

PSALM 37:1-11, 39-40 (p. 449)

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LUKE 6:27-38 (p. 837)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

You are speaking to “those who are listening” Lord. May we, indeed, be listening. Open up our ears, so that we might hear. Open up our minds, so that we might truly comprehend what it is you are saying. And open up our hearts Lord, so that we might respond immediately to your Truth. We ask these things in Jesus’ Name, Amen!

“LOVE WHO?”

I am not sure who. I am not even sure that “who” matters. It was one of those super-put-together business gurus though, back in the early 80’s. He was being interviewed regarding all of his accomplishments. And the reporter asked that one, inevitable question that everyone asks. “To what do you attribute your amazing success?” Like I said, I don’t remember who it was. But I do remember his answer. He said, “Anything that I have achieved, either in my public or private life, can be attributed to one, three-word phrase; ‘AND THEN SOME’”!

“I realized early on that the difference between ‘winners’ and those who ‘also-ran’, can be summed up in those three words. Winners, those who ‘make it’, do exactly what everyone else does, ‘And Then Some’. They work just as hard as everyone else does, ‘And Then Some’. They are as dependable as others, ‘And Then Some’. They do their job, just like everyone else, ‘And Then Some’”.

“The top people in most companies do what average people do, ‘And Then Some’. Those who rise above are thoughtful, like others, considerate and kind, “And Then Some”. They meet their responsibilities fairly and squarely, “And Then Some’. They are good friends and helpful neighbors, “And Then Some’. They can be counted on in an emergency, “And Then Some.’”!

It's simple, right? My guess is you've heard this or something similar before. It's not new information. It's not even profound. If you want to be “outstanding”, then you need to “stand out”! Amazon has countless books on the subject! Motivational seminars and “how to videos” pop up all the time! Corporations spend millions drilling this concept into their employees' heads! Coaches say things like, “I need you to give a hundred and ten percent”, right? It makes sense! This, “And Then Some” philosophy really works! We all know that!

So, how come the practical application of it, often eludes us? What is it about human nature that causes us to look for short-cuts, and easy answers instead? Do you think it's just narcissism, selfishness? Is it simply sin? Why do we strive for comfortable and easy, not to mention the less costly? We want all the dividends of a dedicated and disciplined life, right? Only we want it with as little investment as possible! I mean, who in their right mind would go the extra mile if they didn't have too? Think about it!

When that salesman on television tells you that he has something that will cut your work time in half, don't you think, "Great! I'll take two"? When the very next commercial offers to "melt the belly fat away", don't you wonder "Why work out? Why change my diet? Why not just eat Super Beets, or take a fruit and veggie pill instead"?

Why save for that new car, or an ultimate get away when you can just charge it? Why plan for retirement? It'll all work out! Why put in any extra effort into anything? Like your marriage? If it hits a pot hole, just bail! Why get involved in the community? Someone else will do it. Why get involved in your Church? Why Worship in fact, or study Scripture, or Pray for that matter? It's easier to just listen to Christian radio? Or better yet, watch it on TV? Why do more than the minimum? ..."AND THEN SOME"? Are you crazy? Love those who don't love you? Love your enemies? Don't be absurd!

I don't think people in the First Century were all that different from people today, do you? So, imagine the shock wave that would have rippled through the crowd, as Jesus shared today's lesson! At the very least it would have been a challenge. But it's even more than that. This is actually a command! A command from Jesus Himself! A command given "to those who are listening"!

You caught that part, right? It's verse twenty-seven. "To you who are listening I say; Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you"! We're all listening, right? We heard what the Lord said? We know what He wants us to do, don't we?

Jesus says I want you to take a quantum leap in your lifestyle, in your attitude. If you are going to be on my team, then that's the requirement. You need to give one hundred and ten percent, and then some. I want you to treat everyone well, including those who treat you poorly. I want you to love everyone, including your enemies, especially your enemies! And I want you to do it, because it will point to your Heavenly Father!

And let's put a point on it, just to be clear. We are living in such a divided world right now! Even right here in our Country! Maybe especially here in our Country. And our political leaders seem to be intentionally making it worse! So, let's be clear! What Jesus is saying is, if you are a Conservative, I want you to love Liberals. And if you are a Liberal, I want you to love Conservatives. If you are for masks, or vaccines, or mandates, I want you love those who are not. And visa-versa. I want you urban folks to love those rural folks, you young to love the old, the poor to love the wealthy, women to love men, and visa-versa! Got it!

It's radical, right! It would have been back then as well! Following Jesus requires a whole new paradigm, an ethical change in human relationships, a different way of life! My Disciples are called to be different, says the Lord, set apart from others! You are mine, says the Lord! You are the Salt and the Light that I so often talk about! For people to know that you belong to me, you need to live differently! I want you to be Holy! And to do that, you need to live a Holy Life!

