13:10** they said, “**Why do you speak in parables?**” In other words, why don’t you just spell it out for us?

So we changed our Bible study and went to **Matt 13** where Jesus said He spoke in parables to conceal the truth from some and reveal it to others: **Matt 13:13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.**

- This is why some people hear God’s Word and think it’s foolish and confusing, while others hear God’s Word and find it profound and life-changing.
- **1 Cor 2:14 the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.**

So Jesus spoke in parables – and I’d say He spoke figuratively at times – so the truth would be revealed to the spiritual, but misunderstood by the foolish.

The second reason Jesus spoke figuratively, or used hyperbole, is the same reason we speak figuratively or use hyperbole: we're trying to make a point! Think of some of the things we say:

- *I'm freezing.*
- *This is taking forever.*
- *I'm starving.*
- *This is killing me.*
- *I have a million things to do.*
- *This is making me crazy.*
- *He's got a ton of money.*

We don't mean these statements literally, but we use hyperbole or exaggeration to make a point, and that's how Jesus spoke at times too.

- He would make a startling and dramatic statement for effect.
- One commentator said Jesus wanted to, "*shake people up...to arouse them from their lethargy.*"
- Another commentator said, "*It is best to understand [Jesus' words] as an [exaggeration] for effect.*"

Now the reason we're talking about all this is, some of Jesus' words we'll be looking at can't be taken literally. If you try to take them literally you're going to have some real problems!

Now let me briefly review what we looked at last week so these verses make sense...

Jesus gave four commands regarding the treatment of our enemies in **verses 27-28**

1. First, He said **love [them].**
2. Then, He said, "**Do good to those who hate you.**"
3. Third, He said, "**Bless those who curse you.**"
4. Fourth, He said, "**Pray for those who spitefully use you.**"

Then after giving these four commands regarding the treatment of our enemies, Jesus gives four examples of what it looks like to obey the commands.

- So first Jesus gives us the four commands.
- Then He gives four different examples of what it looks like to obey the commands.

Let's look at the first example in **verse 29**...

29^a To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also.

Hopefully you see why we needed that first lesson:

- This shouldn't be viewed as literally as it sounds.
- We aren't being told to let people beat us up.

One reason we know Jesus' words shouldn't be taken literally, is Jesus didn't respond this way when He was struck...

John 18:22 When [Jesus] said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck [Him] with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?"

Then Jesus turned the other cheek to the man to strike that one too.

No...

23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"

Instead of turning the other cheek, Jesus rebuked the man for striking Him.

Here's an example w/ Paul...

The context is Paul was bound and they were about to scourge him. If he took Jesus' words literally, he would let them do that. But instead...

Acts 22:25 When they had stretched [Paul] out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (ESV).

²⁶ When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."

Paul ended up not being beaten. So he didn't always turn the other cheek either. There were times Paul was beaten, but you also see that he took reasonable steps to avoid being beaten.

So the question is if Jesus isn't commanding us to be physically abused, what is He commanding? This brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: JESUS COMMANDS US (PART I) NOT TO RETALIATE AGAINST OUR ENEMIES.

Jesus isn't encouraging us to be physically abused, but He is telling us to have a certain disposition that doesn't retaliate.

- When Jesus says to turn the other cheek, He means you don't attack people when they attack you.
- He's describing the sort of character or temperament that doesn't seek revenge.

Also consider...

- Most of us are not in danger of being physically struck by people.
- We don't walk around worried about people hitting us...I hope.

So even if this verse was discussing physical abuse, we wouldn't be able to apply it very often.

- Instead, we should think of how much more we can apply this verse to verbal abuse or insult.
- We don't experience physical abuse, but we experience verbal abuse or insults or criticism.
 - Robert Stein said, "*What is being referred to involves insult more than physical injury.*"
 - The Amplified says, "**Whoever strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other one also [SIMPLY IGNORE INSIGNIFICANT INSULTS OR LOSSES AND DO NOT BOTHER TO RETALIATE—MAINTAIN YOUR DIGNITY].**"

So when you're insulted, don't retaliate by saying something ugly in return.

And this is what we see from Jesus...

Even though Jesus rebuked the soldier that struck him, He didn't retaliate. Listen to this verse that prophesied of Jesus' temperament...

**Isa 50:6 I gave My back to those who struck Me,
And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard;
I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.**

This is the disposition Jesus demonstrated.

So here's the balance:

- Jesus rebuked the man who struck Him.

