

The Sin of Cruelty

Luke 9:51-56

From what I understand, the reason why viruses are so effective in harming our health is that they are small enough to slip in without being recognised as germs by the body. Once they are in, they attach themselves to cells and begin to cause havoc, destroying white blood cells and anti-bodies. Their effectiveness lies in the fact that the body does not recognise them as a threat upon entry, and so they act like guerrilla terrorists, sabotaging the body from within.

I think there is a sin that is like that. Many sins are 'big' and obvious to our conscience. They are the germs that we can spot a mile away, lust, selfish anger, hatred, jealousy, evil speaking, fornication. Not that we are completely free of all or some of these things, but the point is we will recognise them and be able to say no. The sin I am concerned with today sits like a Trojan horse in the heart of many Christians. It sits like a silent saboteur, tainting the thoughts and actions which we think are normal. I am speaking about the sin of cruelty.

It's not a sin you think about every day, is it? How many times have you confessed the sin of cruelty to the Lord? And yet I believe we can see in the Word how cruelty, like pride, is in every human heart.

Our text today is a classic example of cruelty, which we want to examine. Please note that this passage should make your alarm bells go off. Here are two disciples, along with Simon Peter, part of the Inner Three: the closest to Jesus, walking with Him 24 hours a day, learning His heart, and their cruelty came out without restraint. It was as demonic as could be, and worse, they even thought their cruelty would be applauded by Jesus. Jesus had to expose their hearts to them, showing them that they did not understand that cruelty was controlling them. If you think your heart has no cruelty in it, please consider that the apostles closest to Jesus had it in the presence of Jesus and felt no conviction until He told them. How scary that two believers, both in agreement, both in the inner circle of Christ thought they were in the will of God when they were actually consumed with demonic hatred.

I. The Calloused Heart of Cruelty

When you think of cruelty, you think of people torturing an animal. We might even think of Nazis torturing the Jews, but our deceitful hearts never identify the cruelty within us. Cruelty is a root evil. It is deriving pleasure from the pain of another; it is to withhold mercy from another. Because cruelty is not as explosive as anger, because it is not as bitter as unforgiveness, it sits silently in the background calling itself by another name. It is calculating and pre-meditated. Cruelty is willing to wait, to patiently inflict suffering on another. Cruelty can be indifferent to reconciliation. Cruelty is not concerned with such things. Cruelty desires to injure another.

Cruelty is a demonic desire for another's suffering. I don't use that word 'demonic' lightly. Satan and his demons are wicked, filthy beings who are cruel. They delight in the destruction of human beings. Their evil nature finds meaning solely in destroying humans through deception and fear. Read the Gospel accounts and you will see what demons did to the people they possessed. One poor father tells Jesus through his tears how the demon would throw his son in the water or in the fire. This dark and fallen spirit enjoyed tormenting a family, by waiting till they were in the boat, and then throwing him in. His patient cruelty would be silent till they were around the cooking fire and then throw him in, to physically torment the boy, and mentally torment the family. Satan's desire is to hurt God, to hate God by seeking to destroy God's creation. And the human heart, fallen from Adam, has that same black animal inside it.

From the earliest years, we see cruelty coming out as naturally as breathing. Who teaches a group of five year olds to single out the one who is different and taunt him with ugly words till he cries out in tears? Before the human heart is even ten years old, it finds delight in hurting others, in punishing others. The tattletale who reports every deed to the teacher is often possessed of that same cruelty, a perverse desire to see others punished. The school bully loves the punishing as much as the power.

As we grow, the cruelty simply becomes more advanced. The high school gang of boys who seek to intimidate others, the student whose purpose is nothing more than to ruin the teacher's lesson: cruelty. Before we have reached adulthood, cruelty is well established as part of our hearts. How many children disobey their parents purely out of a sick desire to inflict suffering upon their hearts? Hardly any illustration is necessary of how vicious and nasty brothers and sisters can be to each other. The older, tormenting and bullying the younger and weaker, the younger tormenting the elder through irritation. As we go into adulthood, our cruelty has aged with us, adopting the subtlety, the shrewdness and the effectiveness that adulthood brings. From the cold shoulder we give our spouse to the car we cut off on the highway. From the critical word we speak of another to the delight we feel when hearing our enemy has fallen, cruelty is embedded inside us and very much alive.

