

## **To Judge or not to Judge? That is the question.**

Please have Luke 6 open at Page 837 from v 27.

HAMLET *To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing, end them?*

I'm not going to recite the entire soliloquy from Hamlet but if you know it, it does give an insight into the torment we face when trying to make sense of a messed up world. Hamlet struggled with wanting to avenge his father's death, eventually taking matters into his own hands and paying the ultimate price with his own life.

Human sinfulness tends to escalate wrong rather than repairing it. We can see this in the constant demands for 'justice' when interviews are conducted outside court-rooms and the victims want the perpetrator dealt with ever so severely. There is a lack of grace, and tragically, this is evident also among Christians.

But we are quick to hide behind proof-texts when we are on the wrong side of the equation. We resort to catch-phrases like the 'Golden rule' to give us a way out.

For many, the Golden Rule has become synonymous with the gospel. Ask people what it means to be a Christian and many are likely to reply "**Do to others as you would have them do to you**". It's a quote from our Bible passage today. It comes directly from the lips of Jesus. It makes sense.

It's actually not a unique concept to Christianity. Most religions and philosophies have a version of it. And that's understandable given how practical a piece of advice it is.

The problem is, that 'Golden Rule' theology is not the core of Jesus' teaching; it is a by-product of a life transformed by the indwelling Holy Spirit when a person surrenders to Christ in repentance and faith.

Our gospel reading today has four sections where Jesus describes aspects of a transformed life. They are Love; Attitude; Recognition and Stability. L A R S. *In Scandinavian, LARS means 'Victorious' so if you want to live a victorious life, remember the four points of this sermon.*

Jesus tackles some behaviours that give those around us an insight into what is happening in our hearts, our inner being. These behaviours give clues about our state of regeneration – whether we are being transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit within us or whether we are being controlled by our own sinfulness and desires.

Christians don't have a monopoly on doing good to others but our motivation is grounded in the firm belief that everyone is made in the image of God the Father and for a relationship with him.

The outworking of that relationship is seen in people who take Jesus at His word and demonstrate His love and compassion to others.

## **LOVE:**

One of the hardest things for people to do is to love enemies. We've become accustomed to seeing pictures of war-torn countries around the world where people's hatred of those who follow a different political ideology, a different religion or even a different version of the same religion, results in killing, dispossession from land, theft of property and resources, as well as mistreatment of women and children.

If we subscribe to a gospel of grace, we have to be prepared to demonstrate it. The gospel is the story of Jesus dying as a substitute for people who rebelled against God's authority in their lives.

Jesus didn't die for 'nice' people. He died for rebels. He died for people like us who couldn't pay the price for sin demanded by a Holy God.

So how do we show love. How do we demonstrate gracious, loving, undeserved kindness to those around us?

The answer may surprise you. It's not in lending your mower to other people in the church family, or even inviting them to a meal. These are good things so please keep doing them but if you really want to make an impact, give to those who cannot, might not, or probably will not repay you the kindness.

[A little over a week ago, the men met for a Blokes Only event with Nigel Klein. He spoke of his struggles with the poverty that was all around him in Tanzania. He was often besieged by people needing food, money, medical help and a whole host of other needs.](#)

How does a Christian respond to all these needs? You can't meet all of them. But one thing that emerged is that you can't just help those who seem reliable, trustworthy and will repay you.

Jesus says 'Love your enemies' and this love is a verb, it is an action word. DO something! He is saying. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Don't just love your friends and family. Everyone does that.

Don't just lend just to those who can repay. If that were the measure of love, we would be a truly sad society.

If that were true, the Commonwealth Bank would be my best friend in the whole world. It has lent me an enormous amount of money but strangely, I don't feel a sense of warmth about it. I don't feel that the bank is so concerned about my welfare that it lent me a lot of money. It's a transaction; pure and simple.

The bank lends me money so that I can buy a house: I then give the bank much more money back. We both get what we need or want at that point of time. When the loan is repaid, I don't have much of a relationship with the bank. If I fail to repay, the bank repossesses my home.

