

“Reflecting God’s Character in a Needy and Unfair World”

Luke 6:17-49

Do you find the Christian life easy to live out? Does God require His children just to play nice and be good neighbors and go to church regularly and to maybe give a little bit of money back to Him? Is that why Jesus calls us out of the darkness and into the light to be nice Christians? If that is what we believe then it is no wonder why youth don’t care to follow Jesus or serve in the church. We live in a very needy and unfair world. God sends His children into the world to reflect Jesus’ character to this troubled place. Our reflection can and will change the people that we come into contact with just like Jesus did when He walked on this earth. The qualities that we are to reflect are not easy. To be like Jesus requires much of us. Our perspective on people and our character will need a complete renovation. Youth want to be challenged. They want to live for something of value. Here it is- reflect Jesus’ character.

Please turn with me to Luke chapter 6 beginning with verse 20. Jesus had finished a night in prayer, and then chose the 12 disciples. After coming down from the mountain, a huge crowd of disciples and other people from all over Judea and Jerusalem were coming to Him for healing. Jesus healed diseases and cast out demons. After healing all those who came to Him, Jesus turned and looked at the disciples and began to speak. Let’s go back in time and place ourselves there among the disciples. We have just seen Jesus do the miraculous. We are in awe. And we are eagerly watching to see if His lips will move. What will He say to us? When Jesus speaks we must remember that He is saying and expressing what His Father believes. Jesus is God the Father’s representative. When we hear Jesus’ heart we are also hearing God the Father’s heart. This huge crowd around us becomes completely quiet. Shh, listen, Jesus is about to speak... look at verse 20 [SLIDE]

In order for us to reflect Jesus’ character we must first see people through His eyes. We all have imperfect lenses that we view people through. These lenses are distorted and do not give an accurate view. In verses 20-26, Jesus gives us His perspective on humanity.

I. Reflecting Jesus’ Perspective. [SLIDE]

Jesus paints a picture of two kinds of people- the poor and the rich. He clarifies who is better off from His perspective. Jesus' perspective is a complete reversal of how we see people. We see people who are wealthy, content, well liked and enjoying life as blessed. They must have the favor of God. We look up to musicians, sports figures, and actors because they have all the world would want. It is so easy to envy people like that. They have so few worries in life. They have all the food they could want. They have all the money they could ever need. They have fun parties with lots of laughter. They have people fawning over their every action and word. I remember hearing a story about Mike Tyson when he was in his prime. One day while he was doing his regular workout he ran by an expensive car dealership. Mike didn't want to run the rest of the way home so he picked out a high end performance car, wrote a check, and drove it the rest of the way home. To have that kind of money and life is what so many crave.

But is the life of the wealthy to be envied? Not according to Jesus. Jesus sees their future is heading to destruction. The pleasure they have now is all they will get. It is temporal and fleeting. Sadly, this short time of being on top of the world is going to come crashing down. Jesus doesn't want us to envy the rich. Rather, the blessed life is the one Jesus describes as poor, hungry, weeping and persecuted. Why? God is the source of all resources. He is the giver of health and wealth. Wealth often creates distance or independence from God. When I am wealthy I don't need to ask God for my daily bread. When I am wealthy, I have everything I need. When I am wealthy, I put my trust in my money for the future. With God absent from my life my heart becomes calloused. The pull of riches puts a cover over my heart so that compassion is outsourced. Jesus is not saying all rich people are in a bad situation. There are some strong believers that God has blessed abundantly who are using money for good, are trusting God for their future and are compassionate and generous.

The majority of those listening to Jesus were poor. They had few resources. The poor experienced social isolation, were treated as second class citizens, and those who would not recant their belief in Jesus would get the boot from their local synagogue- making them even more ostracized. Many of Jesus' disciples left their vocations to follow Him. So what is so attractive to Jesus about being poor? What makes them blessed in His eyes? When I am poor I am desperate. I see my need for God. I see that there is nothing that I can do to rescue myself.

My total allegiance is on God. He is my rescuer. He is my deliverer. The promise of Jesus to the poor who know Him- remember Jesus is talking to all the disciples- the promise is the kingdom of God, a future when they will not hunger but will be satisfied, a future when they will no longer weep but will laugh, and a future when they will no longer be excluded and persecuted. Their future is heavenly. That is why Jesus can say to the poor in verse 23, “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.” In order to reflect Jesus’ character in a needy and unfair world we have to view people like Jesus. The majority of us in this room would qualify as rich. Therefore, we need to be careful not to allow money to create distance between us and God and not allow it to make our hearts calloused. And we need to realize that everyone has dignity in Jesus’ sights.

