

Behold the Kindness and Severity of Jesus
May 26, 2019

So, we had a board meeting this last Sunday, and in a moment of candor I said to the board that one of my flaws was that I was too nice, and you know what? For once, most everyone agreed with me!

The problem with this is that I might give you the impression that Jesus is always nice and accommodating and we know from his words in last week story about The Great Party and the Cost, that this really isn't the case.

When you read the red you hear Jesus saying some very stinging words. Like to Peter, **“Get behind me Satan,”** That had to sting!

That wasn't nice – but love tells the truth.

Like to the Pharisees, insinuating that they wouldn't be at the resurrection feast of the righteous because they misjudged the inestimable value of their invitation being distracted with their possession, their careers and their relationships.

That wasn't very nice! But *love* tells the truth.

It's so easy for American Christians to get comfortable and cozy with Jesus. Before long we view him as nothing more than our BFF or a doting grandfather who thinks we're great, and is ready to help us whenever we call.

But you see, Jesus won't be co-opted to do *our* bidding, anymore than Jesus co-opted the Father to do *his* bidding.

It was ALWAYS the other way around.

Jesus didn't say, **“The Father is always there for me, doing whatever I ask him to do.”** NO! Jesus said, **“I do ONLY what I see the Father doing.”**

That's why told the Wanna-be Jesus followers.

**“When you're ready to pick up cross, with no competing loyalties,
then you come follow me.”**

That's not nice!

But, LOVE manifests itself in both kindness and severity.

As the Apostle Paul says,

Romans 11:22

Behold then the kindness and severity of God;
to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness,
if you continue in His kindness;
otherwise you also will be cut off.

The severity of God was reflected in Jesus just as much as the kindness of God.
And that's what we're going to BEHOLD today

The kindness and severity of Jesus.

When Jesus taught, his message was primarily about the Kingdom of God,
Which is taught in metaphors, parable
Pearl of great price, mustard seed, buckets of paint (ha).

But Jesus also taught about our destiny –
about how it's all going to end up.

He spoke of a heaven to gain.
and a hell to shun.

Of the two, do you know which of the two he talked about the most?
Heaven or hell?
Hell.

Now, just like he talked about the Kingdom of God in metaphors
He talks about our future destiny in metaphors as well.
He doesn't tell is exactly *what* hell is;
he just uses vivid, terrifying images to jolt us
into doing whatever it takes not to end up there.

One of his most vivid metaphors for the destiny to be shunned is
the place of **Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth**

You remember the parable of the buckets of paint and the 3 painters
from Matthew 25:14-30

The ones who used the paint (silver) they had been given are commended and given more.
But the one who failed to use the paint he had been given?

'Take the money from this servant and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver.

To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given,
and they will have an abundance.
But from those who do nothing (with what they have been given),
even what little they have will be taken away.
Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness,
where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The consequences of such a missed opportunity are not inconsequential.
Jesus accept no excuses;
I was too busy
I was too shy
I was too afraid I’d make a mistake
There was no escape from the bitter realization
that he has wasted his life,
that the light of all his ambitions has gone dark,
and he will be crushed with mental anguish of deepest regret.

Jesus wants to jolt us out of our complacency.

Jesus uses this same phrase in **Luke 13:14-28**

And He said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many,
will seek to enter and will not be able.

When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door,
and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying,
‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’

‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’

We know who you are!

We hang around Jesus people; go to church; serve in ministry.

But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know *you*.

Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,
when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God,
and yourselves thrust out.

They lived in close association with Jesus,

But never pushed open the narrow gate and said, **I’m in, all the way . . . in.**

They didn’t realize that the opportunity was time sensitive,
and the time’s unexpectedly up,

they were crushed with the agony of regrets –**weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

And then in Matthew **24:45-51**—Jesus describes the servant who

says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’
and so begins to beat his fellow servants, (is abusive in speech or action)
and to eat and drink with the drunkards (is self-indulgent),
I’m sure this servant thought, I’ll clean up my act before the master gets back.
Dangerous gamble
the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him
and at an hour that he is not aware of, and . . . (listen up)
will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.
There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The next story should sober us all. (**Matthew 13:37-43**)
Jesus speaks of his kingdom a combination of the Wheat and the Tares.

The wheat are the true disciples;

The tares are the look-a-likes.

- They name the name of Jesus,
- They wear the label Christian.
- They support the right social issues
- Have the right opinions
- Can check off all the right theology.

but they look *nothing* like Jesus,

They don’t have his heart.