Imagine what those folks listening would have thought, there on that level place, up on the side of a mountain. If you choose to follow me, says Jesus, then you need to go where I go! If you want to be re-created in my image, then you need to do what I do! And in case you haven't notice, I love my enemies!

And He uses the Greek word "Agape"! This love for our enemies is not a passionate love, "Eros". That might actually be easier! It's not familial affection either, friendship, "Philos". Even that might not be so tough! No, this is "Agape", a gracious, determined, active interest in the welfare of others! Agape love is not deterred by hatred, or even abuse. It is not based on results or outcomes. Agape love is love modeled solely on the Nature of God! We love, because He first loved us! This love that Jesus requires from those who are listening, does not retaliate (vv. 27-31)! It seeks no reward (vv. 32-36)! And it is not based on reciprocity, on having a "tit-for-tat" relationship (vv. 37-38)!

It is the very same love describe by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Church in Corinth. Maybe you remember? "Love is patient and kind. It doesn't envy or boast. It is not proud or self-seeking. Love does not dishonor others. It's not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love doesn't delight in evil. It rejoices in the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

"Love your enemies"! Can you imagine! Who comes to mind right now? "Do good to those who hate you"! Don't ignore them. That's not an active interest. Don't just tolerate them. That's not an active interest either!

Don't simply do what is "right and proper" even, as measured by the yardstick of the world. That's not enough, says the Lord. In order to "love them", like I am calling you to love them, you need to "do good to them! And the operative word is "do"!

Siddhartha Gautama lived in Nepal in the 5th Century B. C. He was a wealthy prince, and therefore isolated from the common people. One day he snuck out of the castle though, and saw a beggar in the streets. And suddenly confronted with the reality of the world, he started coming up with rules to better society. One of which was, "do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you". You may have heard of Siddhartha. He was later called "the Buddha".

Hillel the Elder, one of the most influential Rabbis in Jewish history, lived in the First Century B. C. He was a real stickler for the Law, and taught others to follow the Law as well. He was once asked by one of his students if he could recite the entire Law. And Hillel responded, "Yes, I can. I can even do it while standing on one foot!" He then lifted his leg and said, "What is hateful to you, do not, to your fellow. That is the whole Law. The rest is just commentary."

Only what Jesus says is different. It's more actually! "You have heard it said..., but I tell you...!" Jesus calls us to "do something", not just "don't do something"! He calls us to be proactive, not just refrain from being reactive! Lots of religious thought distinguishes "right" from "wrong"! But Jesus distinguishes what is "good" from what is simply "right"! Don't settle for the minimum, He says! Do that, "And Then Some"!

You have been taught your entire life an “An eye for an eye” and “a tooth for a tooth,” do it to me and I will do it to you! But I tell all who are listening, something radically different! “Anyone can love those who love them in return”. I want you to do that, “And Then Some”. Love those who hate you!

Anyone can loan money to those who will pay them back, with interest usually. But I want you do that, “And Then Some”. Loan to those who will never pay you back!

Anyone can bless those who bless them in return. But I want you to do that, “And Then Some”. Bless those who curse you! And if someone takes your overcoat, let him have it, “And Then Some”. Give him the matching sweater vest as well!

Like I said, this is radical stuff! In the First Century world, someone who lost a court case would be required to give the victor his Cloak, or overcoat, as a pledge until he paid the fine in full. Or a wealthy merchant in a business transaction might demand someone to give his Cloak until he could pay the balance on the debt. It was a guarantee! And it was a big deal!

Your Cloak was your shade from the scorching sun! Your Cloak was your protection from the wind and the rain! You don't want to be without your Cloak, at least not for very long. Which is the point of handing it over! But here is Jesus saying, give them your Tunic too! Wait! What? That would be like standing naked before the people I owe! And Jesus says, “Exactly”!

In Matthew's account of this lesson, Jesus says, "If someone compels you to go with him a mile, do that, "And Then Some". Go beyond the first mile! Go a second mile! And I can assure you, that statement would have instantly brought powerful images to mind!

Israel was occupied by the military might of the Roman Empire at the time. And one of the perks afforded to soldiers—one of the malicious, military privileges—was that they could, by law, demand that any Jewish male twenty-one years of age or older, carry their pack for a distance not to exceed one mile! I'm sure you can imagine how this might have played out!