In our passage, Jesus was about to go into a village of the Samaritans. Well, you recall that there was bad blood between the Jews and Samaritans Furthermore, one of the big disputes between the two groups was where to worship. The Samaritans said Mt. Gerizim, the Jews said Jerusalem. So as Jesus was set to go to Jerusalem, the Samaritans did not receive him. Now, here come the two sons of thunder, James and John with a proposition. "Lord, seeing these Samaritans did not want to receive you, how about we call down fire from heaven to completely wipe them off the face of the earth?" Notice that they compare themselves with Elijah. There was not even a doubt in their mind that they were in the will of God. I mean, the zeal of thine house has consumed me, right?

Cruel. How twisted. A group of living breathing, human beings are in this village. They foolishly reject Jesus, no doubt about that. But cruelty is twisted. To the twisted mind, $2 + 2$ equals 3 or 5, never 4. A twisted man's spiritual algebra adds up for him. A perverse

man's moral arithmetic makes sense in his mind. But it doesn't matter. Two plus two has a correct answer, just as there was a Christlike response to the Samaritans, and they missed it. The cruel man figures that being cold towards his child will somehow push him in the right direction. But it is twisted, a desire to punish, with a supposed spiritual motive. The twisted preacher thinks that if he shuns certain members, it will get them back on track. But it is twisted, a selfish desire to punish, cloaked in a supposed righteous motive.

Isn't it interesting how much cruelty has been done in the name of Christ? It seems religion lends itself to cruelty. Religion, serving God, building the church seems to be the camouflage for many a person's cruelty. How many men's pulpit is a place of cruel words? How much counsel is cruel, coming from a heart that secretly desires to squelch the spirit of another, but dresses in the robe of 'speaking the truth'.

James and John's zeal for God was fine. But as the heart is desperately wicked, who can know it, at this point, their selfish evil was in control. They were claiming they were doing it for Christ, but Jesus distanced Himself from their ways. They were being controlled by their flesh, but as they had a spiritual motive, the ends justified the means. They had a zeal without knowledge.

What pain has been inflicted on people by others claiming to be acting for Christ. What words that pierced like a sword, what humiliations, what nastiness, what coldness, what hardness, but like James and John, we paint it over with, "it's for You, Lord". In these last days, Christians who guard against apostasy must guard their hearts from becoming hard and cruel, even toward apostates. We are to be as gentle as doves, and as wise as serpents. Some claim to be contending for the faith but they are nothing more than contentious for the faith.

This was not the first time cruelty had reared its ugly head in the disciples. How hard were the hearts of these men as they sent away little children, eager to have Jesus lay his loving hands on them? Jesus was angry at their brutishness and said 'suffer the little children'. On another occasion, the disciples find someone serving God, but he didn't have the right label, so they stopped him, and proudly report it to their Lord. Jesus has to explain to these hard hearts that he that is not against Me is for Me. A tired and hungry crowd of over 4000 follows Jesus. The cruel hearts of the disciples say, send them away now, as if they are a worthless herd of cattle, mere numbers. Jesus was moved with compassion and said, give them to eat.

Here in Luke, the cruelty of the finest of the apostles came out for all to see. Like too many today, their cruelty allowed them to dispose of a human's value, and to focus merely on a principle. For them the issue was the fact that the Samaritans have *rejected* Jesus. That was not the issue. The issue was that the *Samaritans* had rejected Jesus, real living, breathing people, with children, parents, and a desire for life and happiness.

It's easy to defend principles. Principles don't complicate your life. They are static and defined. It's another thing to love and defend people. Christ died for people, not precepts.

By the way, the truth is not under threat. The truth will never change. Lies do not threaten truth. People are under threat. The threat of hell.

