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Good morning. Children, yes, can be dismissed. So we are going to start this time in the manner of friends with open worship, which is where we quiet our hearts down and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, which dwells in every believer and who speaks to us and ministers to us. And if the Holy Spirit prompts you to share during this time, then please feel free to stand up and do so. But otherwise, let's just spend some time listening to God. I have felt in my heart that there is some feelings of—I don't know if this is a word—disunity. And I just feel like in this time of transition for us, that I pray that we would just lay it all at Jesus' feet and not feel like we have to take everything upon ourselves to fix things or to try to do everything under our own power. God's got a plan. I'm not sure what it is. But I just ask that we all pray independently and together for unity and that we cross over this new bridge that we're coming to in unity. God wants us all to be working together for His good. And I just feel a sense of disjointedness. I don't know why or where it's coming from necessarily. I just feel it. And I would really pray that we all work really hard to put our own feelings and thoughts and desires away and try to do something that's very hard for me. And I would just say, let's let God decide how He wants us to do this. And let's be willing to move or God wants us to move. And it's hard to do. It's hard for me to do. I just ask that we pray about that and just keep everything forefront to God and not inside or with someone else, but that we just lay it all at Jesus' feet and say, "God, what do you want to do with this? What do you want to do with how I'm feeling about this? What do you want to do with who we're hearing come and speak? We're going to be having different people come in and it's not an easy decision to make." So we just ask that we will just move in unity and that God's going to direct us in this and that we're willing to follow where God's really asking us to go. Could we just pray for a minute about that? Lord, it's a hard future for us. We always are uneasy. It's uncomfortable being in a state of not knowing what the future holds for us. But we really never know what the future holds for us. If we think that it is, it's our own thoughts and beliefs about that. You've made it clear to us that you alone know what our future holds, that you are our leader. We are not the leaders. Lord, help us to be humble followers and unite us in love for each other and love for you in following what you want. Let us be a mighty army going forward of believers and friends, people who care about each other and love you and put you first. Thank you, Lord. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the chance just to come and to be with you today. We thank you so much that you dwell among your people. We thank you so much that you get involved with us and that you allow us to be involved with you. Please guard our hearts and minds as we learn from your word today and as we search for a new pastor and as we seek direction regarding the future of this church. We know that we are your children, that you have adopted us, and that you have wonderful, beautiful plans for us. But we also know that we are frail, messed up humans and that sometimes we get in our own way. So I ask God that you will teach us to submit, teach us to hear you, help us find the path that you are leading us to. I pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen. So last Sunday I spoke, it was Thanksgiving Sunday, so I spoke about being thankful, thankful for our blessings, thankful for the things God has given us. But then I also said that we should not merely just enjoy our blessings, but that we should use those blessings to glorify God and to further His kingdom. This week I would like to expound upon who we are to spend those blessings on and how and what manner we should be spending them. So today's primary verse is going to be from Luke 6. It's going to be verses 27 through 36. There it is. "But I say to you who hear, 'Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from him who takes away your goods, do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 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. Therefore be merciful, just as your father also is merciful." Well, I don't know about you, but that passage, every time I read it, just blows my mind. It is completely opposite of the way this world functions. And if I may be so bold, I would say that it's un-American. It is...the way that we operate, at least the way this world tells us to operate, is that if someone blesses you, you return that blessing. Or if someone has the potential to bless you, you bless them to try and earn that blessing. But if someone hurts you or curses you, then you respond in like manner. You hurt them or curse them back, because we believe in some sort of karma system. And if someone cannot bless you and cannot hurt you, then you just ignore them. But this is not God's way. Verse 27, "Love your enemies." Who are your enemies? If someone is your enemy because you've wronged them, then you need to make that right as a Christian. Anything that you have caused wrong or hurt with another person needs to be made right. No more...that's got to be settled. Whether you're talking financial debts or moral debts, it is your obligation as a Christian to pay all of your outstanding debts. Romans 13, 8 says, "Owe no one anything except to love one another." If you owe someone an apology, then today is the day to pay up. If someone has wronged you and you owe them forgiveness, today is the day to pay up. Ephesians 4, 26 says, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath." In other words, when the sun sets today, you may still be angry at someone, but you will need to have forgiven them. Anger is just a feeling, and one of my personal heroes, Mr. Rogers, great guy, he says that feelings are okay. It's true because feelings are just something that comes out of you. They're something you