At the harvest, at the end of the age, the angels . . .
will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks,
and those who commit lawlessness,
and will throw them into the furnace of fire;
in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.
He who has ears, let him hear.

Listen carefully.

None of these parables suggest we make the cut because we have the wrong theology.

It’s not making profession of the right beliefs that gets us to heaven,

but the evidence of our beliefs played out in a transformed life.

Jesus sees people for who they *are* from the inside.

And in our last parable, Jesus adds another vivid metaphor – the furnace of fire.

He speaks in these vivid images again in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats

Here the sheep are those on his right who have cared for the least in our society,
They took care of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger (refugee, immigrant)
the sick, the needy and those in prison.
The goats are those on his left who failed to do so.

He never says to the sheep or goats, “Tell me what you believe.”
He says, “Show me how well you love.”

“Then the King will say to those on his right,
‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance,
the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.
“Then he will say to those on his left,
‘Depart from me, you who are cursed,
into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” In **Matthew 25:41-46**

Do you think it matters how we treat the most impoverished in the world?

**And finally, Jesus had one more vivid image to describe the destiny to be shunned –
Gehenna (translated as hell in most of our English Bibles)**

John and I saw Gehenna when we were in Israel.
Gehenna was the name of the garbage dump
outside the walls of Jerusalem
where people used to burn their garbage
and dump their sewage.

As such it was full of maggots and worms
with a continual putrid smoke rising continually.



It was originally called the Valley of Hinnom.
It got its reputation reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh,
Israelites committed the unspeakable act of sacrificing their children
to the Ammonite deity, Molech.
It was forever onward a place of disgrace and judgment,
worthy only to be a garbage dump.

Think of being thrown into this putrid garbage heap
and you see how much sense Jesus' words make:

Mark 9:47-48; Matthew 5:29; Matthew 18:9

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.
It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye,
rather than having two eyes, to be cast into Gehenna (hell fire)—where
‘Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’

Jesus makes our choice a stark contrast.
Voluntarily deprive yourself of something that
your lusts protest you can’t live without . . .and enter the Kingdom of God
OR follow your lusts and and what you end up with is only worth of Gehenna.
Instead of a great feast, you have the anguish of deep regret.

That’s not nice; but Jesus tells the truth

And lest you think that the words that come out of your mouth don’t matter.
listen to Jesus’ words in **Matthew 5:22**:
But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to
judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to
the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of
Gehenna (hell).

And as for those who use religion to secure their power and advance their ambition?
Jesus says in **Matthew 23:33**, spoken to the religious elite.
“You snakes! You brood of vipers!
How will you escape being condemned to Gehenna (hell)?

That’s not nice!
But then, Jesus tells the truth.

Love knows that one breaking wave of the fear of hell washing over your soul
will do more to deepen your faith
than many sermons on how to live for Jesus.

There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

Now it makes for interesting conversation to try and sort out
how much of Jesus teaching is vivid imagery and how much is descriptive of reality

And it even more interesting conversation to try and figure out
who’s going to end up in heaven and who’s going to end up in hell.

But we can get so passionate about this debate

that the impact of Jesus dire warning is lost on us.

Frankly, when the day of that great resurrection feast of the righteous arrives, there are going to be MANY surprises.

Jesus says, “MANY, MANY will say in that day, Lord, Lord,”
MANY who we may have even heralded as the spokespeople for our Christian faith, MANY will hear Jesus say, “**Depart from me, I NEVER knew you**”?

And others we were *sure* we could safely scratch off the attendance roster, will enter and take their place at the table ahead of us.

So, let’s put off those heady discussion for now so the full impact of Jesus words can penetrate our hearts.

Because it is our hearts that Jesus reads, not our words.

Behold the Kindness and Severity of Jesus.

It’s not nice, but love tells the truth.

Let the severity of Jesus’ words jolt you out of complacency.

Peter gives us an excellent admonition:

MAKE YOUR OWN CALLING AND ELECTION SURE!

2 Peter 1:3-10

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . .

for this very reason, giving all diligence,

add to your faith virtue,

to virtue knowledge,

to knowledge self-control,

to self-control perseverance,

to perseverance godliness,

to godliness brotherly kindness,

and to brotherly kindness love.

For if these things are yours and abound,

you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ

...

Therefore, be even *more* diligent to make your call and election sure,

for if you do these things you will never stumble;

for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly

into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.