

Loving Like Jesus 7 – Healing Love

Luke 7:36-50

Last week I encouraged you to memorize the fruit of the spirit and said we would work on this during Sunday service, so let's all read this together. *Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."*

(Title Slide) The fruit of the Spirit is love. It should be no surprise that the first flavor of the Spirit's fruit in our lives is love. Elsewhere, the apostle Paul says that love is the greatest of all virtues, even greater than faith or hope. Here's how our Lord and Savior, Jesus put it. He declared that love is not just the greatest, but also the second greatest commandment as we are to love God and love others. As Jesus says, *"All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments."* Every moral principle, every law that is established in justice, every precept that is good, hinges on love.

Love is the highest goal, the final test, and the greatest reward. The great physician and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Love is the master key that opens the gates of happiness."

A couple weeks ago, I was talking to my dad about the fruit of the Spirit. Remember last week I told you that it's fruit, singular, not fruits, plural. It's not the fruits of the Spirit, but the fruit of the Spirit. There is only one fruit of the Spirit, but it displays itself in these nine distinct flavors. Here was my dad's take on this singular fruit idea. He said that the fruit of the Spirit is love, just love, that is the single fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit's goal in your life is to produce love. All the rest of these things – joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are all descriptions of what love is and what love does. So the fruit of the Spirit is love and love does all of these things.

That kinda fits with Jesus saying that all the Law and prophets hang on the commandments to love God and love others, doesn't it?. It also sounds a lot like what Paul says in the famous love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul writes,

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

(Next Slide) That fits right in with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, although in 1 Corinthians Paul spends more time describing what love does not do, rather than what it does. But he just as easily could have said, love is joy, love is peace, love is patient, love is kind, love is gentle.

The evidence was enough that I wondered if the Greek language, grammar and sentence structure supported this idea. Although I found a couple of scholars who took the same position

that the fruit of the Spirit is love and all the rest of these things are simply a definition of love, It wasn't an open and shut case.

However, we can readily see why love is first, and understand that everything else flows from love, and is inseparable from it. Love becomes the fount from which joy overflows. Love is the anchor which gives peace in the storm. Love is the sun that shines forth the rays of kindness. Love makes tender the heart that is gentle.

When love is defined by all of these other qualities, **two things become immediately obvious.** **First, Love flows outwards.** The direction of love is always from us to others. Love causes us to be patient with others, good to others, gentle with others. We're not envious toward others. We're not making proud boasts to others, we're not ticked off at others. Love flows out from our lives toward others.

This is the exact opposite of the world's idea of love. The world's idea of love flows inwards. It flows from others toward me. Love is how you make me feel. Love is what you do for me. And if I feel the love from you, I will reciprocate. This is what Jesus was talking about in Luke 6:32-33 when he says, *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that."*

That's the lowest common denominator of love. A love that flows inward is natural. You can do that in the flesh. Anyone is capable of it. But a love that flows outward is of the Spirit. It comes only from God's work in your life. That's why it's a fruit of the Spirit.

The second thing we should notice from the company that love keeps is that love is seen in action. Love is not defined emotionally. None of this is about how love makes you feel. The proof of love is in what you do. Whether it's the other 8 flavors of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 or all the love is and love is not in 1 Corinthians 13, they are all seen in how you act toward other people. Love is not a feeling. Love is an action.

One other preliminary thing I want to point out as we dive into this virtue of love is that **Jesus is our ultimate definition of love.** If you want to see love in action, what love looks like, then look no further than Jesus. Here is what the apostle John writes in 1 John 3:16, *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."*

You want to know what love is – look at Jesus and follow his example. He is love in action. With that in mind I want to take you to a scene of the life of Jesus. This story comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 14, and it is Jesus showing love in action.

(Two Slides) 1 *One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.* 2 *And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy.* 3 *And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it*

lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" (Next Slide) 4 But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. 5 And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" 6 And they could not reply to these things.

(Title Slide) The setting is dinner at the house of one of the leading Pharisees. So there are Pharisees there, and teachers of the law, what our passage calls lawyers. So, right away, you know when there's multiple lawyers present, there's going to be problems.

As you read the gospels, notice how many of the best stories of Jesus take place around the table? Mealtimes were ripe with opportunity to engage with people. Food opens doors. I also love how Jesus plays no favorites. He's as comfortable eating with tax collectors and sinners as he is at the table of a religious leader.

