

Luke 6:31-35

Sermon: **Sermon on the Mount #4**

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written by: Danijel Dragaš



THE GOLDEN RULE

1. Let's continue in the same rhythm. Jesus has now entered the very core of His commands, and through the instructions He gives to the people, He aims to expose their former, false vision of righteousness—and then call them to do what is good in the eyes of God. In other words, Jesus is giving His people a picture of the heart and soul of a person who, throughout their life, will desire to promote God's righteousness rather than the world's.

1.1. In the verses we're about to read, we must not forget to whom Jesus is speaking—He is addressing His people, who for decades have been immersed in the Pharisaic vision of righteousness. He's speaking to those who believe that Romans, Samaritans, and tax collectors are their greatest enemies. They also believe that all who go to the synagogues and follow Pharisaic teaching are their brothers and friends. Jesus knows this is what His people believe, and through the following verses He seeks to expose their false convictions, to turn their hearts toward what belongs to God, toward what is true—"I am the way, the truth, and the life"—toward the Father. That is His main goal: He wants every person to understand what they must do if they desire a glorious future for themselves.

1.2. **(Luke 6:31)** *Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.*

1.3. The Golden Rule—universal, often discussed, embraced, and applied across many nations. How profound are Jesus' words here! This rule reveals who we are and how, as human beings, we have missed the very point of life.

1.4. From childhood, we all know how we want others to treat us: we want to be cared for, loved, given attention and a sense of security; we want help in trouble, protection in sickness. We want people to love us, to defend us from enemies if necessary, for our country to provide everything we need to live a normal life. We wish that a stranger would let us go first at the doctor's office when we're in a hurry, that a waiter would greet us kindly at the café, that our justice systems would rule fairly in our favor, that our doctors would show compassion toward our condition.

All of these are our desires—our expectations of how we wish the world would treat us in various situations. No one had to teach us this. Jesus tells His people—and us—that we naturally carry within us the knowledge of how we want the world to treat us.

1.5. With that said, if we so deeply desire that the world treat us well, do we do the same toward others? Are we willing to set aside our self-concern and think of others? Honestly, are we ready to help anyone—even a stranger? If we're truthful with ourselves, our main focus throughout the day is us. And because of that self-focus, we literally have no time to think about others.

1.6. So how can we expect the world to treat us well if we ourselves have no time to do good to others because we are preoccupied with ourselves most of the day? This is the truth Jesus wanted to place before His people—and before us. He wants us to train ourselves to think of others, to increasingly see the needs of others rather than our own. Isn't His own life proof that He lived this way? He never used His authority for Himself. Not a single miracle He performed was for His own benefit—every good deed He did was for others. He never sought anything for Himself.

YOU ARE THE SAME

2. All right, let's continue—Jesus goes even deeper into this command. **(Luke 6:32) If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.**

2.1. Let's slow down a bit. Who loved a Jew within the Jewish culture in which he was born and raised? He was loved by his parents, his brothers, sisters, neighbors, relatives—members of his community who shared the same religious identity. He was loved by all who belonged to the same vision of righteousness—in this case, the Pharisaic one. Anyone outside that circle was considered an enemy.

2.2. Jesus challenges the righteousness of His people by drawing a comparison—and for that comparison, He uses one of their greatest enemies: "Even sinners love those who love them."

2.3. The question arises: why does Luke use the word sinners? Why does he distinguish sinners from the rest of the people listening to Jesus? Doesn't the Bible teach us that we are all enemies of God, that there is none righteous—none who loves, honors, or worships God as He deserves?¹

2.4. If you recall, in previous sermons I explained that the Pharisees called anyone who did not belong to their community "sinners." That category included tax collectors, Romans, prostitutes, Samaritans, and people from other nations—Gentiles. So everyone outside the Pharisaic circle was, in the eyes of both the Pharisees and the people, a sinner—someone destined for destruction. They were considered enemies of God, whose time for forgiveness had long since passed. And it is precisely about them that Luke writes here.