And if you ever come to a point, where you think of even the worst apostate going to hell, and you are pleased at the thought, let me say, you have reached the depths of Satan. Because even God is not willing that that apostate should perish in hell. You know, God and Satan agree on this fact, you and I deserve hell. The difference is Satan delights in the idea, God is grieved by it. That leads us to our second point,

II. The Contrasted Heart of God

Jesus says to the disciples, you know not what spirit you are of. I did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. God says that to you and me: when you are about to be cruel, God says, I did not come to destroy, but to save. A Christian is to reflect Christ, do you have his heart? The Samaritans had not rejected James and John, but they were beating the war-drum. Jesus was the one rejected, but left them alone.

Matthew, quoting Isaiah sums up Jesus' heart: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory" Jesus would not break off the one struggling, He would not extinguish the battling and weak heart. God's heart, is big, generous and compassionate. The Pharisees are the awesome contrast between man's cruelty and God's heart. A man with a withered hand stands there in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The cruelty of the Pharisees says, "Uphold the principle of the Sabbath. Who cares about this person?" Jesus reminds them that they will have pity on their animal to rescue him on the Sabbath. Mark 3:4-5 "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. ⁵And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand." Jesus was angry at the hardness and cruelty of their hearts. These same men, would watch a man being crucified, and would call out, "he saved others! Let him save himself!" Cruel. Delighting in destruction, hiding behind religion. Jesus said of them, "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers." There's many a spiritual leader like that today, happy to add to his people's burden each week, never able to offer the way to ease it, secretly delighting as they see the sheep stumbling, proud of their own supposed righteousness.

Precepts are easy to live for. They make handy shields to mask our desire to hurt each other. But Jesus exposes us "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath". God said of some of the OT spiritual leaders, "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up *that which was* broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." I think another contrast of man's heart with God's is the book of Jonah. Jonah, though a prophet of God, is a cruel man. He wants the Ninehvites to be destroyed. God causes the greatest revival ever, and Jonah's evil heart is actually upset. He is miserable that

repentance actually took place. When Jonah preached to the Ninevites, no doubt as he spoke of coming judgement, he was like many a preacher today, rubbing his hands in delight, glad at the thought of the destruction of another. God eventually used a plant to teach Jonah how twisted his heart was. He was more concerned for a big leaf that had withered than for the lives and eternal destiny of thousands of people.

See, the key to driving out cruelty is to understand God's heart. We put off cruelty, are renewed in our minds, think God's thoughts and then put on mercy. God's heart is for people. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" the Lord says. Judgement is coming to the wicked, the fact that a believer escapes it, is grace. You and I do not have to accelerate that judgement, carry it out ourselves, or hope for it. Sin will destroy a man.

Are you trying to help the man, or hoping for his destruction? As you think of the people in your life, do sin's consequences in their life delight you or grieve you? Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to save men's souls, not destroy them. Hell was created for the devil and his angels, man was not meant for hell. God's heart that sees the sparrow fall, is moved with compassion for his crown of creation on earth, man. How far we are from God's heart, when we seek to inflict pain on others.

Your spouse apologises for hurting you. You nod, but carry on in silence. They begin to plead with you to forgive, you drag out their suffering. Why? You want to punish them. You're cruel. A friend argues with you and you bring out a past hurt like a weapon and stab them with it. Why? Because the hardness of your heart wants to hurt another, not help them. Your child gone astray tries to strike up a conversation with you, but you are cold. Why? You're cruel, you want them to grovel, to bathe in your disapproval. Your colleague gets a promotion and you deflate them with a swift word. Why? You delight in their pain, not in their joy. You're cruel. Your neighbour races past you on the highway and is involved in a crash. You laugh, and crow, "Serves him right!" You are delighting in his pain. You know not what spirit you are of. A church member returns after a long season of sin. You spurn him, and make him feel he is truly out of place. Why? Because you want to punish him. You're cruel. You delight in his awkwardness. It's the wickedness of our hearts. Within the church, we gossip and tear down one another. Why? Because we're cruel. Paul warned in Galatians 5:15, "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." The one thing I have never seen is sheep biting each other. A missionary once gave me the example of turkeys. Turkeys will peck at the scab of another turkey, until they have killed it, how much like Christians with each other.

