

I. Introduction

About 60 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, the Roman general Pompey conquered Syria and then Israel. After he entered Jerusalem, Pompey violated the Jewish Temple by entering the Holy of Holies, where only the high priests were allowed to go. Today, we are looking at Luke 6:27-36, part of the Sermon on the Plain that Jesus preached to His disciples. By the time when Jesus spoke the words of today's Scripture, Israel had been under Roman rule for over 90 years.



The Senators urge Pompey to become Dictator

For us, the idea of an enemy may be a bit fuzzy, but the Jews of Jesus' time would have often seen the Roman soldiers who kept Israel subdued and under Roman rule. These soldiers sometimes mistreated the Jews, insulting them, taking their property, and worse. Today we will be looking at Luke 6:27-36, the continuation of the Sermon on the Plain. This passage has wide application for the Christian life in every time and place, but I think these would have been urgent issues for the disciples in their relationship with the Roman soldiers who occupied their lands and cities. Let's read the passage.

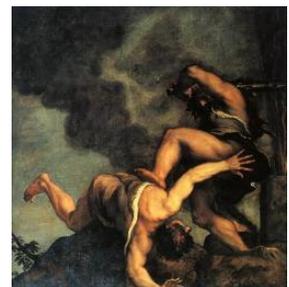


II. Scripture Luke 6:27-36 (NIV)

[27] "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. [29] If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. [30] Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. [31] Do to others as you would have them do to you. [32] "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. [33] And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. [34] 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. [35] 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 sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. [36] Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

III. Teaching

Since Adam and Eve first sinned, humankind has been on an angry and violent path. Cain got angry and killed his brother Abel. Lamech killed a man who injured him and proclaimed 77 times revenge on anyone who harmed him. And from there things got worse. In human history, taking revenge became the norm. Today also, most people are quick to become angry and to want revenge, and even if they do not carry out the act, the attitude of the heart is there.



Cain & Abel, Titian 1576

But Jesus taught and demonstrated a different way. How does Jesus say that we should respond to those who hate us, curse us, insult us, or steal from us? Jesus says, **love them, do good to them, pray for them, and give to them.** It is easy to love those who love us. It is easy to be kind and courteous to those who are kind and courteous to us. It is easy to lend to those who will repay. But it is hard to love those who hate us. Some people get the idea that Jesus is teaching something completely new. But actually, the foundation for Jesus' words can easily be found in the Old Testament.



Joseph Sold by his Brothers

In Genesis 37:28, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers for twenty

pieces of silver. I don't know about you, but if I had been Joseph, I would have been very angry at my brothers. And, perhaps Joseph was very angry at them. Perhaps he dreamed of revenge at first, but if so, his attitude changed as the years passed and he learned to know God better. When the time came when Joseph's brothers were helpless and afraid before him, Joseph chose the way of Jesus. Joseph forgave his brothers and embraced them, then took care of them, freely giving them everything they needed.



Let's look at Genesis 50:18-20, **“His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. ‘We are your slaves,’ they said. But Joseph said to them, ‘Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.’”** Joseph left judgment in the hands of God. And, Joseph recognized that God was at work in the things that had happened, using even the evil actions of his brothers for the salvation of many lives.

Joseph Recognized by his Brothers

In this fallen world, many bad things happen. Many people are angry and violent. Sometimes, we ourselves are the ones who are angry. But James gives us good advice. **James 1:19-20, “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”**

Most of us do not have to worry about Roman soldiers or about being sold into slavery, but we can still run into some pretty difficult situations with our families, coworkers, and neighbors. Watchman Nee tells a story about how a Chinese rice farmer dealt with a difficult neighbor.



Every day a rice farmer worked very hard to pump water up the hill to his rice field using a foot pump. But come the next morning, the water was always gone. Eventually he discovered that his neighbor, who had the field just below his, was draining the water into his own field every night. He was very angry! His daily work was being stolen, and his rice was drying out! For several weeks he argued with his neighbor, demanding that he stop taking the water. But his neighbor just laughed at him and continued the trick. Finally, the rice farmer decided to try Jesus' way. He decided to love his enemy. The next day he used his pump to fill the water in his neighbor's rice field first. And then, after he had blessed his neighbor, he watered his own field. The neighbor had no idea what to do or say! But every day, the farmer continued to water his neighbor's field first before watering his own. And eventually, the neighbor asked, “Why are you doing this?” And the first rice farmer explained about Jesus' way. Now the two farmers are Christian brothers. This story is an excellent example of **Romans 12:21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”**

Rice Fields in China

Love your enemy, do good for him, pray for him, and give to him. Then you will overcome evil with good. However, we do not want to misunderstand Jesus. In **Luke 6:29** the Lord says, **“If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.”** Some Christians have interpreted these words in a way that leads to an extreme pacifist position, and they say that a Christian should never defend themselves or others against violence at all. But that thinking leads to a problem; even if you are willing to sacrifice yourself, how can you say that you love your neighbor and then not do anything to help when your neighbor is violently attacked? Surely, loving others includes protecting them from violent attack, and sometimes the only way to stop a violent attack is with force. When we think about the meaning of Luke 6:29, we realize that being struck on the cheek is not really a violent attack, it is an insult. We should not react with violence or seek revenge if we are insulted or if we suffer minor theft. In such circumstances we should be patient and try to win over our enemy with love and kindness. But there may still be a time when love requires us to use force to protect people from violence.

When the Golden Gate Bridge was being built in San Francisco, a safety net was rigged below where the men were working to protect them in case of a fall.



Golden Gate Bridge
San Francisco, USA

During the time of construction, 19 men's lives were saved by the net. Now, it is far better not to fall, but if you do fall, it is good to know that there is a net.

A lot of us are not really ready to love our enemy. If we were tested, many of us would fail the test and fall into sin. In fact, often we fail to love one another. Look around. See your brothers and sisters. They are not your enemies. But do you always succeed in loving them as you should? I know that I sometimes fail that test already, let alone the test of loving my enemies. I am glad that God has provided a net to catch me when I fall. Paul struggled with a thorn in his flesh and begged the Lord to take it away. But the Lord had a different plan. In **2 Corinthians 12:9**, the Lord said to Paul, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** We strive to love one another, to love our neighbor, and even to love our enemy. But we do not rely on our efforts, we rely on the grace of God. The Lord's grace is sufficient. Amen!

IV. Conclusion

The Lord loves each and every one. **2 Peter 3:9** tells us, **"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** It is God's heart that each and every person would come to faith and be saved. Have you ever noticed the words of **Romans 5:8-10**, **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"** Before we came to Jesus, we were God's enemies. We were opposing God's truth and His work of grace in the world. But He loved us anyway, and He provided for our salvation through the cross of Christ and drew us to Him through His love. Let's pray.

V. Closing Prayer