2.5. And to confirm this, let's read together **(Matthew 5:46–48) For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your**

¹ Romans 3:10-12, 23; Psalm 52:2-4

brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

2.6. In Matthew's account, we see that he chooses to use the term tax collectors and then continues the comparison by saying that even Gentiles do good to one another—just as the Jewish people who attend the synagogue and follow Pharisaic teaching do. Jesus confronts His people with the truth that they are doing nothing special, nothing extraordinary, nothing greater than the other nations and groups around them. In other words, Jesus strikes at the Pharisees—and all who listen to them—where it hurts the most: *"You are no different from those you despise most. In God's eyes, both you and they are the same—unrighteous people before a righteous God. You love those who love you—but tax collectors and Gentiles do exactly the same. None of you are doing anything that demonstrates a desire to promote God's image in this reality. You are the same!"*

CHURCH-BORN SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

3. Some of us were born into church families. By that I mean: our grandparents, parents, and finally we ourselves belong to a certain Christian denomination. Our lives have revolved around the church—its worship, rituals, fellowship, choir singing, and community life. The other members of the congregation are our close friends, some even our godparents at baptism or marriage. In short, our lives are deeply intertwined with the culture in which we were born. And that can truly be beautiful—growing up in such an environment. I have several friends who did, and after listening to their stories, I realized that upbringing made them better citizens and, to some extent, wiser people than many others.

3.1. And why did I say to some extent? Because there's another side to that way of life. Sadly, it often seeps into the very skin of a "church child"—and that is self-righteousness. What do I mean by that? When we look at the rest of the world through the lens of our own tradition, our own vision of righteousness, and when we encounter people of another faith—perhaps those who live near us and belong to a different nationality, or even a minority, while we represent the majority Christian denomination in our country—we can, unfortunately, become harsh, dismissive, malicious, sowing seeds of prejudice, acting unkindly, and even mercilessly toward such people.

3.2. Let me give you an example. Though I was born Orthodox, I was raised in Croatia, where most of my friends were Catholic. I often attended Catholic churches, and my parents had no objection. We celebrated Christmas and Easter together; I was invited to baptisms and weddings—and overall, I felt safe and comfortable within the community I lived in.

3.3. During my childhood, Jehovah's Witnesses would occasionally knock on our door, hoping to share the Gospel with us. To my shame—and I see it clearly now—we mockingly called them "fanatics," "lunatics," "cultists," or "ready for the asylum," and so on. I know that children of Jehovah's Witnesses were often ridiculed by other kids at school. And why? Because our culture had sown seeds of evil within us. We were told to avoid them, that they were not normal people.

3.4. With time, as I grew older, I slowly began to realize how destructive worldly visions of righteousness can be toward one another. Even though within our Christian communities we promote what is good—we love one another, lend money, help each other—and because of that we

believe we're in good standing with God, still, when someone doesn't belong to our denomination, to our version of righteousness, we can very quickly become the opposite of good—we become cruel, slanderous, and scornful.

3.5. Jesus warned His people about the very same thing. He told them: *"It's easy to love those who love you; it's easy to lend to those you know will pay you back; it's easy to be kind to those who share your beliefs and values. But even your enemies do the same! And now I command you: love everyone, just as your heavenly Father loves everyone through His grace."*

THIS IS HARD—BUT IT MUST BE DONE, JESUS REQUIRES IT OF US

4. (Luke 6:34–35) *If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.*

4.1. Through these verses, I'd like to give a life example—something that could easily have happened—to show what kind of person Jesus is describing here.

4.2. Imagine a woman raised in a Catholic family. All her life she has actively participated in the Church's life with her family. She's married, with three children who attend catechism classes regularly.

4.3. Recently, a family of Jehovah's Witnesses moved into their neighborhood. Faithful to the values she had been taught since childhood—kindness, respect, and goodness—she warmly welcomed them. Yet during their conversation, she noticed they were a bit intrusive. Convinced that they alone possessed the "true biblical faith," they tried to persuade her that the Catholic faith was wrong and that she needed to "return to the truth," as they called it.