- But He didn't strike the man in return.

We can seek to avoid abuse, but when we are abused we shouldn't retaliate.

Now the second example of what it looks like to love your enemy. The rest of **verse 29**...

29b And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either.

Let me give the background to these words, and then I'll explain the application...

First, notice the words **who takes away**:

- This means "who stole from you." This is the language of theft.
- The same phrase will be used in **verse 30** and both times this refers to a forceful, unjust taking away.

Next, notice the mention of a **cloak**. This refers to the outer garment, or we would think of a coat or jacket. In Jesus' day this was a rectangular piece of soft wool cloth that was draped over the body any number of ways.

Finally, the **tunic** refers to the inner garment, or what we might think of as a shirt or undershirt. Tunics were considered basic essentials for life, b/c you could freeze to death w/o them. For this reason you could never take someone's **tunic**. Listen to these two verses...

Exo 22:26 If you ever take your neighbor's garment (or tunic) as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. ²⁷ For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in?

If you remember last week's sermon, I explained that Jesus set a higher standard than the Law set:

- The Law said, "**Love your neighbor**" but Jesus said, "Love your enemies."
- This is another good example! The Law said nobody should take your **tunic**. Jesus said, "*Go ahead and let them take your tunic too.*"

But again, you can't take this as literally as it sounded. I don't mean this as a joke, but if anyone took Jesus literally, they'd be running around w/o any clothes on!

So what is Jesus saying? The answer brings us to the next part of Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: JESUS COMMANDS US (PART II) TO LET OURSELVES BE WRONGED BY OUR ENEMIES.

Jesus is making the point that we shouldn't be extreme in demanding our rights when they're denied to us:

- We don't try to vindicate ourselves.
- We should be willing to surrender our privileges at times.

Listen to this verse from Paul that carries on Jesus' command...

1 Cor 6:7 Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather ACCEPT WRONG? Why do you not rather LET YOURSELVES BE CHEATED?

Instead of being filled w/ bitterness and a strong feeling of entitlement, Paul actually said we should have the opposite attitude and...

- Let yourself be defrauded or mistreated...
- Let yourself be wronged or treated...
- Let the thief keep your goods. Give up your rights.
- You lost your **cloak**, let them keep your **tunic** too.

Now the third example of what it looks like to love your enemy. **Verse 30**...

30a Give to everyone who asks of you.

Again, this obviously isn't as literal as it sounds. I think common sense tells us this, but just to be sure, if someone comes and...

- Asks for your car...
- Asks for your house...
- Asks for all the money in your bank account...

You don't have to give everything to that person.

But if that's not what Jesus means, what does He mean? The answer brings us to the next part of Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: JESUS COMMANDS US (PART III) TO BE GENEROUS TO OUR ENEMIES.

Jesus wants His disciples – including us – to be generous. And there are two reasons for this:

1. First, we should have a care and concern for others, and that's going to mean giving to others.
2. The other reason we should be generous is it shows we don't have an attachment to stuff. We recognize we came into the world w/ nothing and we'll leave the world w/ nothing.

But even though Jesus commands us to be generous, we can be generous w/o giving away all our stuff just b/c someone asks.

I want you to notice – once again – that this is an instance of Jesus raising the standard from the Old Testament. Please listen to this...

Deut 15:7 “If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, ⁸but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.

So the Law commanded generosity toward your **brethren**, or **neighbor**, or the **poor**.

BUT who is Jesus commanding generosity toward? Your enemy! See how much Jesus raised the standard?

- You feel affection and kindness toward your **brethren** or **neighbor**. It's easy to want to help them.
- You feel compassion and pity for the **poor**. It's easy to want to help them.

But how do you feel toward your enemies?

- You feel anger and hostility.
- It's easy to NOT want to help them.
- Imagine someone has hated you, cursed you, or spitefully used you, and then that person comes and asks for something.

Jesus said this is the person you help!

Now the fourth and final example in the rest of **verse 30**...

30b And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back.

Again the words **who takes away** is the language of theft, and again, these words aren't to be taken as literally as they sound. If someone steals from you, you can make some effort to obtain your goods that were stolen.

So if these words aren't as literal as they sound, what is Jesus saying? This brings us to the final point He wants to make...

LESSON 2: JESUS COMMANDS US (PART IV) NOT TO PURSUE RESTITUTION FROM OUR ENEMIES.

