

A Strong Contrast

People will often ask why these accounts that we read about here in the gospels differ from one another between the books of the gospels. And I tell them that for me, as I read these scriptures, especially the words of the Lord Jesus that are recorded within these four gospels, I just assume that as He and His disciples traveled about the countryside, He gave many, many sermons, some short ones, some long ones, each tailored to fit not only His listeners at those moments in time, but also tailored to all the other people, like you and me, who would read and study His words later on, even today.

And also, as the Apostle John told us, not all the things that Jesus said and did are recorded for us in these scriptures. He said, in John chapter 21,

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:25)

For that reason, as I read similar words that are given in another of these gospels, I don't question if there is some slightly different wording involved. He probably told many of His same truths over and over again, just in different ways to different people in different circumstances.

And also, we need to keep in mind that each of us hears and receives words spoken to us in different ways. There's a popular expression in today's language, saying that we each look at a matter through "different lenses". And that is so very true. Even within the group gathered here in this church today, the things that I say from this pulpit will be received slightly differently by each of you. Perhaps that is one reason why Jesus began these words today by saying in verse 7, "I say to you who hear".

I have no doubt that all the people who were gathered with Jesus that day could hear His voice. But in these words, Jesus is saying something else. He is implying that some would simply hear His words, but others would "hear" and more fully comprehend the real intended meanings of the things He had to say. And so, may I encourage us in the same way, to "hear", to truly "hear" these words of the Lord Jesus.

So then, as we examine the words of this passage here in Luke chapter 6, and we recognize that these words are similar, in many ways, to those given in the

“Sermon on the Mount” recorded in the Book of Matthew. We also recognize that some of Jesus’ words differ slightly. And for me, that difference may simply be because this sermon was tailored to these listeners, and then also tailored to fit some of us today as we study these words.

The important point to remember is that these are all the same infallible truths that are spoken over and over again, just given in different ways.

Now, here today, in Luke chapter 6, beginning in verse 27, just after Jesus had spoken what the bible scholars refer to as “Be-attitudes” and “Woes”, He continues by saying . . .

²⁷. . . “I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹ To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. ³¹ And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

³² “But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. ³⁶ Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

³⁷ “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:27-38)

These words of the Lord Jesus draw a very strong contrast to the usual manner of thought and temperament that pours forth out of our souls each day. The foundational beliefs and character traits, from which our behavior flows, have been formed and ingrained within us for a long time, passed along to us from our parents and grandparents, or acquired through painful experiences. And they are all that we know, so we seldom ever question their validity.

And to add to that, if we look around us at other people, we see similar beliefs and responses taking place in them, further confirming to us that our own ways are valid.

But . . . looking at these words of Jesus and then also closely examining the usual outcome of our normal behavior, we have to admit, there is something terribly wrong in the way that daily life sometimes turns out for us.

A friend of mine likes to quote Albert Einstein as having said, "The definition of insanity is doing the exact same thing over and over again in exactly the same way, but expecting a different result."

Folks, too often husbands and wives experience that very thing. They continually argue and fuss at one another demanding that the other be kind, but only bringing about more arguing and fussing.

We engage in business practices that hurt other people without regard for godly ethics.

In all these things, we seem to return evil for evil but expect it to bring about good.

Again, the contrast being drawn here in Jesus' words is so radically different from that which we do each day that it demands we go back and reexamine the very foundations of our beliefs. And when we do, I am sure that we will find that we have built everything that we are and everything that we know upon a lie, that special lie that satan brought into the mind of innocent, naive and deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden.

There satan convinced Eve that she could figure out all the circumstances and the matters of daily life for herself, that she did not need the wisdom of God for such things, that she could determine which matters were right and which were wrong, all by herself. And then, using her own wisdom, she could make good decisions for her life.

But unfortunately, as has proven out over the generations, Eve's wisdom and her decisions just cannot provide the same good results that God's wisdom provides. Instead, just the opposite seems always to take place.

The precious truth that God first established for the good of mankind has irreparably been distorted and perverted, and it remains so to this day. That which is right seems wrong to us and that which is wrong seems right. "If someone strikes you on the cheek, you should hit him back." "If someone steals something from you, you should take it back from him."

Or, as we would do it in today's culture, either call the police or call your favorite trial lawyer and sue him, and not only for what he took from you, but take back even more. We are driven by our emotions and we instinctively return evil for evil.

And it all turned on one simple decision made a long time ago back there in the Garden of Eden, a decision that ruled out the perspective that God was the sovereign orchestrator of all of the matters of life, and put in its place the perspective that we ourselves can and must take charge of all those things of life on our own.

And Jesus is saying to us here that that is very wrong, and that we can and must turn it all back around and put it back into the way God designed it to be. And we are to do that by simply making right decisions.