don't have control over, but you do have control over how you respond to those feelings and how you let those feelings control your behavior. So if you're angry at someone, okay, you're angry, it's a feeling, but don't let that anger control your behavior. If you owe someone an apology, if you need to forgive someone who's wronged you, get out there and get it taken care of. So these are enemies that you have made through your sin, but once you've settled all these debts, once you begin living like a Christian and you no longer deal wrongly with people, you're going to find that you still have enemies. People don't like having those people around who make them, who remind them of their sin. And if you're living a holy life, I'm sorry, but people who see your holy life are going to be reminded of their sin. And God can use that to draw people to Christ, but I think a lot more common is people are going to accuse you of being all self-righteous and holier than now, and because you're going to make them feel uncomfortable. Jesus made people feel uncomfortable, you know, not intentionally, but because he, you know, the Bible says that when Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life, when he says he is the truth, what I think that that means is he is the plumb line. He is the standard by which we were intended, we were created to be, and we were intended the way to live. I think that's what it means when he says he is the truth. And when you come face to face with the truth of Jesus, you realize how out of line you are with the truth. And so once you start walking as a Christian in the truth, you're going to cause people to see how out of line they are in the truth. So even if you're living as holy a life as you can muster, you're still going to have enemies. And of course, they could have problems with you for any other stupid reason, like the color of your skin or how much money you make. There will always be reasons someone will find to make you an enemy. So how do you deal with your enemies? You love them. You might say, "Oh, but they're being so unreasonable. They don't deserve my love." Well, neither did you. But look at what God gave you. Romans 5.8 says, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Two verses later, he says, "When we were enemies, enemies of God, we were reconciled to God." You see, however bad of an enemy you may have been to another person in this world, you were a much greater enemy to God because of your sin. All sin that we commit is first and foremost against God. Even if you hurt someone else in your sin, the chiefly offended party is always God, which is why you cannot make your way to heaven just by making restitution to all the people you've wronged. If everyone you've ever wronged has forgiven you, you still are not heaven-bound because you have not been made right with God, and that can only happen through the blood of Jesus. So you were God's enemy, but Christ still died for you. John 15.13 says, "Greater love has no one than this than to lay down one's life for his friends." So God, Jesus laid down his life for us, and we were his enemies. So God demonstrated the greatest act of love towards his greatest enemies, which was you and me. And he did that because he loves us, and that is how we are to love our enemies. We are to look at the people who are our enemies and mimic our Heavenly Father's love that he showed us by loving our enemies, by laying down our life for our enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Don't just not do the bad stuff. You have to also do the good stuff towards the people who hate you. And again, like I said, very un-American. You know, we're always told to...it's funny because the phrase "turn the other cheek" is from the Bible, and yet we misuse it all the time. We say "turn the other cheek," and what we typically mean when we say that is just walk away, just ignore them. And that is absolutely not what that verse means. If someone is being evil to you, you can't just ignore them. You have to be good to them in return. And this may get you hurt because when you love someone, you open yourself up and you make yourself vulnerable to them. And if someone really hates you, then they're going to take advantage of your openness. So how do you protect your heart from that kind of hurt? You have to ground yourself in the truth. You have to spend time and God's worth understanding who you really are and where your value and where your identity come from. You are, as Christians, you are God's child. You are loved. You always have been loved, and you always will be loved, in spite of who you are, not because of who you are. You were guilty, yet you were forgiven. You were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. You were Christ's friend. You have been chosen by God. You are a citizen of heaven. You are a saint. You are God's workmanship. You are sanctified, and you are one with the sanctifier, and he is not ashamed to call you brother or sister. Getting these truths into your head and into your heart is part of putting on the armor of God. It is how you will be able to withstand the hurt and the trials of this world. Comprehending your identity is the first part of becoming who you really are. You need to understand it, and then you will start to act out and behave in the way of your true identity. I've heard so many metaphors on this, but you'll see people who take in orphans, and these orphans are no longer orphans. They are now the children of the parents who adopted them, and yet they still have an orphan mentality. They will still hoard food, and they still won't trust that Mom and Dad will be there for them because they still believe that they are orphans, even though it's not true. We have a tendency to believe that we are still spiritual orphans, even though it's not true. We have been adopted by a loving Heavenly Father, and you need to change your thinking, and you need to get into the Word in order to grow. Giving like God is the name of my sermon today. Giving like God. Love those who cannot or will not love you in return. Give to those