Is that what our relationships should be like; mutually beneficial transactions? Jesus is telling us that what we do for those in need is to be modelled on our heavenly Father's merciful way of dealing with people.

V36 ends this section by commanding us to 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful'.

The next section follows on from this discussion by targeting our attitudes.

### **Attitude v37**

I must say I hate the way verse 37 is used by people nowadays. I have heard, as you probably have too, people justifying their bad behaviour by saying "Don't judge me or you will be judged".

Friends, it doesn't mean you can't call a brother or sister to repentance if they are disobeying God and potentially harming their relationship with God and others.

What it does mean is that we cannot judge a person's standing before God. Only God knows that.

That is generally the basis on which we decide whether we will 'love' others and do good to them. If we think someone is 'one of us' we will help them, lend to them, feed them and generally be merciful.

If we judge them to be an outsider, we condemn them by withdrawing our love and support. I wonder if this attitude affects the way we deal with asylum seekers in this country? The recent debate about asylum seeker bodies being left in the ocean has given me a startling insight into our attitudes in this country to those who are not 'like us'.

Dr Michael Jensen, a lecturer at Moore College in Sydney, wrote a piece which has been picked up by the ABC about this issue. In it he questions what it says about our society that we are comfortable with leaving bodies floating in the sea. The issue seems to have quickly been lost in the rapid turnover of our news cycle.

*One respondent, Craig, wrote: "These are not our bodies, and it isn't our sea."*

*The Australian taxpayer has better things to do than to be funding risky recovery operations on account of the unlawful behaviour of foreigners trying to enter Australia without valid documents, contrary to our Immigration Act."*

*At the same time, expenditure on wars is mind-boggling. The US has spent \$1.5 trillion on Iraq and Afghanistan*

V 31 says 'Do unto others as you would have them do to you' and in this section, Jesus says 'Forgive and you will be forgiven'.

How do we see these commands play out in life?

Some of you may be surprised to learn that a number of years ago I went to gaol. Several gaols in fact. I was visiting a friend who had been convicted of a relatively minor offence and received a custodial sentence.

I went to the infamous Long Bay, Silverwater, Parramatta and Bathurst Gaols – we euphemistically call them 'Correctional facilities now - and finally to the low security Kirkconnell Prison farm.

Visiting these gaols was, until then, the most humiliating experience of my life. I felt like I was the criminal every time I went through the screening process. [I have had many more humiliating experiences since then though!](#)

The thing that saddened me most was that my friend, let's call him Sam, was a Christian who did something silly and was caught by the police. He was abandoned by many of his Christian friends who didn't want to associate with a 'sinner'.

I went to court with Sam. I sat in the witness box and answered questions from prosecution lawyers while gazing into Sam's eyes. I saw the terror in his face and the sadness in his young bride's eyes.

The offence was such a minor one that we all expected Sam to be given a fine and a slap on the wrist. But when the judge's 'guilty' verdict was read and the sentence was a gaol term, we were all speechless. Sam was handcuffed and led out of the courtroom without so much as a kiss good-bye for his wife.

Are we any better than Sam? Are we such paragons of virtue that we should look down at people who have been discovered to be 'real' sinners?

His friends condemned him. His friends abandoned him.

But let me ask you, if one of us was found to have sinned in a way which under the law would lead to a gaol sentence, would we still love them?

Would we treat them the way we would hope we would be treated?

Granted, we must protect people from harm and if punishment is warranted, so be it.

The reality is that we are all sinners. Sin is primarily against God even when perpetrated against fellow humans. God's attitude is merciful. Our attitude should be merciful. That doesn't mean sin goes unpunished, God dealt with it at the cross and all who accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness can transfer their guilt on to Him and be free.

So when we are tempted to condemn others for their sin, particularly the obvious ones, let's not forget that we are equally guilty before God and in need of forgiveness. Let's not look at the speck in our brother or sister's eye when we have a plank in our own.

## **Recognition** v43

The third part of this passage we are going to look at is an illustration of a tree and the fruit that it bears. The apostle Paul has similar things to say in Galatians 5 where he describes the fruit of the Spirit

Much like the Galatians passage, Jesus reminds us that people, like trees, produce fruit in accordance with what their nature is. A bad tree doesn't produce good fruit. Figs don't come from thornbushes nor grapes from briars.

