

Red Letters Class – What Goes Around Comes Around

Introduction

This is the Red Letters Class on the words of Jesus. My topic today is [click] What Goes Around Comes Around. Any JT fans? I promise our class today will be much more spiritual than JT's song of the same name. Turn to Obadiah. [click] It's not very often we turn to Obadiah. One of the shortest books in the OT. I know it's not red letters, but I found a verse there that introduces our topic today. :15 *As you have done, so it will be done to you.* What Goes Around Comes Around. Jesus also taught this principle. It can be either a warning or a promise. Here in Ob God is warning the nations of judgment for their mistreatment of Israel. But in another sense, He is promising Israel there will be justice for their enemies. Jesus issued similar promises & warnings to us. He taught What Goes Around Comes Around. Turn to Luke 6. [click]

Luke 6:31. The **Golden** Rule. We all know this. We teach it to our children. Many other religions have a similar principle. It's a universal standard everyone knows we should live by. [read verse] Treat others like you want to be treated. Yet if you're like me sometimes it seems too mamby pamby. Too goody goody. Too milquetoast. [click] Too Mr. Rogers. So nice. So gentle. So altruistic. So unselfish.

If you're like me you ask yourself: What's in it for me? What do I get out of the bargain? Why should I go around being so nice to others all the time? Sometimes it's hard to get motivated about being selfless. Always thinking of others and never yourself. I have a deal for you today. In this class, we will learn how the Golden Rule benefits us. What do we get out of the bargain. We get to see what's in it for us.

Let's look at the context in which Jesus gives the Golden Rule. [click] :27-31 Jesus is talking about how we should treat people who are mean to us. He sets a very high standard of how we should treat people who mistreat us. Everything he says goes against our natural instincts. Someone hits us, we want to hit back or at least defend ourselves against being hit again. Jesus says no, turn the other cheek. Someone steals from us. We want justice; we want to get it back or punish those who stole. Jesus says give them more. Give to anyone who asks. If someone takes your things, don't ask for them back. The Golden Rule is for your enemies. [click] Jesus is asking us to treat our enemies the way we want to be treated. This is very serious stuff. This is not mamby pamby Mr. Rogers stuff. This is a hard teaching. This is challenging. The Golden Rule isn't just for friends and family. People who are nice to you. People who will repay good for good. Even sinners are nice to those kinds of people. The Golden Rule is for the bad guys. The ones we have trouble being nice too. Now, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, Steve, just a few minutes ago you said we get to think about ourselves. About what's in it for us. Loving our enemies doesn't exactly fit. Actually it does. Let's read on.

Who likes to be rewarded? At work for doing a good job? Who would like to win a big fat prize? [click] This is the winner of the Nobel prize for medicine last year. A big reward. Let's read :35. Jesus tells us if we love our enemies, our reward will be great. You will be sons of the Most High. You will become like God. That's what's in it for you. If you want a great reward from God, love your enemies. Do good to those who mistreat you. Give and don't expect anything in return. That's how you get rewarded. Not by protecting yourself. Loving only those who love you. Being nice to friends and family. But going beyond all that and treating your enemies the way you would like to be treated. Be gracious to the ungrateful and evil. Be like God. Be like Jesus. Doing good even in the face of evil brings you a big reward.

[click] :36. Be merciful like God is merciful. Are we merciful? Or are we merciless? I can be very merciless. Let people face the full consequences of their mistakes. Don't let them off the hook; they'll think they can get away with it again. That's not how God thinks. That's not His heart. God is merciful. When I am merciless, I am not being like God. But there's more. [click] Who can quote Mat 5:7? Jesus says if I will be merciful, I will be shown mercy. This is a great motivation to be merciful. I need mercy from God and from others. I fall short too. I would be in trouble if people held me to the letter of the law all the time. One way to insure I receive mercy is to be merciful. Extend mercy to other people. Then Jesus promises me I will receive mercy. This is what's in it for me! If I am merciful to others, I will receive mercy from God. A promise I can count on.

[click] :37a Very familiar passage. One of the world's favorite verses in the Bible. But the world reads it funny. They think it says "you can't judge me." But that's not what it says. It doesn't say I can't judge you. Instead Jesus makes a promise. Explains what's in it for me. Who likes being judged? Who likes being condemned? How would you like a sure fire way of avoiding judgment or condemnation? Well, Jesus gives us one right here. [click} Sort of like A Get Out of Jail Free card in Monopoly. Don't judge or condemn. That's how you avoid judgment and condemnation. All you have to do is stop judging and condemning others and God won't judge or condemn you. That's what's in it for you. What a deal! What a promise!