Jesus is attracted to the kids who cannot afford nice clothes. Jesus honors the children and families who eat from food stamps and government funds. He is passionate about those who need to use the food pantry. Jesus cares deeply about those who struggle to keep a job. Jesus loves even those who are abusing the system. They are just as loved as those who work hard.

Listen to the difference between what the world says and what God says about the poor.

The world says you are worthless.

God says I find great worth in you.

The world says you offer nothing good to society.

God says I have a purpose for you.

The world says you will never amount to anything.

God says I can use you to do great things.

The world says you are poor.

God says you are rich.

We cannot be prejudiced or callous toward the poor and call ourselves disciples of Jesus. So to be like Jesus we need to see like Him. Lord, give us your eyes to see as you do.

Reflecting Christ’s character begins with His perspective but it doesn’t end there. There are character qualities that Jesus requires of His disciples to reflect in this world. **[SLIDE]**

The first is: **Reflecting Jesus' Love**. Throughout the Bible, God commands us to love others. He commands us to love fellow believers. He commands us to love the lost. But in this sermon Jesus takes love to the extreme. He is commanding what seems to be the impossible. He says that His disciples will love their enemies. Love seems to be easy when we are doing it the way the world loves. Verses 32-34 show the way the world loves, **[SLIDE]** “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.” We do not receive credit for loving people who are easy to love and who love us back. The kind of love that Jesus requires His disciples to have is proactive. We cannot just think nice thoughts about our enemies in the midst of difficulty and fulfill Jesus' command. We have to take steps to show them love. Notice the actions required beginning with verse 27, **Do good** to those who hate you, **bless** those who curse you, **pray** for those who mistreat you. And the Golden Rule found in verse 31, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” The Message paraphrase translates it as, “Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them!”

What kind of enemies did Jesus' disciples deal with? They had enemies who stripped them of dignity, kicked them out of the Synagogue. They were alienated from family for their faith in Jesus. That meant losing inheritances, losing relationships, losing financial and emotional support. And they had enemies who wanted to beat or kill them to silence the truth. These kinds of enemies are still alive in other countries. Many Christians are dealing with enemies that are seeking their demise. Jesus says, “Do good.” When someone slaps you in the face don't retaliate. Turn the other cheek. Being slapped is not referring to someone hitting you with a fist and you are to turn the cheek to be hit again. Being slapped is in regards to someone trying to demean you. When Jesus was slapped he didn't slap back. Rather, He let it go. The Bible says, “Do not repay evil with evil. Rather, repay evil with good.” Jesus then says, “When someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.” Jesus is not giving people a license to steal. What He is expressing is that followers of Jesus should not fight for their rights. He

wants us to care more for the person who is taking from us than for ourselves. This kind of love that doesn't retaliate or doesn't demand its own rights is unique. It is not the way the world operates. It is unconditional love. Jesus has that kind of love. His disciples are commanded to have the same love.

Who are your enemies? Maybe it is someone at work or school who is gossiping about you. Maybe it is someone at work or in class who is taking credit for your work. Maybe it is your boss who is angry a lot and criticizes you. Maybe it is a teacher or professor who maligns the Christian faith. Maybe it is being labeled prude or goodie-two-shoes for your commitments to wait until marriage or for not drinking when it is offered to you. Maybe it is your spouse. Maybe it is your child. Maybe it is someone with a different theological view. Maybe it is someone with a contrary lifestyle.

Darrell Bock writes, "When Jesus calls us to love our enemies, I have a hard time seeing that love in the way we communicate with those who possess different values from our own. We must hold to our convictions while communicating a sensitive, loving concern. The world may misunderstand us but that does not allow us to be insensitive or to harbor misunderstanding towards them." If we are known more for our convictions than our love then we have failed to keep the commitment to love. We are to care more about people than our reputation.

Love your enemies. **Do good** to those who hate you, **bless** those who curse you, **pray** for those who mistreat you. "Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them!"

Jesus' Disciples will reflect love. We are also to reflect His mercy. **[SLIDE]**

Reflecting Jesus' Mercy. Verse 35-36, "God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Here is a definition of mercy. Grace is getting something good we do not deserve. Justice is getting what we deserve. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. Jesus explains mercy as not being judgmental or condemning. Being judgmental is the opposite of mercy. When we are judgmental toward others we are taking the seat of God. We are playing judge and jury. In the bestselling book *The Shack*, Mack enters a dark room to be confronted by

Sophia- wisdom. Sophia asks Mack to sit in the chair of judgment. Mack said, “What? Me? I’d rather not,” he paused. “I don’t have the ability to judge.”

