

TITLE: “Love Supersedes Law” – Jesus Values Humans!

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TEXT: Matthew 12:9-13

This month we’ve been learning about the considerable connections between the ministry of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of the living God, born about 2,000 years ago, and the ministry of Jeremiah of Anathoth, a small village just north east of Jerusalem, the son of a priestly family in Israel, born about 2,600 years ago.

One was divine, and one was human, but both were called to minister in Israel. Both carried messages of grace and truth that were hard for many people to hear. Their respective audiences were caught in rebellion, and the people could not deny their sins. The messages these men preached were heavy on *repentance*, which is not a word that everyone wants to hear. And both encountered resistance on many sides, resulting in martyrdom for each of them. In other words, they both died doing what they were called by God to do.

In their individual generations, they were sent to meet a need. The need was repentance from sin, so God might be able to save people through his *mercy*. You see, God desires mercy. Contrary to some people’s beliefs, God does not enjoy judgment. He does not desire destruction for his own creation. But because he is a *just* God, he will allow it, as a consequence for sin, unless there is what I call a ‘mercy opportunity.’

There were many so-called ‘mercy opportunities’ in Scripture, and not just in the New Testament either. For whatever reason, some people have this great misconception that God went through a terrible temper tantrum in the Old Testament. Then, they think he had a divine mood change when Jesus came along, and now he’s a much nicer God... To this I say, “Nonsense!” God does not change his mood like we humans do!

For example, think of Jonah, a messenger *in the Old Testament* sent by God to preach a message of repentance to a rebellious city called Nineveh. If you are familiar with the story, he had a little bit of a hard time getting there.

Once he did, though, the people obeyed the word of the Lord. They repented from their sin and turned back to God, so God had mercy on them and withheld judgment.

This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. So he complained to “Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a *merciful* and *compassionate* God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are *eager* to turn back from destroying people” (Jonah 4:1-2).

That’s a ‘mercy opportunity’ in the Old Testament, y’all. Think about it. God was *seeking* to show mercy through the prophet Jonah. We must not take these words lightly, because God’s heart and intentions towards people have not changed one bit.

Why would God seek to have mercy on such a rebellious people; a people who perhaps wanted nothing to do with him? Because he *loved* them. I'm not sure if this is news to you, but God *created* people. God *loves* people. God *values* people. God *desires* to have relationship with people, even rebellious people, and He does so through *mercy*!

Here's the good news. Are you ready for it? It has *nothing* to do with a perfect performance, a good report card, or being on your best behavior. Aren't you glad?

I know I am.

Today I'm going to do my best to instill a sense of value in you. Today I'm going to tackle a sense of unworthiness before God in you. Today we are going to experience the radical, unconditional love of God through the truth of Scripture. Are you ready?

Now there are two things we need to have a good understanding of before we dig in:

1. When we see Jesus, we see the Father.

- "Jesus is the *visible* image of the *invisible* God" (Colossians 1:15).
- "The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very *character* of God, and he sustains everything by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3).
- Jesus says, "Anyone who has *seen* me has *seen* the Father" (John 14:9).

In other words, Jesus is the perfect representation of God; he is the original ambassador of Heaven. Therefore, when we see Jesus, we see God!

2. God's nature never changes.

- "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore" (Hebrews 13:8)

This is why the Scriptures are able to declare, "He will never leave you nor forsake you" because our God is a reliable, dependable God! (see Deuteronomy 31:6)

In other words, God's nature is faithful. His love is unending. His character is as constant as the sunrise, and his mercies are made new every morning.

That is why we are able to confidently say, "God is good, all the time..."

That being said, let's hear today's passage once more from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*:

When Jesus left the field, he entered their meeting place. There was a man there with a crippled hand. They said to Jesus, "Is it legal to heal on the Sabbath?" They were baiting him. He replied, "Is there a person here who, finding one of your lambs fallen into a ravine, wouldn't, even though it was a Sabbath, pull it out? Surely kindness to people is as legal as kindness to animals!" Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." He held it out and it was healed. The Pharisees walked out furious, sputtering about how they were going to ruin Jesus (Matthew 12:9-14).

The title of this message is ‘*Love Supersedes Law.*’ Let’s pray.