God is not that way. As far as the heavens are from the earth, He is not that way. God's heart is big, tender and merciful. When Jesus was teaching on prayer, He pointed out that we, being evil, will not give our son a scorpion or a stone or a snake if he asked for bread, fish or an egg. Jesus' point was that even you are not that cruel. How much more is God not that way? God's heart is soft. Jesus could hardly refuse to help. He healed and helped till his human frame reached exhaustion. Do you realize Jesus even had mercy on demons? Remember when they begged him to send them into the pigs feeding rather than into hell, he suffered them. He was even merciful to wicked spirits who are condemned. Jesus told us we should love our enemies because that is how God is. He makes it rain on

the good and evil, the sun to shine on the just and unjust. Everyday he feeds billions that spit in His face, openly curse Him and deny Him altogether. God's grace abounds. His heart is big. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

James and John probably thought Jesus would smile and say, "Not now boys" They even thought God would co-operate with their cruelty by sending the fire! Many years later, John would write "He that hateth his brother is in darkness" Jesus didn't thank them for their zeal, or simply re-direct their enthusiasm. He distanced Himself and said, you don't see that what is controlling you know is demonic; it is anti-christ.

Can I give you a simple definition of cruelty? Cruelty is whenever you heart closes up to another person. It is whenever you heart hardens to them. God's heart is seeking the health of another, always keeping the door open like the father of the prodigal son. God's heart is mercy. Hear Scripture as it speaks of God and His heart:

"the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." Jas 5:11

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us" (Eph 2:4)

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again" (I Pet 1:3)

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," Ex 34:6

The words 'his mercy endureth forever' occur 41 times in Scripture. Scripture speaks of the 'multitude of thy tender mercies'

"*It is of* the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

²³*They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*" Lamentations 3:22-23

III. The Compassionate Heart We Need

Scripture's method for sanctification is simple: put off, be renewed, put on. We must seek to put off cruelty. We saw the Calloused Heart of Cruelty; put that off. Then we must be renewed in our minds, our thinking must change, we must have God's heart: a desire to save, not destroy. We must desire to open our hearts to people, not close them. Then, thirdly, we must put on a replacement: a heart of mercy. I've spent the majority of the time identifying the sickness, because I think that way you'll be more ready to desire the cure, more aware of the problem. However the need to replace it is vital, else the vacuum will attract something for worse than the original cruelty.

So let us quickly define a heart of mercy, and then seek to apply it to our thinking, speech, relationships and living. God emphasises that we are to have a heart of mercy Jesus said in the Beatitudes "Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Matthew 5:7. An absolutely beautiful verse, summing up so much of the simplicity of the life of a believer is Micah 6:8 "He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

A verse Jesus often quoted to the cruel hearts of the Pharisees was Hosea 6:6; "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

Paul, in Colossians 3, applying the exact put off, be renewed and put on principle tells the Colossians to put off the cruelty of anger, wrath and malice, to then be renewed in knowledge after His image, and then listen what you are to put on, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;” Col 3:12. Perhaps Jesus summed it up in Luke 6:36

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”

Mercy is first and foremost, a desire to heal. Mercy sees the pathetic state of all of us, and does not rejoice in the evil, but is grieved. Mercy wants to save, not destroy. In whatever situation, whether in speech, in thinking, in attitudes, in relationships, mercy wants to help. Psalm 103:13-14: “Like as a father pitieth *his* children, *so* the LORD pitieth them that fear him. ¹⁴For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we *are* dust.” In that great Psalm on God’s mercy, it shows that God knows we are weak, sinful humans, passing through like a gust of wind. Knowing this, God does not reward us according to our iniquities. He is patient, slow to anger. He seeks to help and heal us. Mercy looks to your fellow man and sees another son of Adam drowning in their own sin. Mercy does not curse them, but remembers he is also dust and also needs grace. Mercy is then slow to anger, kind, patient, meek and charitable. God does not reward us according to our iniquities. If we seek to reward each one according to theirs, we are like the wicked servant who strangled his fellow servant for money due him, shortly after having been pardoned by the Master. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us. Mercy wants to heal. It is not distant, selfish and unconcerned. It longs to ease the pain of another, not increase it.