That's how we can recognise the work of the Spirit too. If a person is born again of the Spirit of God, he or she will act in a godly fashion. What they say and what they do will be consistent with being joined together with Christ.

## **Stability** v46E

It's not surprising that the very next thought relates to foundations. Jesus uses an illustration about building a house to describe the foundations of the Christian life.

He goes to the core of our confession if we are followers of Christ and asks *"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I say?"*

Jesus shows that having foundations that go deep into the ground are necessary for buildings to survive raging waters in a flood. In fact, for most buildings, the foundations are critical no matter where they are built.

I was talking to a structural engineer recently about the earthquakes in Christ Church, New Zealand. Apparently, the extent of the damage was increased by the soil that Christchurch is built on.

The soil there is subject a process called 'liquefaction'. When shaken, as happens in earthquakes, the soil turns to a liquid and foundations are

severely tested. If they can't hold the building during an earthquake, severe damage occurs. In fact, during the NZ earthquakes of 2011 and 12, 11,000 public buildings were destroyed.

Cars sank when the ground they were on liquefied, only to become stuck fast, half-submerged, in the newly reconstituted solid ground when the earthquake stopped.

Newer buildings that had been built to more modern standards, survived.

In v49 Jesus says *"But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."*

Stability in the face of trial, when the storms and tempests of life lash at the very core of our being, that stability is what marks us out as people of faith. When we can say 'Your will be done' and mean it, that is when we can stand alongside others and offer a helping hand. Not rejecting them but being merciful.

So, what do we have here in these four cameos from Jesus? What can we take away from them that will help us understand why they are recorded in scripture for us?

Let's see if we can draw some threads together.

The problem we all face is that we live in a broken world and what we see all around us is a world full of broken people struggling to make sense of a world without apparent foundation or direction.

Taking our cameos in reverse order, we can start by ensuring we have firm foundations in our personal lives. Our **stability** is in Jesus, the Rock of our salvation. *'On Christ the solid Rock I stand' the hymn goes 'All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand'.*

If our foundations are in Jesus, we can live lives that are not shaken by every event which doesn't go our way. We can stand firm in the face of trials knowing that He who loved us enough to give his life for us will bring us safely home. Whether the storm be cancer, retrenchment, divorce, death of a loved one or even disappointment at missed opportunities, our eternal security is guaranteed in and by Jesus.

As people then with firm foundations, we will bear fruit in keeping with the Spirit of God. The list in Galatians 5 shows us what this will look like. We will be **recognisable** by our love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control.

So when we go into the world and we rub up against other, less than perfect people, how will react? Hopefully, like Jesus. John 3:17 says *"<sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."*

There is a subtle difference here that I think we need to be aware of when interpreting this passage. Jesus never condones bad behaviour. He does however, expect holiness in our lives.

In John ch 8 there is a story of a woman caught in adultery. Some Pharisees and teachers of the law brought her to Jesus and demanded a verdict. The law stated that the woman should be stoned.

Jesus' response is both startling and a model for us too. He says *"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."*

Jesus didn't say *"Oh it's OK, leave her alone"*. His first priority was the restoration of the woman. No-one stayed to throw the first stone and Jesus asked her *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*  
<sup>11</sup> *"No one, sir," she said.*  
*"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."* – NOTE! Leave your life of sin.

That's the difference is between judgement and discernment in the Christian life.

We are not the ones to judge who is a genuine follower of Christ but we are to discern when a person is behaving inappropriately. Our **attitude** is not one of judgement but of mercy; mercy in order to bring people to Jesus for cleansing of sin and restoration of their relationship with God the Father.

However, St Paul warns us not to even eat with immoral 'sinners'. We are to expel the immoral person from among us. I take it that means that a person who refuses to act appropriately while claiming to be a Christian is to be reprimanded. They should know better. By bringing an issue to their attention first, we could in fact restore that person to a right relationship

with God and with the church. Read Matt 18 and then look at 1 Corinthians 5 and 6.

