

## Feb 23, 2025 Luke 6:27-36 “The Seed of Something Heavenly”

See, this is why Christianity doesn't work.

This teaching of Christ contradicts everything fundamental to human life and society.

Human identity depends on having a coherent view of yourself, an inner life of hearing, seeing, tasting, feeling, taking the measure of everything that happens around you, and forming an idea of yourself, your relationship to others, and how people see you.

If you take everything and everyone with the same equanimity, respond with the same flavor to everything and everyone, you cannot have your own personality. And in addition, you cannot have society. Because everything depends on taking care of your friends and resisting your enemies and making them pay.

Oh, no, this definitely won't work, and even is actively disruptive. You would have a world where you can any way you wish, and there do not seem to be any consequences. People who are selfish and cruel would have all the same advantages that the kind and gentle would have. People would have nothing to stop them from expressing the true impulses of their heart, no social pressure at all, nothing to give them pause in running headlong into corruption.

It's important that there be clear categories of friend and enemy. This is best for individuals and for society. Then you know where you are! Then you know what to expect! Then you know what you have to do to get ahead.

But here are the words of Christ. These are not lovely, helpful beacons of light. These are disruptive, upsetting, dangerous words that undermine human society, and drive a wedge into families, neighborhoods, and communities.

Apparently, it's all or nothing in the kingdom of heaven. The Scriptures are not left for us so that we can know the rules and justify ourselves. We are thrown into confusion by these teachings. We can't prove that we are doing the right thing, that we are aligned with the correct side. We are thrown out into the world with only the Holy Spirit to navigate by. We cannot judge by externals how to treat people and how to act, but navigate by the presence of God's mercy within.

Oh, you know that this is going to be a disaster. People who have hurt those we love will be treated just the same as those who have helped them. This distorts the natural flow of human society, and will alienate those closest to us.

Because we know our friends by the way they ally themselves with us. They are suspicious of the people we are suspicious of, and in favor of the people we are in favor of. It may be all very well to sacrifice ourselves for principles, but surely we would not throw our friends under the bus?

In fact, this cannot be right, because in Psalm 139:21,22, the Psalmist writes, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."

[When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Tablets of the Law and found the Israelites with a Golden Calf idol and cavorting in immorality, he called out, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." The Levites rallied to him, and went through the camp, killing their sons and brothers who had offended against God's holiness, thereby earning the right to serve in the temple of the Lord as worship leaders. (Exodus 32:25-29) This was followed by a plague from God on the Children of Israel recently released from Egypt.]

"The Seed of Something Heavenly." What we are hearing from Christ is a foretaste of heaven. Loving your enemy is the behavior of God which we only glimpse here on earth. Love is actively seeking the well-being of people whether we personally like them or not. It is praying and working for the will of God, which is good, in every circumstance and relationship. Seen from another perspective, Christ is teaching us to expand our idea of our neighbor (Parable of the Good Samaritan) to include anyone we might encounter.

We read Scripture with an open heart, not an empty mind. Therefore, as one commentator says, "...[B]ut what may be appropriate for a weak enemy (compassion) is not necessarily desirable for a conqueror and his opposing forces." (Bovon, p. 234) Occupation by an enemy was the daily reality of Jesus' community, thus here the enemy has the power to abuse and take from you. The commentator continues, sketching out the range of response to a powerful occupying enemy. 1) traitorous collaboration, 2) "defense of God's glory and cleansing of the land by force with weapons", 3) physical distance from enemy, along with hatred and considering the others to be out of your world, and 4) separating political and religious realities by taking care of those you consider God's chosen ones, your brothers and sisters and lack of attention to the enemy. (ibid)

Even hearing the words of Christ, we today range from literally obeying the words, such as the Plain People, the Amish do, to completely ignoring these words and waging active war to punish and kill an enemy. Some have seen in this impossible text only the word that judges us,

the reader. We cannot follow through on this teaching as individuals or as a society. We understand our sin as we read. (Bovon, p.244)

We do not forget that God has taken judgment as his sole prerogative. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:17-19) There is a purity and holiness in judgment that is beyond the capacity of humans, as we see in the appeal and overturning of legal decisions. Our compassion for our enemy does not cancel whatever God is doing in their life.

I Cor 15:35-38 tells us that if in our life here we only have hope of heaven, we are of all people most miserable. We anticipate something more, but taste it here, see it happening despite everything ugly and vicious. Christ brings heaven to us here. Christ is practical. In his world, the enemy was powerful. The good that you could do was limited to everyday courtesy, generosity when taken advantage of, and to prayer.

The seed was planted and has been growing. This creates something that does not fit in with the rest of society. This is a view of holiness. Not that we are holy, but that we rest in God's holiness. We learn of God's mercy by seeing how God treats us and others. (v.35, 36)

And what is God's pleasure? It is not the defeat of enemy, despite all the psalms calling for this, and the sure outcome of God's judgment promised. This is the widening circle of Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Fitzmyer, p.639) We are even stepping out of the role of judge and asking God to deal with our enemy. (Bovon, p.239)

Change of heart and life together are the seed of the kingdom to come. Hearing what Christ said in the text today, we are shocked into a kind of vision of something beyond what we know. It is a different way of being and being together with others. We can't unsee the glimpse of heaven, however ridiculous and divisive heaven might seem to us while struggling with life here.

Do we really want this? Do we really trust the character and judgment of God to handle us and the world truly and fairly? Love of enemy while continuing to love life and our friends, set us on a path to a different world we do not control.

## **Resources**

Bovon, Francois. Luke 1. Hermeneia Series, Fortress, 2002. Pp, 230-245.

Fitzmyer, Joseph,S.J. The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Volume 8 in The Anchor Bible. Doubleday, 1981. Pp. 625-646.

Reiling, J. and J.L. Swellengrebel. A Translator's Handbook of the Gospel of Luke. United Bible Societies, 1971. Pp. 273-279.