Father, would you reveal a true sense of eternal value in these human hearts today.
In Jesus’ Name, Amen

Now, referring to the story we just heard, this is such a fascinating passage of Scripture to me. There is clearly a stark contrast between human perspectives here that is staggering to consider. Think of it; we have a man who is in need of healing, and the Healer is present. Who is the Healer? Jesus, of course! But on the other hand, we have jealous and envious men, called Pharisees, seeking to trap Jesus into the rules of their hyper-religious system, in order that they might condemn him. They cared more about obeying the rules than the restoration of the person in front of them. Interesting, huh?

Here’s the glorious part, though. In the midst of this tumultuous religious climate, we still see God’s goodness evidenced through Jesus’ own words and ministry. Regardless of the wolves in sheep’s clothing that surrounded Jesus, he still showed nothing but love to the lost and the broken sheep in front of him. That is what a good shepherd does; he lays down his life for his sheep. Let these things be point of focus today, because I really want to drive two facts home in your hearts... Here they are.

- **FACT #1: You are *valued*.**
If that’s all you get out of today’s service, then it was worth it. Regardless of your preconceived notions or ideas, you need to know that as a human being created by God, you are supremely valued by God.

It doesn’t matter what people may have told you, what any kind of false religion has taught you, or even what brokenness in your life has caused you to feel, you are *still* valued. I cannot say this enough!

ILLUSTRATION: \$20 DOLLAR BILL – No matter how much it gets crumpled, crushed, or stomped on, IT’S STILL WORTH THE SAME TO THE OWNER AS IT WAS BEFORE, and the same is true for you! You are so very valuable to God, and the harsh circumstances of life don’t change that!

- **FACT #2: Your value is *unchangeable*.**
In other words, in God’s eyes, your value is fixed! Nothing can alter how he sees you, because he sees you through the eyes of *unconditional* love.

Some of you don’t believe this. Some of you think you have to somehow earn God’s love and affection by your own performance and good behavior. Perhaps you were raised that way, and you only received love on your ‘good’ days.

But it is not so with God, my friend! He loves you through thick and thin.

You see, we don’t get *better* to get into God’s Presence; we get into God’s Presence to get *better*. Isn’t that good? Praise God, Jesus made a way for us to do that!

Just like the man in the story today, Jesus didn't evaluate him based on his gifts or his talents. He didn't judge him based on his accomplishments or his production value to society. Nor did he pick and choose to heal him because of his great personality. Jesus had compassion on the man simply because he was a human being in need, who had faith to receive his healing, as evidenced by stretching out his hand at Jesus' command.

Again, it had zero, zilch, nada to do with the man's charisma or godly character, even. Jesus perceived the man through God's eyes, not the world's eyes, saw what he could be if he were healed, and he healed him. It's that simple. Why, you might ask? Because God values humans enough to *invest* in them.

ILLUSTRATION: Grandparents POPPY AND NANNA
ILLUSTRATION: BAILEY THE BEAGLE

Let's look at a couple more Scriptures to validate these points, shall we?

"Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?" (Matthew 6:26)

- In the context of this passage, Jesus is actually teaching about his kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, which he came to Earth to establish. He's telling his listeners, "Why do you worry about the things the people of world worry about? You're in my kingdom now! Clothes, shoes, drinks, food... None of this stuff really matters in eternity. Instead, fix your eyes on my kingdom; seek to establish it further in the earth, and everything you need shall be provided for you!"
- In other words, if God takes care of the birds of the air, which have zero responsibility by the way (no mortgage bills on their nests, no flight insurance to keep up with, etc.), then won't he also take care of you, you of little faith?
- Jesus is emphasizing this point: "What do you have to be so concerned about? Aren't you infinitely more valuable to God than a flock of birds?"

How about this one:

"Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

- In the context of this passage, Jesus is instructing his disciples, because they are worried about being persecuted or punished for their faith. Jesus used the opportunity to reveal to them their eternal value, again with the illustration of birds. Why the emphasis on birds? Because it reveals God sees and cares so much about even the *little things*, including you and me.

I cannot say it enough: You are valued, and your value is unchangeable.

AMEN