But let me pause here for a moment and restate a basic foundational truth about decision making. Not just any person can choose to make a right decision.

In the Book of Romans, we are told that as long as a person remains unrepentant and unsaved, their minds and hearts and souls and spirits are controlled by the sinful nature that lives within them. And because of that, they are completely incapable of making a truly right decision. Listen to verse 7 of Romans chapter 8.

⁷the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. (Romans 8:7)

And here in this passage, over and over again Jesus tells us how "unbelieving sinners" respond to their circumstances, continually practicing sinful behavior, returning evil for evil.

Folks, the sinful mind is so depraved that it does not have the ability, on its own, to submit to the truths of God and to make good decisions. Before a sinful mind can do anything that is at all righteous, it must first surrender its control back under God's control.

It is only by surrender that the depraved heart, mind and soul is brought back to a point from which good decisions can again begin to be made.

In other words, a surrendered heart is able to go back and undo that which Eve did in the Garden. Where she said, I want to make decisions for myself, we can now repent of that manner of thinking and say back to God, "I can't make good decisions for myself, I want you to be my sole decision maker."

But listen . . . even then it is still an impossible thing for you and me to do on our own. Consider what Jesus is saying here! Verse 27,

²⁷"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. ³¹And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. (Luke 6:27-31)

Again, even with a surrendered heart, these attitudes, these responses, these temperaments are completely impossible for any of us to carry out by our own efforts!

Consider for a moment if you were the father or mother of the ones that O. J. Simpson mercilessly slaughtered. Could you love him? Could you pray for him? Our emotions are so strong. In truth, we would probably lie in wait for him and strike back as viciously as he struck out at our children.

Again, even with a surrendered heart, these responses that Jesus demands are completely impossible for any of us to carry out on our own! So then, what are we to do?

. . . Folks, this is another one of those unfathomable mysteries of God, mysteries that cannot be comprehended by the simple mind of men, but yet, still must be done.

This is the point where you and I are brought to the cliff's edge of faith, and there we are told to simply take the next step, a step that surrenders back our attitude, our responses and our temperaments into the more capable hands of God.

There and there alone is where real truth lies. There and there alone is where right results take place.

Who knows what God intends for those wretched people who have mistreated you or your loved ones! Yes, God might have retribution in mind for them. In Romans 12 we are told,

¹⁹Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.
(Romans 12:19)

So yes, God might have retribution in mind for them, but He may also instead intend to use your suffering as a means of turning that lost one to Himself, as does often take place in our marriages with the mistreatment that comes from an unsaved husband or wife. In 1 Corinthians 7, we are told,

¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. (1 Corinthians 7:14)

God often has plans that you and I don't know about and we must give place to His plans.

But again, none of the Godly attitudes, responses, and temperaments will come easy. We are most often driven by our strong emotions. And those emotions are fueled by the foundational sin that first tempted Adam and Eve there in the Garden, the foundational sin of "pride".

"Pride", that driving force within us that lays claim to our right to our self, that driving force within us that tells us that we can do it all by our self, that driving force within us that demands that no one be allowed to mistreat us or cheat us and get away with it, that driving force that demands that we exact our own form of vengeance.

Folks, "pride", our claim to our right to our self, has been the downfall of every man and woman born on the earth, but it does have a remedy, and that remedy is simple "surrender", "surrender" that leads to repentance and faith,

“surrender” that brings about a humble and contrite heart, “surrender” that humbly declares back to God, “Yours is a better way than mine”!

My question for you and for me as we consider these words of Jesus is, “Are we content with our own form of insanity, that of ‘doing the same exact thing over and over again, but each time expecting a different result, which never comes’. Or are we ready for a difference?”

Folks, I am ready for a difference! And I know that you are also. But how do we begin? We begin by being intentional with our responses, with our attitudes and with our temperaments. Why must we be intentional? It’s because, if we are not intentional then our old natural responses will win out.

We have to intentionally choose to go against the grain of our natural responses, to deny our pride, to deny “our claim to our right to our self” and to intentionally humble our pride into the more capable hands of God.

And we have to intentionally do that over and over and over again until that humility becomes our normal response, our normal attitude, our normal temperament.

Folks, we know that God really can do things so much better than we can do them. He knows more about the situations in front of us. He knows what He wants to accomplish in each person’s life. He knows when to exact vengeance, and He knows when to be merciful.

So what if we let someone get away with something? So what if we let someone cheat us? Cannot God restore our losses? Cannot God bind up a broken heart.

You and I are children of the King. Our provision comes from His hand! We must not give in to the temptation to make our own provision, whether it be for vengeance or it be for some other purpose. God’s way will always be the better way. So, I remind us as we close,

²⁷ . . . do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹ To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you. And

from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. (Luke 6:27-30)

Let's Pray.