

Seventh Sunday After the Epiphany

February 20, 2022

Psalm 103:1–13 (NIV) ¹ Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ² Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— ³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ⁶ The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: ⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

Genesis 45:3–15 (NIV) ³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. ⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ⁸ “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God

has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. ¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’ ¹² “You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.” ¹⁴ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

1 Corinthians 15:21–26, 30–42 (NIV) ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

³⁰ And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? ³¹ I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” ³³ Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” ³⁴ Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame. ³⁵ But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” ³⁶ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant

the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. ⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.

Luke 6:27–38 (NIV) ²⁷ “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

**The Surprising Jesus:
Love Your Enemies**
Luke 6:27–38
Outline

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(verses 27-30; 1 Peter 2:21-23; Romans 5:8–10; John 13:34; 1 John 4:10–11, 19)
- ❑ **Human morality**
(verses 31-34)
- ❑ **A family resemblance**
(verses 35-36; Genesis 45:4-5; 50:20-21)
- ❑ **The reward of love**
(verses 37-38; Galatians 6:7-10)

The Surprising Jesus:

Love Your Enemies

Luke 6:27–38

Alice and her family were asleep when men with covered faces stormed into their home in Nigeria around midnight. After calling her husband by name, they shot him as he opened the bedroom door. Alice, who recognized one of the attackers as a neighbor, tried to stop the bleeding as her husband lay crumpled on the floor and their five terrified children cried in the corner.

When the Nigerian military arrived in their village about an hour later, they took Alice's husband to the hospital. But it was too late; he died on the way to surgery.

In the sectarian fighting engulfing Nigeria, where Christian villages and churches have been targeted, the conflict has widowed an estimated 10,000 Christian women in Northern Nigeria.

Without her husband, Alice worked hard to provide for her family, planting crops on their land and working odd jobs. But because of violence against Christians, she had her home burned down and her crops destroyed.

Even experiencing such devastating attacks, Alice refused to hate her persecutors. When she saw the neighbor she had recognized as her husband's killer, Alice summoned the courage to approach him and greet him kindly. An article telling Alice's story reported, "this willful act of love has helped her find peace."

Like Alice, Jesus called His disciples (and is calling us) to demonstrate what the unbelieving world would consider

An incomprehensible love (verses 27-30)

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.

If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Jesus was calling His disciples to radical righteousness.

On the human level, this is an unreasonable ethic—you end up bruised, coatless, shirtless and poor.

Common people did not have more than one set of clothes. If your coat was taken and you gave your shirt (tunic) also, you were left naked.

We are never more like Jesus than when we are mistreated and return evil with a blessing (verse 28).

The apostle Peter teaches in 1 Peter 2:21-23, *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* (NIV)

Jesus hung on a cross for you—naked, bruised, insulted, mocked, battered and bloodied.

We should not really be surprised when Jesus commands us to love our enemies, because He loved His enemies.

Romans 5:8–10 teaches, *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!* (NIV)

At first glance, the golden rule is pretty simple: treat others the way you would want to be treated.

But Jesus takes it deeper. As believers in Jesus, it is not enough to *do unto others what we would have others do unto us*. Christians are compelled to *do for others as Christ has done for us*.

As Jesus taught in John 13:34 *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.* (ESV)

I have had people tell me, when they fully realize the life Jesus is calling disciples to live, “this Christianity is hard.”

“No,” I say, “it’s not hard, it’s impossible!” But were never meant to do it in our own strength or out of our own resources.

1 John 4:10–11, 19 instructs us, *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* ¹¹ *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

¹⁹ *We love because he first loved us.*

Jesus challenged the business-as-usual approach of

Human morality (verses 31-34)

³² *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.* ³³ *And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.* ³⁴ *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.*

Jesus is saying that the morality of the unbelieving world is not the standard He is setting for those who follow Him.

Normally people do not live their lives based on the golden rule. They don’t even live by the silver rule which is, don’t do to others what you would not want them to do to you. They live by what’s been called the bronze

rule: do to others as they do to you. That is, treat others as they treat you.

The late astronomer and science popularizer, Carl Sagan, before dying of cancer, promoted what he considered an important breakthrough in ethics—allow a computer to decide what is right.

Complicated computer programs can test the outcome of various decisions. They are in fact sophisticated computer games simulating real life.

With such computer games you can try out various strategies and see how other people might respond. Every time you get what you want, you score a point. With games like these, Sagan claimed, you can test moral systems scientifically.