Here we find Jesus eating at the house of a Pharisee. In addition to Jesus and his disciples, the Pharisees and religious lawyers, there's someone else there— a man sick with what our text calls dropsy. Some ancient versions call it "gathering waters." The NIV calls it abnormal swelling. His modern medical diagnosis would likely be some sort of edema, which is the accumulation of fluid in certain tissues of the body. My dad has issues with this, and it can be extremely painful and debilitating.

It's the Sabbath day, the day they are to remember and keep holy. It was to be a day of worship and rest, and not a day of work. The Pharisees had an extensive list of rules as to what counted as work and what didn't. Their desire to honor the Sabbath began as a noble intention, but over the years it had become a way of honoring themselves. They built themselves up by place heavy burdens on others. The problem is that they valued their own rules over relationships, traditions over truth, and saving face over saving people.

Their rules were burdensome and unyielding, and missed the point of Sabbath rest entirely. In the collection of Jewish traditions known as the Mishnah, twenty-four chapters are devoted to Sabbath observance. So, what God takes 8 words to say in the Ten Commandments, they made into a freakin' book. You talk about petty and tedious. These rules didn't put the focus on the goodness of God, but on how good you were at following rules. And rule following became the litmus test by which they judged everyone. And Jesus called them on it...repeatedly.

Look at the end of the first verse. It says, "*they were watching him carefully.*" They weren't watching to learn from Jesus. They weren't watching to follow his example. They were scrutinizing him, testing him, hoping he'd mess up. They wanted to catch him breaking one of their precious rules. They wanted to embarrass or discredit Jesus.

Jesus was just the opposite. He didn't care for their rules and traditions, especially when it got in the way of loving people. Here was this man who needed love, he needed help and he needed hope and Jesus wasn't going to let the traditions of the Pharisees get in the way of that.

And so Jesus turns their own test against them, *“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”* In those twenty-four chapters on observing the Sabbath, is there anything that will allow you help a hurting person?

Now, Jesus already knows they will permit themselves to render aid, as long as it serves their own interests. Verse 5, *“Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?”* There’s something wrong with rules that allow you to help yourself, but not someone else.

Jesus, however, made God’s opinion quite clear when he healed the man in verse 4. You and I can’t perform miracles like Jesus did, but we can love people in action just like Jesus did. And if we have His Spirit inside of us, we will have that kind of love flowing out of us. Jesus here shows us three ways to show love in action.

I. Love in Action Sees Others

First, love in actions sees others. Love sees people, and it sees them differently. Jesus saw people differently than everyone else around him. When others see a problem, love sees a person. Other people in the room may have only seen his illness, but they didn’t see the person behind the illness.

I think what the Pharisees saw was a prop. We can’t know with certainty why the man was there, but if you’ll permit me to read between the lines, here’s what I see. I see the Pharisees watching Jesus carefully looking for any misstep he might make. I think the reason they were doing this is because they knew this man was there, they knew how Jesus had responded in the past to sick people on the Sabbath, and they were watching to see what Jesus did. They wouldn’t want this man there unless he was a tool to serve their interests.

He’s not the kind of person who would usually be welcomed at this table. The Pharisees would have seen his illness as a judgment of God for some unworthiness in his life, and so they would have seen him as unclean. But whatever their reasons were, God had his own reasons. This was a divine appointment. He was there because this encounter was on heaven’s calendar. He was there so Jesus might show love in action.

Jesus didn’t look at his illness and ask what he did to deserve it. He didn’t worry about navigating all the rules concerning the Sabbath. He wasn’t concerned about satisfying the political interests of others. He simply saw a man who needed healing love and he showed it.

What do we see when we see someone in need? What do you see when you see someone hurting or someone who needs help? Who do you see? Do you see a who or a what?

When we learn to see others with the eyes of Jesus we will be empowered to love them in action. We will not merely see where they’ve been, or where they are, or even only what they

need. We will see who they can be and where they can go when we love them with the kind of love that is the fruit of the Spirit of God working in our lives.

Labberton writes in his book, *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor*, about what Jesus when he healed a sick woman.

Jesus didn't see a sick woman, he saw a daughter of God. He didn't see an outcast from society, he saw a child of Israel. He didn't see a sinner, he saw a person in the image of the Creator.

Here, Jesus doesn't see a man with an edema crashing a party he doesn't belong at. He sees a man who's been invited to the great banquet of God.

