

When it comes to action movies, payback; vengeance; revenge movies, usually score pretty well at the box office: –
Movies like:

- Denzell Washington in — The Equalizer
- Russel Crowe in — Gladiator
- Mel Gibson in — Payback
- Liam Neeson in — Taken
- Eric Bana & Daniel Craig in — Munich
- Thomas Jane in — The Punisher
- Keanu Reeves in — John Wick

All of these movies and heaps more, have a very common theme of:

- Revenge
- Payback
- Vengeance

The baddy has done something terrible, and so the goody dishes out to them exactly what they deserve...

Why is it that we like these movies so much – I know some of you don't, but many do... Why?

Well, we love action movies,, But if we're honest, it just might be, that in some circumstances, we like the thought of violence - - - but of course, we only like violence if it's getting done to someone who deserves it.

And before we jump up and down and protest our innocence – that “We would never wish violence against anyone – no godly person would ever do that”, I want to point you to Psalm 137 (made famous by Boney M, “By the rivers of

Babylon”). Psalm 137 is the people of God crying out against their oppressor (Babylon), who had done terrible things to them, and they’d taken them as captives. And that Psalm a verse that isn’t included in the Boney M song:

Psalm 137:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you
with what you have done to us!

⁹ Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones
and dashes them against the rock!

Now, that sounds awful, but they were crying from the pain that the Babylonians had inflicted upon **them** – That’s exactly what the Babylonians had done to **their** children...

And so revenge movies tap into a base human instinct for revenge – To see justice done, yes... – but vengeful justice... And so the base human desire, is for ourselves to be the ones who wield the justice. “I’ll get you back for that”.

*And it **is** a base human instinct. My parents never taught me how to retaliate – It was all very natural for me to thump my brother when he picked on me...*

And because of this base human instinct we have, the way of Jesus is pretty-much a completely foreign concept.

What does the world tell us? And even the psychologists... It teaches us:

- To stand up for yourself;
- Don't let people walk all over you;
- Don't let anyone take advantage of you;
- Don't let anyone think that you're a soft-touch;
- If you let them get away with it this time, they'll do it again;

It's all about:

- my rights;
- my freedoms;
- my strength;
- No one can take advantage of me...

The way of Jesus is very different. **Today** we get a picture of the love that God has for us, and how (because we have received the merciful love of God {which we did not deserve}), the children of God, love others in the way that God loves us (even though **they** don't deserve it). It's about how we personally love (in very practical ways), and it's an **extraordinary** love – it's the sort of love that is not considered “normal” in the world.

Righto, we're studying Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount. Last week we were in the beatitudes – the blessings **and** the woes. And particularly when we got to the woes, Jesus' words are deliberately offensive.

For starters, Jesus said: **woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.**

Now hang on a minute, I hear people say *“I worked hard to get what I have – nobody’s going to take that away from me.”* ... Maybe you did work hard for it. Although in my experience, the loudest protestors (about how hard they’ve worked for something) have often had a family legacy that gave them a pretty good start...

But anyway, what Jesus said is offensive because by world standards, we are rich. *As someone said to me last week “Even an Australian on welfare is rich by world standards”. And they’re 100% right.*

- Oh how sad it is for us – we’ve already received our consolation;
- Oh how sad it is for us – we’ve got plenty to eat – we shall be hungry;
- Oh how sad for us who have great happiness and enjoyment in life – we shall mourn and weep.

So, what can we do about this? These things: Wealth; plenty of tucker; happy times,,, **are** worldly/physical blessings, but they’re **also** blessings we thank God for.

- **God** provides us with what we need;
- **He** provides us with the food we eat;
- **He** blesses us with happiness.

But the thing is, if we keep all these blessings for ourselves and our own satisfaction, blessings become woes. Physical blessings (if I am worldly/selfish about them) become woes.

So, if the circumstances in life that God has placed me in means I **am** rich; and I **am** well fed; and I **am** happy, does that mean I’m doomed? Am I **stuck** with the woe “Oh, how

sad it is for me – things are going to go badly for me on the Day of Judgment”? Of course not. And we touched on this last week, and we’re going to build on it this week – It’s what we do with what we have...

But where do we begin? Let’s begin with salvation. I want to assure you, the Lord has forgiven our sins – through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance of sins, we have been saved by grace... And so this whole section here of extraordinary love (love and mercy), is about being a faithful son or daughter of our Heavenly Father. **As** the children of God, **we** love as our Heavenly Father has loved us. **Because** He has been merciful to us, **we** show mercy to others. A chip off the old block.

And so, in our Lord Jesus Christ, we use everything God has blessed us with, with love and mercy.

The extraordinary love that Jesus is on about here, isn’t about an affectionate love – it’s not an emotion – it’s not a feeling. It’s about “willing service”. And it is not a love that is restrained to “a feeling” – it’s expressed in actions... **Every** word of Jesus in today’s Bible reading, is about what we do. It’s about:

- how we give;
- how we treat others;
- how we serve;
- being merciful;
- doing good...

Why? Because as Disciples of Jesus, we become just like our heavenly Father.