“Oh, that is not true,” returned the quick reply, tinged now with a hint of sarcasm. “You have already proven yourself very capable, even in our short time together. And besides, you have judged many throughout your life. You have judged the actions and even the motivations of others, as if you somehow knew what those were in truth. You have judged the color of skin and body language and body odor. You have judged history and relationships. You have even judged the value of a person’s life by the quality of your concept of beauty. By all accounts, you are quite well- practiced in the activity.” And then later on Sophia added, “Judging requires that you think yourself superior over the one you judge.”

It is so easy to judge. We do it all the time without realizing we are being judgmental. Criticizing people, the way they dress, the way they act, the way they lead is being judgmental. Yesterday morning I caught myself starting to be judgmental. On the way to church I saw a woman standing out in the cold pumping gas while her husband sat in the car talking on the cell phone. Immediately, I knew for a fact that the husband was not being considerate of his wife. I knew that he must not be a very good husband. I knew that a good husband would be out there pumping the gas while the wife was inside the car keeping warm. That quick, those thoughts came to my mind. But before it could go any further, I recognized that I was being judgmental. How dare I think I can determine the reality of a situation from a snapshot in time. I began to look to the possibilities- maybe the husband was talking to a troubled daughter. Maybe, he was waiting all week for this call and it just happened to come as they pulled into the gas station... It is so important to filter everything that goes into our minds. Was that a judgmental thought? Am I being critical? When we make ourselves look better than others then we are being judgmental.

We are not God. That means we have no right to judge. If we choose to judge others then we open ourselves up to be judged by God. “Do not judge and you will not be judged.” Does that mean we have no right to try to help someone when they are doing wrong? No. There is a time and place when we are to lovingly help others see the error of their ways so that they will be kept from a multitude of sins the Bible says. However, we are to do some strong self-evaluation

before we go to that person. Look at verses 41-42, [SLIDE] "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? 42 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." Jesus says it is hypocritical to call someone out when we have a bigger issue going on. We must first deal with our issue- the log- and then we can help our brother or sister with the speck in his/her eye.

Mercy involves compassionate loving acts toward others. Eric Swanson defines mercy as "love with legs on it." That is the best description of God as well. His mercy always sought to reach out. In yesterday's Old Testament reading of the *One Year Bible* Deuteronomy shows God's mercy. [SLIDE] Deuteronomy 9, "Hear, O Israel. You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky... 4 After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. 5 It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. 6 Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. 7 Remember this and never forget how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD." The Israelites didn't deserve mercy. They deserved justice- death for their disobedience. However, God showed them mercy and gave them the land He promised to Abraham. And that is how God deals with us. God is kind and merciful to the ungrateful and wicked.

Mercy also means forgiving people even when they do not deserve it. Forgiving someone is a great act of mercy. It is releasing someone from the debt they owe you. Forgiveness can transform lives- those who forgive and those who receive forgiveness. A woman at a Prison

Fellowship banquet in Seattle shared the following story, "The man I ate dinner with tonight killed my brother." She told how John H. had murdered her brother during a robbery, served 18 years at a Walla Walla prison, then settled into life on a dairy farm, where she had met him 20 years after his crime. Compelled by Christ's command to forgive, Ruth Youngsman had gone to her enemy and pronounced forgiveness. Then she had taken him to her father's deathbed, prompting reconciliation.

Some wouldn't call this a success story: John didn't dedicate his life to Christ. But at that Prison Fellowship banquet last fall, his voice cracked as he said, "Christians are the only people I know that you can kill their son, and they'll make you a part of their family. I don't know the Man Upstairs, but He sure is hounding me." Just as Christ died for us regardless of our actions or acceptance, so Ruth forgave him without qualification. Even more so, she became his friend.

Ruth understood what Jesus had forgiven her for and she needed to do the same. Darrell Bock writes, "The deeper our understanding and appreciation of what God has done, the better prepared we will be to reflect his character to others." If you struggle with forgiving others you might want to spend time writing down everything you have done to God. He forgave you of a lot. He commands us to forgive others.

Jesus' Disciples will see with his eyes, reflect love, mercy and also **[SLIDE]**

Reflecting Jesus' Generosity.