These words look very similar to Jesus' words in **verse 29**:

- **29 from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic.**
- **30 from him who takes away your goods, do not ask them back.**

The words are almost identical except for the end where Jesus says **do not ask them back**.

More than likely, here's what's in view...

- Someone borrows something from you...
- You lend something to someone...
- And the person doesn't return it!

Jesus says, *"Let them keep it. Don't pursue restitution. Don't expect anything in return."*

Adam Clarke said, *"It is probable that what is here spoken relates to requiring a thing speedily that had been lent...it is the character of very bad men that lend today, and tomorrow will he ask [for it back]."*

Let me give you a familiar example from Scripture that illustrates the **OPPOSITE** of what Jesus is saying...

Think of the story of the unforgiving servant. Jesus said a man was forgiven a huge amount, but then listen to what he did...

Matt 18:28 That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!"

Jesus said, **"From him who takes [from you] do not ask [for it] back."**

- This man did the opposite.
- He demanded it back!

Now here's what's interesting about this...

- The man who grabbed the other man by the neck owed him money.
- He wasn't grabbing the man around the neck to rob him.
- He was trying to get what rightfully belonged to him.

But Jesus still said the man was wrong, b/c he wouldn't demonstrate the goodness that had been shown to him.

- Jesus has been so good to us that we should be good to others.
- Jesus forgives us and lets things go, so we should forgive others and let things go.

Now think of how challenging this is...

If your enemy steals from you, you're really going to want your possessions back:

- Earlier you didn't mind that your friend had your favorite jacket, but now that he became your enemy, you want it returned.
- When someone steals from you, you don't keep hounding the person for weeks, months, or years trying to recoup what you've lost.
- Jesus says you let the person keep it as a good witness.

Now that's it!

- We've seen four commands to love our enemies in verses 27 and 28.
- And we've seen four examples of what it looks like to love our enemies in verses 29 and 30.

Now after covering these four examples, maybe there's a question you've had...

We've been talking about people...

- Mistreating us...
- Abusing us...
- Stealing from us...
- Even committing crimes against us...

And it sounds like we don't do anything about it!

- We just let people act like this.
- There's no punishment or judgment for them whatsoever.
- These people have sinned terribly, but we just let it go.
- You almost start thinking Jesus sounds unjust.

Shouldn't these people be punished instead of loved?

The answer is yes, they should be punished, BUT here's the issue:

- Who is supposed to do that punishing?
- Who is NOT supposed to do that punishing?

These people deserve to be punished, and they will be punished, it's just an issue of who does and does not punish them...and this brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 3: JESUS' DISCIPLES LEAVE PUNISHMENT TO GOD.

Sin deserves to be punished, but on this side of heaven, we need to trust that God will administer that punishment. Listen to these verses...

Rom 12:19a Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath;

This refers to God's **wrath**. Giving **place to** it means letting God's **wrath** punish sin instead of our own.

19b for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," (Deut 32:35) says the Lord.

This is what we do instead...

²⁰ **Therefore**

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head (Pro 25:21-22)."

We focus on loving our enemies, and we let God deal w/ punishing our enemies. They're in His hands, not ours.

Now here's the question:

- Why are we supposed to leave punishment to God instead of taking it into our own hands?
- Why are we supposed to **give place to God's wrath**, instead of unleashing our own **wrath**?

Does anyone know what man's wrath produces? Or I should say, does anyone know what man's wrath does NOT produce?

Jam 1:20 the wrath of man DOES NOT produce the righteousness of God.

This past week a Muslim man entered a homosexual nightclub in Orlando and murdered 49 people and injured another 53. On the morning of the attack, this is what he posted on Facebook: "*The real Muslims will never accept the*

filthy ways of the West...You kill innocent women and children by doing US airstrikes...now taste the Islamic state vengeance."

So he saw himself carrying out vengeance, and his **wrath** produced the murder of 50 people:

- Getting angry at the sins of others doesn't further Christ's Kingdom.
- Taking vengeance into our own hands doesn't **produce the righteousness of God.**

But here's what does:

- Treating our enemies the way Jesus describes in these verses.
- It's a powerful witness.
- It reveals Christ to the unbelieving world.

Let me close with this quote...

Edward Welch said, *"God may define some people as enemies, but He says that we are to treat them as friends. Our duty is to consider how to serve them in such a way that they would be pointed to Jesus and repent from their sins. How can we even begin this impossible process? We realize that we were Christ's enemies! If we do, then we have no choice but to treat enemies the way God has treated us."*

Let's pray.