1.

The first lesson, is “Love those who oppose you”.

Out of the 4 woes and 4 blessings, the ones that Jesus said most about, were to do with being hated/mistreated/excluded/cancelled because of our relationship with Jesus...

He said:

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.....

Our reward is great in Heaven, but how is this heavenly reward achieved? Well, it’s about how we respond to being hated and cancelled. Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

When Christians are persecuted for the sake of Jesus, we do not retaliate. (*all it takes for evil to prosper is for good men to do nothing*). But it’s not only about refraining from hostile acts – we do good. In the Name of Jesus, we do good to those who hate us; we bless those who curse us; we pray for those who abuse us...

If someone gives you an upper-cut in the jaw or slaps you in the face, we turn the other cheek.

One commentary I read summed it up like this:

Love is available; vulnerable; and subject to repeated abuse...

And so, the first lesson, is “Love those who oppose you”. Even if they take your coat, let them have your shirt as well. Give to everyone who begs. And if someone steals from you, don’t demand it back.

Now, that sort of stuff – it only makes sense if we know God will see. And we know that God will reward His faithful, who do good, even to those who have done evil to us. And we also know that God will bring His judgment.

BTW, there’s 2 ways in which God judges. We’re well aware that when Jesus returns (on the Day of Judgment), God will punish the wrongdoer... But we also need to remember that the Authorities are God’s appointed servants to administer justice and to punish the wrongdoer today. And so Jesus' words here, are **not** about a political turning of the other cheek – it is right for our nation to defend itself against an aggressor. And it **isn’t** about a societal laxness on law enforcement – It is right for the police and courts to convict and punish the wrongdoer – they are serving God when they do this.

This is about us personally. As Disciples of Jesus, we love those who oppose us and we do good for them. And we do it,

knowing that God will see, and we know that God will reward His faithful.

2.

The second lesson is “Do to others what you’d like them to do to you”. This is about giving way beyond what a person deserves or what they’ve earned. For Disciples of Jesus, our love and service for others, is so lavish, it goes beyond what they deserve.

Jesus tells us here, that if we only love those who love us, what benefit is that to us? BTW, in the Greek, the word for “benefit” or “credit” in these few verses is “charis”, which is the word for “grace”. “Charis” is “favour of a superior” (in this case, God). If you love those who love you, what grace (favour of God) is that to you?

Now, if you’re anything like me, you probably think along the lines of *“I’ll be nice to you, just as soon as you’re a bit nicer to me”*; or *“I’ll give you a bit of help, just as soon as you earn it”*. But as Disciples of Jesus, we gotta-be better than that. We are to be like our Heavenly Father.

- Even sinners love those who love them...
If we only love those who love us, how are we different to a sinner?
- Even sinners do good for those who do good to them.
If we only do good for those who will do good to us, how

are we different to a sinner?

- Even sinners lend stuff to those that they know they're going to get it back from and they loan stuff to people who will loan stuff in return...

If we only do the same, how are we any different to sinners???

We do to others, what we would like them to do to us.

3.

Which brings us to the 3rd lesson: The **divine** standard – the way of God.

Our Heavenly Father is:

- kind to the ungrateful;
- kind to the evil

In other words, He is merciful and gracious...

While **we** were evil, He was kind to us. While **we** were still sinners, He gave His Son to die for us.

Love; Kindness; Mercy.

Give; Do good; Lend, expecting nothing in return.

V35 sums it up:

35 ... 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 is

kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful,
even as your Father is merciful.

That's how woes become blessings.

God has blessed you and I enormously. And if we live like every other sinner lives (counting our blessings; and banking our blessings; and self-directing our blessings to reward ourselves), there is no reward – woe...

But if we love and are kind and merciful – if we:

- give to those in genuine need;
- do good; and
- loan (expecting nothing in return),,,

And we do these things, knowing full well that this sort of love is going to:

- cost us;
- makes us vulnerable;
- means we may be subject to repeated abuse...

If we love like God loves, then blessed we are indeed. – **great** is the grace/reward/favour of God, because He delights in those who follow after His ways.

Aren't you glad we're studying a Gospel? The teachings of Jesus don't get any less challenging do they...

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
we are so thankful that You are merciful
- that You are kind to the ungrateful;
- kind to the evil,
because that was us.

It was while we were evil
It was while we were ungrateful
that You sent Your Son to die on the cross.
It is by Your grace and mercy,
that it is even possible for us to enter the Kingdom of
Heaven.

And so our hearts overflow with thanks.

And Lord, give us the mind of Christ.

Help us to be loving.
Help us to be gracious and merciful.
Help us to be like our Heavenly Father.

Lord, remove from us, the pride we hold onto.
That pride that neglects the plight of our fellow man
- that pride and selfishness that says

- "you don't deserve it"
- "you can't be trusted"
- "you hurt me"

Lord, give us hearts of love,

- love for those who don't deserve it;
- service for those who would never be of service;
- doing good to those who have never done anything good in their life.

I guess what we're praying for Lord,
is a complete transformation.

Take our wicked hearts,
And fill us with love and mercy.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.