Immediately after this healing, Jesus tells two parables, and I really wish we had time to get into them. However, I encourage you to read these later when you're at home. Make them a part of your time with God this week. The first parable, in verses 7-11 is about a wedding feast. In this story, the person sitting in the worst seat at the wedding feast is invited by the host, "*friend, move up higher.*" This person goes from having to sit at the kids table to being moved to the guest of honor.

The second parable, from verse 12 to 24 is about a banquet where invitations are sent to the poor, crippled, blind and lame. To those that everyone else ignores, they are given special invitation in vs. 17, "*Come, for everything is now ready.*"

If you're here this morning and you are in need of a supernatural kind of love, let me talk just to you for a moment. Maybe you've spent your life being seen as a what, not a who. People look at you and they see failure. They see unfulfilled potential. Maybe they see an ailment or disability. They see a shortcoming. They see mistakes and foolish choices. They see the abuse and neglect of others.

But do you know what Jesus sees? He sees an honored guest. He says, "Friend, move up higher. I've saved the best seat for you. You are my guest of honor. Come, for everything is now ready." That's how love in action sees people. That's the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. But love in action is more than what we see. It's also in what we say.

II. Love in Action Speaks Up

Love in action speaks up. Love in action speaks up even when everyone else remains silent. Jesus takes a room full of people who love the sound of their own voice and who believed their opinions were the very thoughts of God, and he renders them silent. I love how Jesus turns the tables here. The Pharisees were always asking Jesus questions to trick him, to test him, to trap him, but Jesus is the one who asks the question here they can't answer. "*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?*"

Vs. 4 says they remained silent. Vs. 6, *“They could not reply to these things.”* Not one of them says, “You’re right, we should do what we can to help this man.” Nobody says, “Jesus, you’ve healed so many others, could you please heal this man.”

There are places where we are supposed to be silent. The library, a museum, weddings, when you’re in your tree stand or duck blind, during a test, in a courtroom, in the bathroom. Another place we are told to be silent is in church. Do you know how many times I got shushed growing up? There are times to be silent and there are times to be noisy in a worship service, but when it comes to people who need God’s love, it’s time for us to be silent no more. We need to speak up for those who have no voice. We need to speak up for the hurting, the lonely, the neglected, and the forgotten. When we see others with the kind of love the Holy Spirit grows in our lives, we can speak up, even if everyone else remains silent.

III. Love in Action Acts Courageously

Thirdly, love in action acts courageously. It isn’t enough just to say something. Healing love does something. Too often we promise prayers never prayed, and offer blessings and sympathy, but do we do anything? Now, I’m not saying that praying is doing nothing. Prayer is powerful. Sometimes, prayer is the most powerful thing we can do. James 5:16 says, *“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”*

Doing nothing is when we say we will pray for someone, but then we don’t. Don’t use the promise to pray like a Christianized version of wishing someone well. It sounds nice and polite, but if you promise it and don’t do it, then they are empty words. I know how it is. We’re busy, we get distracted, and we forget. I’ve been there. I see someone in church and then I remember, “Oh, I told them last week I would pray for them. Oh, crud, what did they need prayer for? Did I pray for them. I’ll say a quick prayer. Dear Lord, please be with whatever it was they needed. ‘Hey, how are doing? I’ve been praying for you.’”

Do you know what’s even better than praying for someone? Praying with someone. “Can I have a word of prayer with you right now? Let’s just step into the other room here and have a word of prayer.” Two believers come together like that in the presence of God. That’s powerful stuff.

Once we’ve prayed for somebody, then we need to explore this question— how might God want to use us as a part of the answer? How might I be an answer to their needs? How can I be a part of the life change that happens here? Love in action happens when we’re willing to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

And healing love doesn’t just act. It acts courageously regardless of what others think. Jesus was outnumbered in that home. He was surrounded by Pharisees and religious lawyers. He was on enemy turf. This wasn’t like being in the home of Mary and Martha. These were people hoping to see Jesus fail, but Jesus acted courageously.

Remember this, these people all thought they had good reasons, spiritual reasons for not helping this man, but they weren't reasons. They were excuses. Whatever reasons we think we have for not showing compassion, even if they sound like spiritual reasons, they are not reasons at all. They're just excuses.

Sometimes the most courageous thing we can do is love other people. You see love not only confronts the enemy in the world. It confronts the enemy in our own hearts.

Jesus sees. Jesus speaks, and Jesus saves. We need to see. We need to speak, and we need to save. No, we can't save like Jesus does, but whenever we act in love we are reenacting the salvation of Jesus each in our own little way. That's the fruit of the Spirit growing in our lives.