

Living Like Sons *Luke 6:27-36*

Hidden behind a row of overgrown bushes, the Havens' house was weathered confederate gray by years of wind and wear. There were seven Havens children. And all of them, from Mary, the eldest, to baby Eli, were earnest and intelligent.

They all looked alike, too. In fact, they could have swapped faces. And no one would have known the difference.

I knew their mother. She looked nothing like the children. Her hair was shiny black like a raven's wing, not mousy brown.

Moses Havens drove a truck and was not home very often. So I did not meet the man of the house for several years.

Then one evening, I saw a man sitting alone on the bench at a livestock auction. And there was no doubt. He had to be the father of the Havens clan. He had the same face. People should see our eternal Father in His children's faces, too. That is what happened at Antioch. Called the jewel of Roman's eastern provinces, Antioch was a modern city on the windswept highlands of modern Turkey.

A large gentile church bloomed and blossomed there. The new believers had no building; they met in homes. Still, their pagan neighbors knew who they were. They saw something different in them, too. And they gave them a name: Christians, little Christs.

They spat that word out with a sneer. But the very fact that unbelievers called them little Christs is a feather in the cap of born again believers at Antioch. With a minimum of teaching, they were living out God's most basic command to Christians.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children... Ephesians 5:1 (NIV)

Even the sex worshipers who patronized the prostitutes at the Temple of Daphne could see it. The slaves and shopkeepers who worshiped Jesus were trying to imitate the way their Lord lived.

Then and now, that is the essence of shining for our precious Savior. We are to imitate the attitudes and actions of God's Son.

We are to witness for Him by being like Him.

Christ's Sacrifice

After appointing twelve men to serve as apostles, Jesus paused to give them some basic instructions. Then He added a brief description of what would happen if they obeyed them.

...you will be sons of the Most High; Verse 35

Our Savior did not mean to say that we can become God's children by obeying these commands. The sense of our Savior's statement is that we will thereby show ourselves to be sons of God.

The implication of that statement is stark and stunning. If believers must do these things to be recognized as God's children, it is quite possible to be a child of God and behave nothing at all like the Lord.

And that is unthinkable. We simply must be like Jesus. Eternal destinies hang in the balance. It will make the difference between heaven and hell for people our Lord dearly loves.

They must see Jesus if they are to love and live for Him. And they can only see Him in us.

Christ's love for people was so powerful and profound, He willingly laid down His life and shed His blood to pay the price for the sins of mankind.

He did not just do that for those who believed in Him, either. Our Lord also loved the men who slapped Him and smashed their fists into His face. He gave His life for the men who beat His back and drove nails into His hands.

Proud, arrogant priests so hungered for His blood, they stooped to bribery and betrayal. Yet our Savior loved them even when they stood at the foot of His cross cursing, mocking and spitting in His holy face.

Jesus dearly loved His enemies. So if we are to be like Him, we must love those who set themselves against us, too.

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Verses 27-28

It is not enough, our Lord insisted, to limit our love to those who love us. We must love like God. And God loves His enemies.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. Verse 32

Christ's love is not only powerful. It is also practical. So we cannot settle for a love that is little more than warm, fuzzy feelings. Love must also affect what we do. Or it is not really our God's love at all.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 1 John 3:16-18

No matter how unfairly and unkindly people might treat us, we are to love them. And motivated by love and love alone, we are to pray for them and help them in any way we can.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; Verse 35

Intelligent people can always reason away clever arguments on Christ's behalf. But they can neither ignore nor argue with love.

That is why even one of the Roman officers who supervised the Savior's crucifixion came to faith. Like hot coals, it was branded in his brain that the very Man he was executing, genuinely loved him and fervently prayed for him.

The same thing happened to Saul of Tarsus. He was stunned and stirred by love, too. But he did not see Jesus; he saw Stephen, one of the Master's followers.

Just like Jesus, even as wicked men were murdering him, that godly man had nothing but love for them. Paul never forgot that. It planted a seed in his life that took root and grew until he sprawled in a ditch on the road to Damascus, blind and finally broken.

Nothing is more powerful than Jesus' love. And if we let Him, His Spirit will shine it within us.

Christ's Submission

There is violence in Christ's commandments to His disciples. He also spoke of vicious assaults and savage street thefts.

Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Verse 29

Luke's careful record of our Redeemer's words is very specific. Our Lord was not talking about an open slap on the cheek but a closed fist smashed into the jaw.

The Savior was not speaking about an act of disrespect and disdain, but of violence and hatred. And the second illustration is every bit as strong. Jesus spoke of someone who, either by fraud or by force, steals your coat on chilly day.

Our Savior insisted that, even in such extreme circumstances, we who trust in Him are not to resist. We are to be like the Lord we love. And He did not resist men who were vicious and violent.