4.4. After several such encounters, her patience finally ran out. She called them strange and told them to stop bothering her and to leave her alone. Anger boiled inside her: *"Who are they to tell me my Catholic faith is false?"* She carried her frustration into her home and told her children never to associate with the neighbors' kids.

4.5. At church, she shared her experiences with the other women of faith. But the way she spoke about it was not gracious—it was mocking and filled with malice toward her neighbors.

4.6. Over time, she stopped even greeting them when they met on the street. Her children began mocking their children at school. In short, the relationship that had barely begun ended quickly, destroyed by *clashing visions of righteousness*.

4.7. Some time later, the neighbor's husband fell gravely ill and, despite medical treatment, passed away after several months. He had been the sole provider for the family, and now the widow slowly began losing everything. Debt crushed her, her children lacked money for school supplies, and when the heater broke, they were left without warmth.

4.8. The Catholic woman knew they were in trouble—she knew her neighbor, who had once angered her, was now suffering.

And so the question arises: what will she do?

Unlike her neighbor, she lives comfortably—she's healthy, has a husband, a job, and enough for her family's needs.

Will she allow her heart to be ruled by the world's vision of righteousness—"they're fanatics, they're a cult"—and thus "hate her enemy"?

Or will she obey what her faith has taught her—to love her enemy, to lend expecting nothing in return?

Will she be a true Catholic, a true Christian, who helps her neighbor—the Jehovah's Witness—in her time of need?

Will she have the courage to stand before her church community and say, *"Forgive me for sowing seeds of spite against that woman. I was wrong. Let's go and help her together. Let's not allow our differing visions of righteousness to rule our will. Let's do what is good in the eyes of our God—let's help her"*?

Will she tell her children to stop mocking the neighbors' kids? Will she confess to them that she was wrong and ask their forgiveness? Will she ask her husband to go and try to fix the neighbor's broken heater?

Or will she remain closed within her anger?

4.9. It's important to note—this isn't to say that the Jehovah's Witnesses were kind. On the contrary—they were intrusive, self-righteous, and often looked down on their Catholic neighbors on Sunday mornings as they carried their Bibles firmly in hand on the way to worship. During the week, other Witnesses visited their home to sing hymns, talk about God, and reassure each other that they alone were right with Him. They truly believed their Catholic neighbors were doomed unless they joined their faith.

4.9.1. That was their attitude toward everyone in the neighborhood. Her anger was justified; her disappointment understandable.

But does that give her the right to judge her neighbors as they judged her?

I believe it does not.

4.9.2. Because in God's eyes, what matters most is not what they did to her—but what she will do to them.

Will she love her enemy when that enemy is in need, or will she reject them?

Will she repent and seek forgiveness, or remain hard-hearted?

Will she lend expecting nothing in return, doing good even to those who do not love her?

— That decision, dear friends, will determine whether that woman will be blessed—or not. —

4.9.3. And that is precisely what Jesus asked of His people: *"Go and feed the poor. Don't believe, because of your own vision of righteousness, that he is poor because his parents or grandparents sinned against God and that God therefore cursed him."*

Go and speak to the leper. Don't let the Pharisees' teaching—that all lepers are cursed by God—keep you from doing good to them."

Bring them food. Give water to the thirsty Samaritan you meet in the desert. If he has none, let him drink from yours.

If a Roman soldier forces you to carry his load for one mile and then says, 'That's enough! I can't stand the sight of you, Jew. You disgust me—get away from me!' look at him kindly and say, 'Sir, allow me to carry it all the way to your destination—it would be my honor.'

Don't look at him with hatred. Don't long for the moment you can be rid of him. Don't let your body language reveal contempt. Be gracious. Be noble. Love—even those who hate you—through your actions."