Computers have been programmed to test the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Then they tested the Bronze Rule: Do unto others *as* they do unto you. In other words, I’ll treat you the way you treat me. If you’re nice to me, I’ll be nice to you. If you insult me, I’ll clobber you!

Then they tested the Iron Rule: Do unto others, *before* they do it unto you.

In test after test, Sagan claimed the rule that won out was the Bronze Rule: Tit or Tat—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

Sagan claimed that it was scientific proof that you’re most likely to get what you want by paying people back in kind for whatever they do to you.

Tit for Tat may earn the most points in a computer game, but does that make it moral? Sagan says with computer games we find out “what really works.”

But ethics is not about what works, it about what’s right.

So, if you're trying to get rich, is it OK to falsify your corporate balance sheet and lie to banks and investors? If you're trying to get a new drug approved, is it OK to falsify the results of tests in order to get your product to the market?

Such an approach to right and wrong is called pragmatism or utilitarianism. What I want, is what is right.

Two hundred years ago during the age called the "Enlightenment", utilitarianism (pragmatism) was proposed as a purely rational ethic to replace Christian ethics.

It defined good behavior as behavior that accrues the most benefits—health, wealth, happiness, whatever. Simply total up the costs and benefits, and you can calculate morality.

But utilitarianism has proved to be a cold and heartless ethic. Chuck Colson once observed: "It justified slavery on the grounds that it was good for the economy. Today it justifies abortion on the grounds that it reduces welfare rolls. It supports euthanasia because it cuts medical costs. No, we've seen utilitarianism in action, and it is utterly inhumane."

Colson went on to remark, "True right and wrong are based on God's holy character."

Jesus commanded those who followed Him to live by a different standard. We are not to live by a human standard, but by God's standard. We were made in the image of God and we should bear

A family resemblance (verses 35-36)

³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

We are called to be like God in His kindness, goodness and mercy.

Joseph, in our Old Testament lesson, is an example of loving our enemies. Joseph's brothers, jealous that he was their father's favorite, had sold him as a slave.

Then, nearly twenty years later, Joseph was ruling Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He had the power to exact revenge on his brothers, but instead demonstrated love!

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!" ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. (Genesis 45:4-5 NIV)

Because of his brother's hatred, Joseph spent 17 years as a slave or in prison. But Joseph saw God's hand in his suffering. In Genesis 50:20-21 Joseph told his brothers: . . . *you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (ESV)*

We are never more godly (like God) than when we love our enemies and do good to them.

Finally, Jesus taught His disciples that when they live as *children of the Most High*, reflecting the image of God, they will experience

The reward of love (verses 37-38)

³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Jesus said in the previous verses that if we love as God loves, our *reward will be great*. Here Jesus tells us what the reward of love will be.

If we are merciful as God is merciful, then our reward is receiving God's mercy. If we are giving as God is giving, we will experience the abundant blessing of the Lord.

Jesus is *not* saying that you can earn your salvation. Jesus *is* saying that if you are critical, judgmental and condemning of others, you will be *unable* to receive the blessings of God's mercy. Jesus clearly said that if you cannot and will not forgive others, then you can't receive God's forgiveness. If you are stingy and miserly, you will miss the blessings God wants to pour into your lap.

We do not become *children of the Most High* by loving our enemies. We demonstrate that we are His children when we do so.

We become children of God when we believe and receive Jesus as our savior by faith. Then we receive forgiveness and salvation.

But with faith in Jesus, comes the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives which enables us to live supernaturally. Instead of living according to our sinful human nature, we live according to the Spirit.

The reward of love is to receive the blessings of living supernaturally. Godliness (being like God in His moral attributes) is its own reward.

Jesus was teaching the principle of the law of the harvest. We find it Galatians 6:7-9.

⁷Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
(NIV)

We will all reap a harvest of what we sow. The only question is, what sort of harvest will it be?

If we are true followers of Christ, demonstrating this incomprehensible love is our calling. We are to love our enemies, pay back evil with blessing and give generously.

Pastor and Bible teacher R. Kent Hughes summarizes what Jesus taught like this:

“Are you doing good to those who hate you, or evil? If Christ is ruling your heart, it will be good.

Are you blessing those who curse you? If not, Christ is not on the throne of your heart.

Are you praying for those who mistreat you? If so, you are like Jesus.

This is an impossible life. It is unnatural. It is unconventional. It is—supernatural!”

Let us pray . . .