I gave My back to those who strike Me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. Isaiah 50:6

There is an eternally important reason why Jesus never fought back when wicked men resisted Him. He understood that nothing could happen to Him by accident. He knew what we must learn.

Like prosperity and progress, pain and problems can only come into our lives by our Heavenly Father's consent. And He never allows anything to come into the lives of His children that is not intended to enrich their lives and deepen their faith.

So our Savior willingly and faithfully submitted to whatever His Father allowed to come His way. And He expects us to do the very same thing.

After all, there are no accidents in the life a Christian. Our great and gracious God is in complete control every moment.

So when someone attacks us, physically or verbally, unless we must do so to protect our families, we are not to fight back. Secondly, if we are assaulted, either personally by violent thieves or legally by predatory law suits, we are not to resist. Instead, we are to give them more than they ask for.

It takes an extra measure of grace to react to personal attacks with calm serenity. And only knowing that God is in complete control of our lives can give it to us.

If our Lord allows it, we must not resist. We must submit.

Christ's Sympathy

The young man was dressed to the nines. His garments were imported silk, carried on camel caravans all the way from China. And His robe was embroidered with expensive colored threads.

Throughout his young life, he had known nothing but power, prestige and pleasure. But those advantages gave him neither serenity nor satisfaction.

Then one day, he saw the light in the eyes and life in the faces of Jesus' disciples. Instantly, he wanted to join them. But he stumbled over the cost of following Christ.

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Matthew 19:21

Our Redeemer's request of that young man was not unique. He made the same demand of His disciples. More important still, He did the same Himself.

Out of love for needy human beings, our Savior gave away absolutely everything He owned. He went without a house to live in or a bed to sleep on.

Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Luke 9:58

When Joseph died, he left Jesus his carpenter shop and all his tools. But by the time Christ died, there was nothing left. And when He hung on the cross, soldiers gambled over the only personal possession He had left: His clothes.

Our Lord had nothing else to His name. But not by misfortune or mistreatment. Our Master had nothing left because He made a positive choice. He owned nothing but the clothes on His back because He had given away absolutely everything else.

Some people came to Him in rags. Others came starving with hunger. And Jesus not only saved their souls and soothed their sicknesses. He also gave them the food and clothes they needed.

That is what we are to do. We are to shine Jesus' kindness and compassion to anyone and everyone who is in need.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Verse 36

We do not have to wonder how to carry out that commandment, either. Jesus said it is simple. Whenever someone asks for our help, we are to have compassion and, both willingly and freely, give them what they need.

Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Verse 30

The company of Christ's followers are called His body. And for good reason. We who have chosen to love and live for Jesus Christ are the only physical presence He has in this world.

So if men are to see our Master, they must see Him in us. Or they will never see Him at all.

And Jesus said that no one is disappointed when he or she asks for God's help. *Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Matthew 7:7-8*

So if we are to be like our Lord, we must be as ready to help others as our Heavenly Father is to help us. Nothing is quite so hard and humbling as having to ask for help. So our God never robs those who come to Him of their dignity by belittling or berating them because they need His help.

He not only helps them. He also encourages and uplifts them. And we should, too. We are not only bound to obey Christ's command to help those who come to us. We are also to do so in such a way that they are not made to feel little or low.

However, there is a much more important reason why those who love Jesus should freely give to those who need help.

All of us offer pious excuses for not giving to a beggar on a street corner. But if we were honest, our real reason is that deep down we simply do not want to part with the money.

And that is a danger signal for anyone who considers himself a Christian. Loving money is utterly incompatible with serving God.

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

Money must never more important to us than helping people in need: people Jesus loves and died for. If it is, our profession of faith in Jesus is probably little more than a pious pretense.

We are to be like Christ. And He never valued anything as much as He did people in need. Not even His body and His blood.

It does not make any difference who needs our help, either. Even if it is an enemy who has bitterly opposed us and spitefully used us, we are to give them whatever they need.

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 Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Verse 35

In the final analysis, it is not enough that we actually are God's born again children. Our relationship with our Redeemer must so profoundly change us, that people can plainly see we are His sons. But to do that we must love others as Jesus loves us.

And our God is even kind and compassionate to those who hate Him, oppose Him, and persecute His children. He gives them good health and peaceful lives. So we can do no less.

One thing is abundantly clear in Christ's teaching. Our Heavenly Father has a higher standard for His children than He does for other people in this world. He expects much more of us than He does of those who are yet to know Him.

And if we do not love all men just as He does, we are no different than any pagan.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. Verses 32-34

Jesus would say that if we love only those who love us, we are no better than the worst of men. And that is unacceptable for those who claim Christ as King and Savior.

After all, we are commanded to be like our Lord. We are called to be Christians. Little Christs!