

Measuring Up

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church February 23rd, 2025 – Luke 6:27-38)

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We are bombarded every day with messages about how we need to measure up. Ads on the television, or on billboards on freeways, on our social media feeds, we are constantly told what kind of car we need to drive, food we should or shouldn't be eating, beverages we need to drink to be cool, the kind of house we should live in and clothes we should wear, the best super fund and insurance policy we should have to maximise our finances and the interest rate we should be aiming to access. Need I go on.

These messages tell us how we need to measure up in our society.

But is this really how we need to measure up?

Jesus in the second part of his plain message on the plain tells his listeners, his followers the way in which he thinks they should measure up.

Jesus asks his followers to:

Love your enemies – that is those who don't like you and you them

Do good to all

Bless those who curse you

Pray for those who treat you badly

If they hit you (metaphorically or physically), then turn your cheek and let them take their best shot.

If someone has need and they ask for help – give them what they need.

Even if someone takes you jacket, give them your shirt too.

When you have lent someone something, don't ask for it back.

Don't judge or condemn others.

And forgive.

A pretty tall order. This is summed up in what has become known as the 'golden rule' (do unto others what you would have them do to you) and it has an equivalent in almost every religion and culture.

The thing to notice is, that it is all, characterised by generosity.

Jesus, I would argue, is providing a measuring stick for us, in both his words and actions.

This message is countercultural, both then and now.

It is very important to notice that Jesus has a caution – it is actually easy to be nice to those who return the favour, that is not, what he is asking for. He wants us to practice this to those who won't or can't repay our generosity. That is the essence of true generosity.

This is not a call to be a doormat, to let people get away with horrendous behaviour. Turning the other cheek in Jesus's day was an act of defiance. Servants were slapped as part of a disciplinary process, to turn the other cheek was to say to the master, 'come on hit me with your best shot', almost taunting them to do even more, which of course would shame them into stopping.

This way of life is a choice.

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This way of life takes courage.

This is about making oneself vulnerable – giving away your coat or shirt exposes you in many ways, makes you vulnerable for the sake of others.

This way of life will bring freedom to all.

We see in our first reading from today that Joseph eventually is able to put into practice, the kind of things Jesus is calling for – love for enemies, forgiveness and mercy. I am sure you all know the story of Joseph. The favourite son of Jacob, he was mistreated by his older brothers. Joseph flaunted that favouritism in his brothers' faces, who retaliated and had him sold into slavery. Joseph finds himself in Egypt, has some dreams, predicts famine, gives the king some advice and ends up in a very good position. His family experience the predicted famine and end up on their knees before Joseph whom they do not recognise. Although it takes a bit of time, instead of exacting revenge on those who mistreated him, and after assuring himself that his father is safe, and they have shown true remorse, does he respond with grace, offer forgiveness and give what he can to help them all.

Just think for a moment, how different our world would be, if those in power practiced this golden rule, this love for enemies, this mercy and forgiveness:

If we loved our enemies – wars would cease and maybe never even start. Countries would co-operate with each other rather than competing with each other, resulting in the common good for all.

Debts to developing countries would be written off and they could provide for their people.

There would be equity and justice – people in the developing world would not die of starvation or preventable disease. People would get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. People would have adequate shelter.

People would have no need to steal from each other, or to rise up against each other.

The divide between the rich and the poor would narrow.

There would be compassion.

There would be joy.

People would no longer need to fear, love casts out fear and fear is what drives much bad behaviour.

There would be peace.

Maybe this vision is utopian, but it is God's vision.

So why would we want to engage in such utopian behaviour?

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The answer is pretty simple, God in Jesus calls us to follow him, to become like them. To practice mercy because God has been merciful. To practice forgiveness because God forgives. To love because God is love.

This measure of love that we have been given by God is not a flat measure, it is generous, the measuring cup is overflowing and that is how Jesus is asking his followers to act.

When we act in this way, then we will receive it back in equal measure says Jesus. We know that don't we, when we treat people badly, it comes back to us, that is what I see occurring in the world, a bit of tit for tat. We are called to change it up, instead of handing out violence, being concerned with our own self-interest and power what if we handed out kindness, mercy, generosity.

So, let's begin to take Jesus seriously, take him at his word. It starts with us. Let's set an example for the rest of the world. It is the little things that together will change the world.

I came across this the other day on social media and there is truth in it.

In a time of hate, love is an act of resistance. In a time of fear faith is an act of resistance. (written by Loryn Brantz)

This is what Jesus is calling for, is it not? Amen.