



You Can Make Good Things Happen

Luke 6:27-36

I think what really upsets people is when they upset other people. It is upsetting to have people upset. But what can you really do about it? So many things are beyond our control --they are out of our hands. The power is in the hands of another. So many times, we are helpless to make a difference in a bad situation.

The Bible tells us that "Offences will come" (Matthew 18:7). What, if anything, can we do about them? Is it the end of the world when they do?

Let's look at some real life situations:

Jack lives in a home where his father drinks every Friday night. Ordinarily, his dad is not such a bad fellow, but when he drinks he breaks furniture and abuses the family. Jack's mom and dad have never really gotten along; yet, it does seem that somehow, deep down they do honestly love each other. Still, Jack and his brothers and sisters can hardly wait to leave home.

If Jack's dad would stop drinking, things could be a lot better in their family. Do they have to wait for Jack's dad to make the first move? After all, he's causing most of the trouble. Right?

Amelia has publicly embarrassed Emily --again. She is always saying some cutting thing --some dumb thing. It seems that lately everything Amelia says has a caustic, abrasive flavor, even when the two women are alone. Now, Emily is finding it increasingly difficult to be around Amelia. Emily feels that if only Amelia would stop her jabs, everything could be OK again. Will she have to wait until Amelia apologizes?

At first, Laverne and Sybil were happily married; now, it seems that one fight leads to another. Now, Laverne has started to run around on Sybil.

The New Testament teachings of Christ apply to situations just like these real life situations. The Old Testament gives us the rudimentary basis and rules for raw-civilization --without it the human world would lie in chaos all of the time. The Old Testament gives us the rules with which to control and manage evil to a *limited extent*. They are "common sense;" and, every "civilized group" has come up with a similar list. By way of contrast, the New Testament gives the manner by which the bad may be changed into good.

Jesus taught something different --something more! His teachings went far beyond the need for raw-civilization. He taught us to love, not only our neighbor and friend, but our enemy as well. He taught us to love those who do offensive things toward us and say offensive things about us. Instead of retaliating against the people who spitefully use us and persecute us, he taught us to pray for them. In doing this, Christianity took

a giant step beyond the raw-civilization outlined in the Old Testament.

In other words, Jesus taught that there is a positive and helpful action that can be taken by the person who is offended --the innocent party, so to speak. We are never totally helpless; we can do and say healing things --and when that fails, we can pray.

There is within every person a principle of what we call fairness. That is good. However, with humans, fairness is never totally fair; it carries with it other agendas --like: "He had it coming," or "He'll get his someday," or "It serves him right." It embodies *retribution* and *retaliation* as well as fairness. Unfortunately, these two feelings have kept the world in a fight since the first day of creation. --Retribution and Retaliation. Both are components of "It's only fair."

If we lived by the principle of fairness alone, we would need to wait for Jack's father to become sorry --but, he might never do that. After all, what is there to bring it on? If we live for the principle of fairness alone, we will have to wait for Amelia to apologize --but, she most likely never will. What would cause her to?

It is because of this, Jesus said, "But I say to you, don't fight back; but, whoever hits you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). Why would Jesus say a thing like that? Upon a second look, it is the only thing that makes sense. You see, there is only one first blow --then comes the second, third, fourth, and so on. By the time you have hit one another, say, ten times, it is no longer important who hit first; for you have both hit one another many times.

Whenever you hit a person back, you're doing what they want you to do. For as soon as you hit them back, they have a good reason for hitting you again. They even feel justified in having hit you in the first place --after all, you hit them.

When Jesus said, "turn the other cheek," he wasn't suggesting that you should get hit twice. What he was saying was, "If you don't hit them back, they *probably* won't hit you again; if you do, they surely will." That will save a lot of wear and tear on your face. You will have stopped the whole thing before it gets much of a start.

Of course, all of this is usually done with words, not boxing gloves. Jesus is not suggesting so much that people are hitting one another with their fists --no! People hit each other in many ways long before they "put up their dukes!" In other words, there are ways for us to stop the little wars in life, even if we didn't start them. It may hurt our dignity a little --after all, we're not naturally programmed this way.

Jesus is teaching that, "It takes two to fight." If you don't hit back there won't be a fight. Jesus came to point out that nothing else will work. Let's go back to our examples: So, Jack leaves home and criticizes his mom and dad --and doesn't do much better in his own marriage. Emily and Amelia are no longer friends --Amelia won't apologize. Laverne and Sybil are breaking up. And, it is all fair; Jack's parents did fight a lot, Amelia did say those things, and Laverne was unfaithful, --wasn't he? So, it's all fair.

Here is the question:

When should children honor parents? Only when they deserve honor?

When should we love our friends? Only when they are good to us?

When should we love and be faithful to our spouses? Only when they're not grumpy? Only when they are the picture of wifehood or husbandship? Most anyone can pull that off!

If this were true, there would be nothing different about the teaching, and ministry, and substitutionary death of Christ. There would be nothing extraordinary --indeed, nothing supernatural about being a Christian. There would be no possibility for making our world better; we would have to wait for our parents, our spouse, our neighbor, our children to change or apologize. We would have to wait for people who have done wrong, said wrong, and acted badly to set their sails back into the wind! What a ridiculous proposition that is! To say we have no power to change things --no power to make good things happen is ludicrous.

If we are to act Christian only under favorable circumstances, when it will be to our benefit and good, then how are we any different? To act as a Christian is to act in the unexpected way. Jesus taught, "For if you just love them who love you, what reward do you have coming. Don't the publicans do the same? If you exchange pleasantries with your friends only, how are you so good? Don't the heathen do that too?" (Matthew 5:46, 47).

Anyone can get along in an easy situation; Christianity goes the next step. Now, all of this is hard to do and often takes a great deal of patience and forgiveness --but, can you think of any other plan that will work? There isn't one! Jesus had the only plan to make peace. He demonstrated that plan when he died on the cross, not for his friends, but for his enemies --many of whom, by the way, have, by now, become his friends. Should he have waited for mankind to make the first move and come back to God? He would have waited a long, long time --he would have waited forever.

I believe this was seen in a crystal-clear manner in the Los Angeles riot in one person --Reginald Denney. Reginald Denney was just an ordinary guy who earned his living pretty much like the rest of us. He's not a Ph.D. or a famous politician; he's a cement truck driver. He's part of the muscle that keeps the economy rolling and the products flowing, as buildings rise skyward and new highways stretch across the horizon. The only reason we know him at all is that we saw him on national television, being pulled out of his truck and brutally beaten during the Los Angeles riot.

The nation has come to love Reginald Denney, not because he was a victim, but because he chose to become the "forgiver." Though the riot focused attention on many factors contributing to unrest in our nation, Denney put the attention on healing through a simple act of forgiveness. Denney was able to do this by abandoning the self-centered position of seeing others only in terms of his own needs. He was able to perceive a broad appreciation for his assailants' motives, needs, and reasons for acting as they did. He verbalized the frustration they felt. The understanding and forgiving spirit of Reginald Denney, thereby, became the most healing, positive, productive thing to come out of the Los Angeles riot. Reginald Denney --*The Forgiver!*

On June 17, 2015 a hateful young man, named Dylan Roof, went into a prayer meeting at the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina and shot 9 worshipers to death --hoping to start up a race-war. The families of the victims, and the church forgave Dylan Roof. There was no war; it stopped then and there. Roof had posted photos on his website with emblems associated with white supremacy along with the Confederate battle flag. Following these murders, and the forgiving spirit of the AME Church, the South

Carolina General Assembly voted to remove the battle-flag from State Capitol grounds. South Carolina, itself, is a very different place today --no war could accomplish that. With the "forgiving spirit" of one church, the "civil war" was "a little more over." Kindness & goodness come from kindness & goodness --not "mean and nasty."

There is another reason for us to forgive. That is, in our relationships, which are less than perfect; people don't usually hit us on the cheek in the first place unless we've got it coming --at least a little bit. We can always say, "Why did they hit me on the cheek?" Chances are, it will be at least 10% our own fault. We can apologize for that. Why are people, as well as nations, so surprised when someone comes along and actually does "knock the chip off their shoulder?" Of course you won't want to make your apology by saying, "I'm sorry, I believe I was 10% wrong here and you were 90% wrong, and I want to say I'm sorry." That won't work. You'll have to say something like, "I'm sorry I said that, will you please forgive me?"

Norman Vincent Peale used to tell the story of a conflict that divided the community in his first church. The conflict was rooted in just two women who, many years before, had a disagreement that led to their separation. Peale was invited to eat a slice of pie at the home of one of these women. When he commented on how good the pie was, the woman replied that she was never able to make pie as good as the other woman. Peale soon visited the other woman, taking this compliment to her. The two women were brought back together. When we share the *Good News*, it will be in good company if it is accompanied by "good news," rather than "bad news."

You can make something good happen. The thing about Jesus' teaching is that you don't have to wait for something to happen; you can make it happen. There is a law of science that says, "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." If science were writing the Bible, it would say, "A punch in this direction > will bring one in this < direction. Society lives by that law. That law is the story of the Middle East, (Every part of the middle east), it is the story of Iraq and Iran. It is the story of all the middle east. To change the Middle East, you must change its theology). It is the story of every broken home and friendship. We are kind to those who are kind to us, and mean to those who are mean to us. We give them what they've got coming. That may be the Old Testament; but, it's not the New Testament. It is not Christianity. An "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is not the slogan of Christ.

Jesus taught us how to make this cause and effect law work ***for us, rather than against us.*** He said, "Be kind to those who are mean to you, and in a good many cases, you can expect they will return the kindness." There is something in their hearts to make them react to kindness with kindness. Jesus was the first to teach, "You cannot give a smile away; people will always give it back." If we use the teachings of Jesus, they will work for us too! As a Christian, you can not only make good things happen --you're expected to!

This, after all, was the way God acted. "We love him." Why? "Because he *first* loved us!" Christians are expected to make the first move in the direction of good, and reconciliation, and kindness, and forgiveness. If not, how, exactly are we Christians? I, for one, am not understanding this new vindictive, "We're going to get you" Christianity at all. Should I?

The Old Testament leads to the New Testament --But, the Old Testament is not the New Testament! We are Christians --and, we must not forget that our Leader said to us, "A New Commandment I give unto you! It is New --and, it is True. It was given because it was needed.