who cannot or will not repay. This is how you store up the treasure in heaven, like we talked about last week. We talked about how earthly treasure, since we're on earth, it's the most immediately valuable treasure, but it's also, your money will get spent, your talents will fade. Everything we have on this earth, every treasure that we have, is going to rot away at some point, or be stolen or given away or something. But the treasure that we send up into heaven will be eternal treasure, infinity treasure. It will never wear out. It will never go away. And every blessing that you give out in this life, that doesn't come back to you in this life, is going to come back to you in the next life. And this is why it is to your benefit to find the people who cannot repay you, or who don't plan to repay you anyways. Everything in heaven is perfect, so trade your earthly, imperfect treasure for heavenly treasure. Now as I was writing out this sermon, one thing that popped into my head was, well if I'm giving to everyone who asks, like this verse says, then it's possible that someone will say, "Hey, give me money so I can buy drugs," or "Let me borrow your gun so I can go kill someone." And obviously, you can't do that. All of these commands here in Luke 6, they are rooted in the fundamental principle of "Love your neighbor." And so if someone says, "Hey, give me money for drugs," and you give them the money, that's not loving your neighbor. You're giving them money to poison and kill themselves. Or if you give them a gun to commit murder, you are not loving your neighbor. So that's not love. But when someone has a real need, whether it's, "I need food or clothing," or whether it's, "I need you to stay late and help me set up chairs," or "I need you to wake up early and take me to the airport," these are real, honest needs. And these are the kinds of things that God is talking about. Opportunities to actually show love through our behavior. So don't be careless about how you spend your blessings. Be wise. But at the same time, be generous. If you're a Christian, then if you truly understand that everything that God has done for us is...we cannot repay the things that God has done for us. It was a debt that we could not pay off, and we cannot repay it. And a lot of people, when they think about Christianity, they mistakenly think that Christianity is performing all the tasks on this list so that we can earn something. Christianity is not about earning anything, and it's not about repaying anything. It is about understanding the love and the gifts that have been freely given to you, and in response to that love, living out the kind of life that God created you to live. "Bless those who curse you." James 3.6 tells us that our tongue is set on fire by hell, and it's true. It's so easy to let venom drip from our tongue. It is so easy to gossip. It is so easy to let those feelings that we talked about, the anger and the jealousy and the greed, vent themselves through our tongue. And when we do, when we allow our tongue to be the vent for all those negative feelings, it poisons us and it poisons the people who hear it. Our simple little words break friendships, harm children, they topple nations. It is so easy and it feels so good to respond to other people's poison words with poison words of our own. But this verse says, "Bless those who curse you." Respond to words of death with words that bring life. And not sarcastically or mockingly, you know? And that's always the temptation. Someone says something mean to you, and you say, "Well, Jesus bless you!" And obviously you don't really mean it when you say it like that, and they know you don't mean it. But when they respond that way, dig down into the reservoir of love that God has placed in your heart. And let that cool, refreshing, life-giving love, let that be the source for what comes from your tongue. Put out the fires of other people's tongues with the love from your own heart. Use your tongue to bless this world and not poison it. I could keep going on here. This is an amazing passage. And if you really just break it down into each little phrase and apply it to yourself and think about what it's really saying, it's just so rich. And I really encourage you during your quiet times this week to take this passage and dig into it and chew on each little bit and apply it to yourself. "Who is my enemy? Who hates me? Who curses me? Who takes from me? Who asks me for things?" And think about in the past how you've responded to those people. And then start to plan in the future when these situations arise. How should I be responding? Because if you start to think about and imagine the proper way to respond to those things, it's going to be easier to act out in the proper manner if you are preparing to act it out in your mind ahead of time. So take your quiet time. Take this passage and really just slowly chew your way through it. "Who" -- focus on recognizing the people in your life who don't deserve what you have or who can't repay what they're asking you for. Maybe they're not even asking anymore because they know that they can't repay. But when you see that need and you can fulfill it, bless them anyway, even if they don't ask for it. Step out and blessing. Don't just bless your friends. Bless those who don't deserve and who cannot repay because that will demonstrate and proclaim exactly what God has done for you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much that you went to your enemies and you loved them and you blessed them and you forgave them and you purchased them out of slavery. Teach us, Heavenly Father, to go and do likewise. Show us who our enemies are. Show us who we are treating as enemies and teach us how to treat them the way that you've treated us. I pray that you, as we go throughout this week and we run into these situations, I pray that you recall this verse to our mind and give us the love and the grace and the mercy in our hearts to be able to respond in the way you want us to respond. Watch over all of my brothers and sisters as we go throughout this week. In Jesus' name, amen.