Finally, when it comes to **loving** our enemies, whether real or perceived, they need our love, compassion and mercy even more!

I read this quote from a friend on Facebook just this week. He said "*The Good Samaritan teaches us much – partly, how very, very expensive, dangerous, unwise and inconvenient real Christian love is*".

And isn't that the point? Real Christian love doesn't make sense in the world's eyes. It's expensive. It's risky. Are we willing to take risks to see people restored to a right relationship with God in Jesus Christ?

Is that our priority?

I mentioned earlier my friend Sam who went to gaol. What happened to him? Like many inmates, he was frightened of being released. He had few friends, no work, a shattered reputation and, he had become comfortable in gaol leading Bible studies and doing theological study.

At the time, I had a man in my home group who was a departmental manager with a large Christian welfare agency. Let's call him George. I asked George if he would employ a former prisoner and he thought long and hard about it, discussed it with the CEO and they interviewed Sam while he was still in gaol. They offered him a job.

I will never forget going to gaol on the day Sam was released. He walked through the prison gates, clutching his little box of belongings, thankful for the lessons that God had taught him.

I took him to a cafe for a hearty breakfast and he told me that going to gaol was the best thing that had happened to him. God had well and truly grabbed his attention.

Sam started work a week later and has since built a business empire which now reaches into SE Asia.

**To judge or not to judge?** That is the question isn't it?

Passages like these can't help but throw us back upon the mercy of God.

We deserved judgement and eternal separation from all that is good because of our rebellion against God.

Romans 5:8 says *'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'*.

It is not our prerogative to judge whether others deserve the same mercy we have received. That is God's work.

When we grasp how much we have been granted in God's mercy, we will be less likely to look at others with anything less than utter compassion. We will love unconditionally because that is how we are loved. And we will love them enough to point them to Christ and Christ-likeness.

Without Christ, humanity will face judgement without an advocate. Without Christ, human sinfulness will continue to escalate conflict rather than strive for reconciliation.

With Christ however, we can nurture others so that they will display the fruit of the Spirit for God's glory and the benefit of humanity.

With Christ, we can build on a firm foundation that can resist the devil and his schemes. We can live lives of peace knowing that the one and only judge has everything under His control and justice will not only be done, but will be seen by all to have been done.

Imagine how revolutionary that would be in our workplaces, our schools, our neighbourhoods and dare I say it, in our churches!

## **Luke 6:27-49**

New International Version (NIV)

### **Love for Enemies**

<sup>27</sup> "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

### **Judging Others**

<sup>37</sup> "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. <sup>38</sup> 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."

<sup>39</sup> He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? <sup>40</sup> The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

<sup>41</sup> "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>42</sup> How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

### **A Tree and Its Fruit**

<sup>43</sup> "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

<sup>44</sup> Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. <sup>45</sup> A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

## **The Wise and Foolish Builders**

<sup>46</sup> “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? <sup>47</sup> As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. <sup>48</sup> They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. <sup>49</sup> But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

## **Hannah’s Prayer**

2 Then Hannah prayed and said:

“My heart rejoices in the LORD;  
in the LORD my horn<sup>[a]</sup> is lifted high.

My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.

<sup>2</sup> “There is no one holy like the LORD;  
there is no one besides you;  
there is no Rock like our God.

<sup>3</sup> “Do not keep talking so proudly  
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,  
for the LORD is a God who knows,  
and by him deeds are weighed.

<sup>4</sup> “The bows of the warriors are broken,  
but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

<sup>5</sup> Those who were full hire themselves out for food,  
but those who were hungry are hungry no more.

She who was barren has borne seven children,  
but she who has had many sons pines away.

<sup>6</sup> “The LORD brings death and makes alive;  
he brings down to the grave and raises up.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD sends poverty and wealth;  
he humbles and he exalts.

<sup>8</sup> He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

he seats them with princes  
and has them inherit a throne of honor.

“For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’s;  
on them he has set the world.

<sup>9</sup> He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,  
but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.  
“It is not by strength that one prevails;  
<sup>10</sup> those who oppose the LORD will be broken.  
The Most High will thunder from heaven;  
the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.  
“He will give strength to his king  
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”