The soldier's enjoyment of this Military Perk, was only exceeded by the Jew's hatred of the practice! The humiliation and subjugation were extreme! Imagine being stopped on the way to the market, and you, or your husband, your oldest son maybe, being forced to stop what you are doing, and walk a mile out of your way, carrying the sweaty old backpack of your enemy! And then a mile back, by-the-way, just to return to what you were doing! I don't think "resentful" is a strong enough word! And yet incredibly, Jesus demands that believers not only endure this demeaning practice, willingly! But also, willingly doubling it, by going the extra mile!

Clearly, Jesus is not only talking about carrying backpacks here, or debt security, or even physically turning the other cheek! He is talking about so much more! Jesus is talking about an entire attitude shift! An attitude shift willingly adopted by all of us who claim to follow Him! An attitude shift incorporated into our daily lives!

This second mile, turn the other cheek, love your enemy lifestyle, is one that needs to be learned and practiced! A principle that must be applied daily! A life that simply has to be lived out! And I say this, because this lesson comes right on the heels of the Beatitudes. This is actually part-two of the Sermon on the Mount. You know, where the Lord calls us to reorient every aspect of our lives towards Him! Blessed are the poor, remember? Blessed are the hungry. Blessed are those who weep and those who are persecuted. But woe to those who are rich, and well-fed, who are self-satisfied, self-reliant, who laugh now, who are popular by the standards of the world!

Remember, this “a level place”, up on the side of a hill, with a diverse cross section of people, with folks who hold all kinds of beliefs. Jesus is talking to those who will listen, calling them to a revolutionary change in thinking! This is a new way of life, a totally new approach to relationships and social behavior! One based on the attributes of God! This Higher Plane of Living is what will characterize His followers, distinguish us from the rest of humanity, because that’s how we point to God! “Then you will be sons and daughters of the Most-High”, it says! Apparently, God wants us to be recognized as members of the family! And apparently, He wants the family to have a good name!

Picture the father of a newborn baby looking down on his son or daughter in a hospital nursery. Now imagine someone walking by and saying, “He looks just like his daddy!” Now, you could take that poorly. The baby has chubby cheeks! He screams at the top of his lungs! He drools all over his pillow! But you don’t! You take it to mean that this child bears some visible family characteristics.

Embodied, here, in this precious little one, are some traits of the parent! And moms and dads feel quite proud of that, right! Your chest swells, your face beams! It happens every time an inherited trait, shines through! And so, it does with God!

Giving and Loving are family traits! God constantly gives of Himself for us! And constantly loves doing it! Loving and Giving, Caring and Sharing, and doing it in excess, are birthmarks, then, of a mature believer!

Remember when Jesus fed the five-thousand with five loaves and two fish? Everyone's need was met, and they had twelve baskets of food left over. That's meeting a need, "And Then Some"! Remember when He told His Disciples to cast their nets on the other side of the boat? They could hardly pull those nets in, because of the quantity of fish. That's meeting a need, "And Then Some"! Remember when Jesus turned the water into wine? He filled six water jars with one-hundred and eighty gallons of wine! That's meeting a need, "And Then Some"! That's the way Jesus lived His life! And that's the way He died! The Cross lies far beyond the first mile marker! Jesus refused to give less than His best for us! He refused a partial victory, even though it cost Him dearly! And now He calls us to Follow Him!

A Second-Mile Lifestyle, living "and then some", is when the Lordship of Jesus Christ intersects with every aspect of your life and being! And then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, boldly living out each day accordingly, so that others will see, to whom you belong! And all of God's people said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Thank you, Father, for this time of silent rest. Thank you for the stillness of our hearts, and for the quiet moments for our souls. Thank you mostly though, for your Presence with us even now, creating that peace.

Lord, we come to you in prayer because you are awesome and mighty and deserving of our praise. We come to honor you, and to magnify your Name! But we also come to you in prayer because we are your children, those who are sometimes fearful and hurting and afraid to be alone. We know of your great love, for we have tasted of it ourselves from time-to-time. And our desire is that we will bask in it, and live in it, each and every moment of each and every day! So, Lord, we ask you to mold us now into vessels that will not only be filled with this great love, but also ones that will be poured out on your troubled world. We ask that you make us instruments of your Peace and your Love, tools that can be used to heal the hurts of your Creation, and signposts that will point to you.

Father, today we bring some joys which we celebrate in your Presence. Thank you for this day. And thank you for our lives, and for love, and for the opportunity to share these with others. Thank you for your Son who makes all this possible. And thank you for this invitation to come to you in prayer, for we carry some hurts today, as well. Please be with

Please bless these people Lord with your Abundant Grace. Please heal the bodies that are broken, and in pain. Please still hearts and minds that are troubled and burdened and stressed. And please give guidance and direction, and most of all love, to each and all. For we ask these things in the Name of our Risen Savior, as we pray together now the very prayer that He taught us saying, Our Father...