Mercy is never pleased at the pain of another, only grieved. Proverbs 17:5 “Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: *and* he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.” Because mercy is never glad at anyone’s pain, God instructs us regarding our enemies, “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: ¹⁸Lest the LORD see *it*, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. “ Proverbs 24:17-18. Rather, feed your enemy when he is hungry, give him water to drink when he is thirsty. Why? Because to so treat your enemy is mercy. He doesn’t deserve it, but what we deserve flew out the window the day Adam ate the fruit. God is unfairly good to you and me, so we must be to others.

Mercy seeks to heal.

Second, mercy is guided by truth. Pick up a concordance and you will find the two often mentioned together. Mercy needs truth to guide it, otherwise it becomes simply passion. Mercy needs truth as the railroad to guide the train. We are to have mercy on all, but the truth teaches us how to do that. When John tells us to not receive an apostate into our homes or bid him Godspeed, is he teaching us how to be hard and cruel? No. Mercy to that apostate is not allowing him to think we are okay with that doctrine. It is opening our heart to him, not our mind, by explaining to him he is apostate, and he must repent. Proverbs 16:6 :” By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD *men* depart from evil.” But don’t think for a moment that truth allows you to shut your heart to

anyone. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because his heart was grieved for them. If He'd had our hard heart, He'd simply have ignored them.

And because mercy is guided by truth, it means it will not put away justice. Justice will always be done. And it's not wrong to long for justice on your enemies. That's biblical, read the Psalms. But it is wrong to rejoice in their pain. To long for wrongs to be put right is righteous. To feel pleasure at their pain is evil. Listen to the amazingly merciful heart of David, the one who wrote the Psalms demanding justice on his enemies:

“¹False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge *things* that I knew not. ¹²They rewarded me evil for good *to* the spoiling of my soul. ¹³But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing *was* sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. ¹⁴I behaved myself as though *he had been* my friend *or* brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth *for his* mother.” (Psalm 35:11-14). Mercy is compassionate even to our enemies, though righteousness and truth long for justice.

Thirdly, mercy is tender. I don't really know how else to put it. Paul said, “put on bowels of mercy”. The Hebrews believed that the intestines were the centre of emotion. We can see how they thought that: great emotion in us causes ‘butterflies’, doesn't it? The Greek word for *moved with compassion* is derived from this word, bowels. It depicts a churning of the innards, a deep sense of emotion. It is not a casual thing, but a great emotion of deep longing, pain and pity. That is God's heart of mercy. How else can you say it, except to say, mercy is tender. It is soft. It's heart is open, gentle, even vulnerable to being attacked and hurt. But cruelty's heart is hard, cold, calloused by past hurts, a ten-meter thick wall shielding it from the pain of others, to protect itself from pain. Because of excesses in the professing church, we are often scared of emotion. But God created it. Nothing wrong with tenderness, with a big, soft heart. It's what mercy is, a hugely tender heart. Yes, truth directs it, but truth never hardens it. Truth never hardens it. Do you feel that for anyone? God will give you that heart, if you'll put off your cruelty, confess it as a sin. If you'll seek to meditate on His heart, His mercy. And if you will actively obey God in this area, seeking to heal others, to keep your heart open to them, to seek their well being. To cry for other's pain, to joy in their joys. To be tender and soft to others, forgiving, gentle, humble, meek. To be guided by truth, but always merciful. Can I sum it up? Mercy feels the grief of God over the destructiveness of sin. Mercy keeps it's heart open, to help.

James and John had a calloused, cruel heart. Jesus contrasted their heart with his own. That's the heart we need, a compassionate heart. Maybe you need to begin identifying and confessing the sin of cruelty in your life. Maybe that virus has been sitting there for years, unidentified, but sabotaging your Christian testimony. Your need to identify it as the sin it is. With your family, for starters. With your friends. With people in this church or visitors. With other Christians, with your colleagues or fellow students. With your neighbour, on the road, in the shopping centre. Maybe you need to confess it in your thinking, in your desires, ambitions, plans, attitudes. In your speech, in your habits. In your lifestyle. Put off that old man. Put off that wicked heart. Be renewed in His image. Put on bowels of mercy. Be ye merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful.