

## Children of the Most High

Luke 6:35 "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil."

Sunday, February 20, 2022 at the First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction: The man who hated the story of the Prodigal Son.

This passage is further on in the "Sermon on the Plain", Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, and it as well suffers from misrepresentation, depicting the followers of Jesus as people who are passive, habitual victims, perpetually allowing others to take advantage of them in a manner that most people would not find attractive at all. Oddly, this is at odds with the New Testament's depiction of our Savior, who seems to be wise and vigorous and not passive at all. He boldly rebuked the religious leaders of his day-people who were not used to being rebuked-and threw out the money-changers from the Temple Courts because they defrauded people. Even when he was arrested and abused and he remained quiet all the way to the cross, He was not so much passive as strategic. He knew that His death on the cross was the vicarious sacrifice for all sins, and His Resurrection would lead to the resurrection of all who follow Him. So maybe His instructions at this point are strategic as well, based on the assertion that He watches His followers and He rewards their obedience.

- Point: and your reward will be great

The point, to me, is in the phrase "and your reward will be great." A mysterious statement, largely ignored by the commentaries that I have in the pastor's study, the idea of rewards when we serve a God whom we serve in a covenant based on grace seems a little strange. If we are saved by grace, what is there to earn? For that matter, if we find ourselves in heaven, what need do we have for any other reward? Yet the notion of rewards shows up often in the New Testament. Jesus told a parable in Matthew 20 about a landowner who paid all his workers the same wage, regardless of the hours they worked. Matthew 5:12 tells us that Christians who are persecuted should rejoice and be glad, not because persecution is fun, but because their reward in heaven is great. Matthew 6 tells us that when we pray or do charity, we are to do it quietly, because our Father who sees in secret will reward us. It also tells us that everything we do for the approval of the crowd will be rewarded by the approval of the crowd and that will be all. Matthew 5:46 says "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" It goes on to say that we should be like our God who is perfect. "Perfect" meaning "to be complete, mature, all that you were meant to be." If course there are certain caveats

- The Caveats

A couple of examples are the advice in Romans and in 2 Thessalonians. At the end of his epic epistle, Paul in Romans 16:17 wrote, "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them." So even though we are called to unconditional love, unconditional love does not mean unconditional tolerance of destructive, manipulative or divisive behavior. There are people that even God wants us to avoid. They usually are people who demand forgiveness and trust without repentance. To forgive is commanded in Scripture. That does not mean you have to trust someone who is not trustworthy. Unconditional love also does not mean that you have to perpetually support the lazy as well. In one the very earliest of New Testament letters, the Apostle Paul wrote: "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked

with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden on any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:6-10) The same God who tells us to love unconditionally tells us that those who refuse (not those who can't) to work should not eat. The Bible has a dim view of laziness, and unconditional love and unconditional tolerance are not the same. But if we want to be like our God, then we need to try to do right by everybody because God loves unconditionally.

- A thought about being "children of the Most High"

Before moving to the application section of this sermon and then the conclusion, I wanted to make a little comment about the motivating factor that followers of Jesus are "children of the Most High" when they loved unconditionally. When reading about what makes a church attractive to someone who is not part of the church, Scripture tells us two points: the gift of prophecy in which the Holy Spirit reveals to people the depths of their own thoughts will cause them to acknowledge that God is indeed in their midst (1 Corinthians 14:24-25) and when people see that the church loves one another with unconditional love (John 13:34-35) In it Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. But this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

- Application: Be generous, and if you suffer injustice, don't stoop to revenge. That idea comes with the idea that God will avenge (Romans)

As far as any sort of application is concerned, please note that you need to expect any thanks or recognition or honor for loving other people, sometimes not even from the recipients of your mercy, but the Father sees, and He will reward one way or another. Be generous, and if you suffer injustice, don't stoop to revenge. The same God who rewards goodness will judge evil. Even the word for "reward" can mean either something good or some sort of punishment. We are saved by grace, but our obedience is rewarded. Very little is written about the nature of those rewards, but they are there nonetheless.

- Conclusion

In conclusion, Jesus told His disciples to love unconditionally, be generous and in doing so your reward will be great. The Scripture spoke often of rewards, but I find little (maybe the first few verses of Revelation) that describes the rewards. To love unconditionally is to be like our Father in heaven, who does the same. To love unconditionally does not mean unconditional tolerance of any behaviour, but it does mean that people will see God in the midst of the church and be touched to the core of their being. All of this is part of what it means to be children of the Most High.