FIGHT FOR GOD'S VISION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

5. Now we move on to the next part of the text: "Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." I don't know whether Jesus here speaks directly and exclusively about His own people when He says "ungrateful and evil," or universally about every human being. In verse 36 Jesus says, "*your Father*," so it can be assumed that He is telling His people that they are the ones who are evil and ungrateful.

As I said in previous sermons, all the commands Jesus gave above to His people are drawn from the commands of Moses, so it wasn't as though they couldn't know what a righteous Israelite should look like. Likewise, they had heard all their lives in the synagogues the stories of their forefathers who entered the Promised Land—a land they did not deserve—and once there, countless times they forsook Yahweh for other gods, and yet Yahweh forgave them again and again.

5.1. The promises Yahweh gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still very much alive, even though as a nation they did not deserve them. The greatest proof that God's promises still stand is the coming of His long-promised, only Messiah. He is the One who is now issuing commands to His people; He is preparing them for the establishment of the Kingdom of God that will come in the future. By God's grace, He is giving them instructions on what an Israelite must be like if he wishes to inherit the Kingdom of God. And for all these reasons, I assume Jesus is directly addressing His people when He says that Yahweh is kind to the "ungrateful and evil"—they are the ones who have been ungrateful and evil toward their God throughout their existence. If anyone should have known who God is and what matters most to Him, it was they.

5.3. Jesus says to His people: "*I am here. I am the proof that your Father loves you and has not forgotten you. You still have time, Israel: do as I have commanded you, and your reward will be great—you will be sons of the Most High.*"

5.4. Or it may be that Jesus is speaking of God's universal love toward all humanity.

(Matthew 5:45) *So that you may prove yourselves to be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

5.5. Why does Jesus specifically mention the sun and the rain? What did a Jew understand when Jesus spoke of these two great forces that affect the daily life of a nation, and of each person? In those days, nearly every Jew—like the surrounding nations—worked in agriculture. It fed their families; without agriculture the nation had no chance to survive. And what are the main elements needed for, say, wheat to grow? Sun and rain—without them, there is no food.

5.6. I believe that with this analogy Jesus wants to show His people this: *“Even though you are the chosen people and believe yourselves more righteous than others, by the vision of righteousness I now set before you I am proving that you are not. And did not the Law of Moses teach you to show mercy to the ungrateful—to your enemies? If you truly believe you are righteous like your Father, why do you not love those who are evil? Does not your Father do the very same?”*

In other words, what about those whom, in your eyes, deserve to be cursed by God? Do you not see that they too have sun and rain—do you not see that they too receive what is necessary to live a good and wholesome life? Is that not mercy, O Israel? Though they do not deserve it, they receive it from your Father every single day. So you must do likewise—be as your Father is: give though they don’t deserve it; be merciful, as your Father is merciful to you all. He is merciful to both the good and the evil.”

5.7. With that said, I believe that “the good,” in this context, describes those fortunate ones who in their lives imitate the portrait of God’s vision of righteousness.

5.7. Finally, the greatest proof of God’s love for humanity is found in **(John 3:16) For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.**

5.8. These verses reveal the character of our God—grace alone, grace upon grace; the boundless mercy of our God. And who, in the end, will believe God’s gift? The fortunate one. That is, regardless of the era in which he lived, regardless of his background, regardless of what he has done in his life—when he realizes, deep within his being, what God has truly done for him in this selfless act of grace, it will break him... It will position him to see himself as a pauper with nothing to offer God; he will begin to hunger for God’s righteousness; he will begin to love his enemies; he will begin to desire to be like his Savior, Jesus Christ.

5.9. Nothing else in the life of a fortunate one will matter as much as the Son of God—he will fall in love with Him with all his being. Yes, he will limp forward in Jesus’ vision of righteousness, but he will never give up. Rather, he will wrestle with God to his last breath, longing to be transformed into His image; he will wrestle with God to receive His blessing in the end—just as Jacob did in the Old Testament.²

² Genesis 32:24-28