There's also a warning. What does Jesus tell us in Mat 7:2? [click] He says if I do judge people, the same standard will be used against me. With the judgment I use, I will be judged. With the measure I use, it will be measured to me. As Gary said at the teaching workshop, most of us are either Nazis or Jamaicans. We are either too strict or too easygoing. Jesus here is warning the Nazis. He is saying if we are tough on other people; God will be tough on us. This verse should teach us to lighten up. To be less condemning. Give people the benefit of the doubt. I'm a Nazi. I want to hold people to the standard. Not let them off the hook. Make them toe the line. If I do that, I am setting myself up to be judged and condemned. My behavior affects how I will be treated by God. And I am also missing the opportunity to claim the promise. To be free of judgment and condemnation. A warning and a promise.

The same principle applies to forgiving people. [Read :37b] [click] Who is this? John McCain. Where is he? POW in Vietnam; injured and tortured. :37b. Think about people who have sinned against you. People who have hurt you; mistreated you; against whom you have a legitimate grievance. Someone who hurt you. Think about someone like that; someone who has done you wrong. Someone you have every right to be upset with. Write their name down. [click] What's John doing here? He went make to Vietnam. He led the effort to normalize relations. He forgave. Now I know we have some deep hurts. Real pain was inflicted emotionally and perhaps physically in some cases. Perhaps it's something recent and fresh and painful. Perhaps it is a deep wound from long ago that never seems to heal. It's hard to forgive? Hard to let it go. Jesus give us some motivation. He says here if we forgive; God will forgive us. That's a great promise. He tells us what's in it for me. If I forgive people; God will forgive me. I like that. I can get fired up about that.

But again he also warns us. [click] What does Mat 6:15 say? If we don't forgive; God won't forgive us. God will treat us exactly how we treat others. Forgiving others isn't just the right thing to thing to do. It's necessary for me to be forgiven. If I don't forgive; God doesn't forgives me. This is scary stuff. My being forgiven is tied to me forgiving others.

Let's look a moment at the Lord's Prayer. [click] How many of us used to recite this in unison in church? I've done it. Pretty religious stuff. And even when praying more seriously we often use this as a model. Allison taught me yesterday something she learned from Joe in the Middle School class. [click] If we pray this, what are we praying? We are asking God not to forgive us if we don't forgive others. Forgive me as I have forgiven. Oops. How many times have we prayed this. Good motivation to be more forgiving.

Who wants to receive lots of blessings? A big dose of good things? [click] :38 They way to receive a large shovelful of blessings from God is to give. Here is another promise to claim. With the measure I use it will be measured to me. If I am stingy; if I give only sparingly; protect what I have. Then I will receive in the same measure from God. But if I am generous. Freely give to others, then God will give to me bountifully. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into my lap. For our 15th anniversary I took Barbara to a very nice restaurant. Bacchanalia. It cost a fortune, but the portions were not large. I remember the waiter pouring our drinks. He filled the glasses only half full. That's not what God does. If we give, He gives to us with a measure that overflows. Pours it into our laps. Sort of like ice cream cones at Brewsters. You order one scoop and they pile 2 scoops and more onto your cone. I have never tried ordering two scoops; I am not sure what would happen. That's how God is. If we give, He piles it on. Some of us think we can't give very much because we don't have very much. We never seem to make ends meet and so we can't ever give. Listen to me now. If we think that way, we have it backward. The reason we don't have very

much is because we do not give very much. By not giving, you are dooming yourself to never have much. This isn't just a clever thing to say. It is really true. This verse is a promise from God. He always keeps His promises. I have seen him do this in my life. Start being generous and God will be generous with you. I guarantee it.

We started with the Golden Rule. "What Goes Around Comes Around" might be called the Golden Boomerang. [click] Do good to your enemies and receive a great reward. Don't judge and condemn and you won't be judged or condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and you will be given to by God in even greater measure. But if you do judge, if you do condemn, the same standard will be measured to you. If you don't forgive, God won't forgive you. If you give little, you will be given little. Whatever you dish out is dished out to you. These are sober warnings, but they are also great promises. Let's take full advantages of the promises of God.