Jesus says on verse 38, "Give and it will be given to you." So if you give little, little will be given back to you. If you give much, much will be given back to you. The illustration Jesus uses is of a person who buys grain. When the grain is $\frac{3}{4}$ full the seller will shake it up so that the container levels out enabling more grain to make it inside. More and more is put into the container until it overflows. God chooses to give more than what was given. His giving overflows into our laps. Unfortunately, few Christians take God at His word. The average Bible believer gives less than 3% back to God. They trust more in what they can do with their money than in the God who owns all resources.

Let's watch a clip on generosity. My thanks go to the Hagge family for showing this video to me. It is a humorous way to encourage generosity. **[Show video of Tithe Rap]**

When God says 100 you say 10. Why does God want us to be generous with others? Because God is generous with us and because it is difficult to show mercy or love when I am stingy with money. I have not met a stingy person that I'd classify as merciful and loving. But when someone is generous, they are often very merciful and loving. Why? Because a generous pocketbook creates a generous heart.

We are in the same boat as the disciples were back then after hearing Jesus speak- overwhelmed. What Jesus expects is more than I can do. There is no way I can see like Jesus, love like Jesus, show mercy like Jesus and be as generous as Jesus. My love is too conditional. I struggle with judging. I don't see like Jesus does. It is not easy forgiving others. I hate giving up my rights. In order to reflect Jesus' character we need to surrender to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is loving, shows mercy, is generous, and has the same perspective as Jesus. Surrendering means giving Him control of our lives. We do that by confessing our sins and inviting Him to be in control of our lives. As you begin the day, confess and invite. If there is a point in the day when you take control then confess and invite again. The more we are yielded to the Spirit the more we will be like Jesus.

Briefly I would like to touch on the effects of reflecting Jesus' character.

II. Jesus' Disciples will make an impact.

If we choose to follow Jesus commands He promises that we will make an impact in three ways.

[SLIDE]

First, **we will be Rewarded**. Verse 35, **[SLIDE]** "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." God the Father is watching everything we do and eager to reward us when we do right. Sometimes we are rewarded in this life but the majority of rewards are awaiting us in eternity. And it amazing that Jesus says if we do these things we will be the sons of the Most High. We will be reflecting the character of God. Jesus is saying like King like Prince or Princess.

[SLIDE] Second, **we will be Fruitful**. **[SLIDE]** Verses 43-45, "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not

pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. 45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” If we are reflecting Jesus’ character we are a good tree. A good tree only produces good fruit. Fruit can be our enemies becoming believers and friends. Fruit can mean a restored marriage. Fruit can mean our children walking with Jesus. Fruit will result from living for Jesus.

[SLIDE] And **third we will be Fortified**. **[SLIDE]** Verses 46-49, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? 47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is 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. 49 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." Jesus says floods are going to come into your life like the Red River threatening Fargo, North Dakota. What you do with Jesus’ teaching determines if you will survive. William Hendricksen makes the following observations from this passage:

- “Everyone is a builder. To build is merely to live. You are building. The question is: on what foundation are you building?
- There are only two kinds of builders. There are those who are building upon obedience to the teachings of Christ and there are those who are not. All other foundations are shifting sands. All other foundations lead to eventual ruin.
- The wise builder is one who builds his life on Christ. He hears and he believes and he attempts to live accordingly.
- The hour of crisis is unavoidable. This is not an insurance program against something that just might take place. The storm WILL come. The only question is whether you will be ready.”

Let's go back in time. Jesus just finished His sermon. And there we are looking around at each other amazed at what we heard. This is a lot to process. What will you decide? Will you choose to follow Jesus' commands? If so, it will require your very lives. You see, we cannot remain as we are and follow Him. We are required to change by His Spirit's work so that we become more like sons and daughters of the Most High. If you decide to keep the status quo, to live safe and comfortable, then you are not ready to follow Jesus. He requires us to follow Him on His terms not our own. He is not interested in half-hearted disciples. It is all or nothing. What will you decide?

Let's pray

We will close the service with the chorus Jesus Messiah. The alter is open for you to talk to Jesus. Maybe you need to confess your sins of hating your enemy, or for having conditional love or for being judgmental or for envying the rich and putting down the poor or for your lack of generosity or mercy. Maybe you are ready to take Jesus at His word and need the Spirit's power. Whatever it is please come forward and meet with Jesus. If you'd like someone to pray with you just lift up your hand and someone will come and pray with you.