
Loving the Lost

By David Wilkerson

August 17, 2009 There is much talk right now about the fearful situation our world is in. Nation after nation is troubled, on the brink of economic disaster. Yet amid all the fear and turmoil gripping the world, God is still loving and saving lost souls.

His marvelous work of salvation never changes. It isn't affected by the economy. His wooing, convicting Holy Spirit isn't hindered by conditions on Wall Street or by teetering global finances. God's saving power has never been limited by shrinking bank accounts.

The fact is, our Lord never amends his promises. They are always "yea and amen," at all times and in every circumstance. God didn't promise to provide all our needs *except* when we're unemployed. He didn't promise to be Jehovah Jireh, our provider, *except* when economic times get scary.

Our Lord's promises never change. And that includes his promise about saving the lost.

When God commanded us to go into all the world to win the lost, he didn't include an exemption clause. He didn't say, "Preach the gospel of my Son Jesus Christ to all nations — *except in hard times* ." He never said, "Believe for the salvation of many — *except when there is a great shaking in the world.*"

Thank God, he has never said the world is too wicked, too hardhearted, too given over to lust to be reached by his Good News. At no time in history did the Lord ever limit his tender mercies — and he never will. Right now, America and the rest of the world could still be spared judgment — *if* there is true repentance. Of course, such repentance would require a great humbling and a mass return to the Lord. But our God has never rescinded his amazing offer of mercy.

Indeed, the Lord has made provision that no one need perish. Scripture tells us God does not take delight in the death of the wicked. On the contrary, he gave his own Son so that none should perish and all would have everlasting life.

In spite of God's great gift, the world hates the Christ who loves them. Jesus declared that he came to seek and to save the lost. He who had power to subdue the winds and waves, who could send fire down from heaven to destroy the wicked, who embodied righteousness — this same Jesus came as a humble servant.

And he brought healing to the people. Christ listened patiently as broken, suffering multitudes pleaded for deliverance from their afflictions. He opened blind eyes. He caused cripples to walk. He made the sick whole. He loosed tied tongues and unstopped deaf ears. Jesus even raised the dead. Simply put, Christ set captives free just as he claimed he would. He faithfully broke every form of bondage he encountered.

The truth is no human being ever loved the lost more than Jesus did. He grieved over them as scattered, confused sheep in need of a shepherd. He wept over their spiritual blindness. And he poured out his very life for them at the cross. No person in history should have been more loved or respected. Christ should have been honored and esteemed by all. Yet despite all his outpourings of sacrificial love, the world hated him without a cause.

There were thousands upon thousands of reasons to love Jesus, and not a single reason to hate him.

What did he do that he should be so hated and despised? The gospels speak of Christ as kind, patient, longsuffering, forgiving, full of tenderness and mercy, willing that no one should perish. He is called a shepherd, a teacher, a brother, a light in darkness, a physician, an advocate, a reconciler. He went about doing only good. No one ever had cause to hate him. So why the deep, vicious hatred toward Christ? Why the violence done to him and his name?

Jesus was hated by the world because *he came as a light to deliver the world from darkness*. John writes, "This is the condemnation [their reason for hating him], that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd [discovered]" (John 3:19-20).

Jesus declared of himself, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (8:12). This explains the one reason Jesus was so hated. His gospel is a call to the world to "cast off the works of darkness, and...put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:12).

Here is the world's reason for hating Christ, both then and now. Jesus promised to deliver sinners from the chains of darkness, to set them free from all satanic power. But they didn't want that. Why? What a Christian sees as freedom, the world sees as bondage.

"Freedom? What freedom?" they ask when offered freedom in Christ. "I'm already free. I've been freed from all restrictions, all sexual taboos. And I'm freed from the bondage of the Bible. I am free to worship a god of my own choosing, and in my case that is no god at all."

The simple fact is the world loves the things of this world. And they love the pleasures of sin. As Jesus put it, they *prefer the darkness*. Therefore, as Christ warned his disciples, "Because I have chosen you out of the world, the world is going to hate you just as they have hated me."

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). Why is this so? Why the hatred toward us, simply for loving the Lord? Jesus explains, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (15:18).

This is why society has unleashed massive efforts to stamp out all that pertains to Jesus...why there is such disdain for his followers...why courts try to outlaw the very mention of his name...why there is such abhorrence, even outrage, toward those who claim the Bible as their moral compass. *It all has to do with our mission as the bearers of his light.*

Think of it: As Christ's witnesses, we are called to a seemingly impossible task. We are asking the world to lay down the things that are most dear to them: their sins. In their eyes, the Christian walk — a life of purity and holiness — looks like a form of slavery. Our idea of heaven seems to them more like hell. When they hear us talk about the gospel, it is an offence to their lifestyle. Christ's gospel calls them to repent of the sins they love, to repent of rejecting the God who died for them on a cross. It calls for a life of holiness, when for years they've tried to silence their conscience, to kill any notion there might be a coming day of reckoning.

Christ's gospel also tells them their own personal goodness can't merit eternal life. It asks the self-made man to die to himself and his selfish ambitions, and to give his life for others. It declares that his own sense of integrity is nothing in God's sight. Such a gospel is a threat to his pearl of great

price: his personal achievements, the things he has worked long and hard to obtain. If you tell him his righteousness does not merit salvation, he'll despise you.

At the Last Supper Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you" (John 13:34). During his final time with the disciples before his crucifixion, Jesus warned, "Some of you will be rejected, some will be imprisoned, some will be killed. All of you will be persecuted" (see John 16:2). What a send-off message. The disciples were going to be hated, seen as the off-scouring of the earth!

Yet Jesus gave them a word of direction at this same time. What was his final instruction? It was about *how to reach their generation after he was gone*. This word of direction had nothing to do with methods for evangelism. Jesus had already told the disciples they were to go into all the world preaching the gospel, and that they would need the power of the Holy Ghost to do that. These two things were already clear to them.

Now, he said, "I give you a new commandment." Jesus told them plainly: "If you obey this new commandment, all men will know who you are. And they'll know exactly where you stand. They may hate you. They may call you fanatics and turn you out of their synagogues. But they will know you are mine."

Here was Jesus' commandment to the disciples: "A new commandment I give unto you, *That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*" (13:34, my italics). Note this is not an option; it is Jesus' commandment. And it is where every evangelistic effort must begin.

You see, Scripture makes clear we are to feed the poor, and the church will always do so faithfully. We are to do many good works, through which we preach Christ boldly. But to penetrate the "gross darkness," we need to lay hold of this new commandment from Jesus. Why is our obedience to this command necessary to break through darkness? Christ explains: "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (John 13:35, my italics).

According to Jesus, only this particular love — a love for fellow believers — will gain the attention of a lost generation. It is the same kind of self-denying, sacrificial love that Jesus shows to each of us. And such love for our kin in Christ cannot be accomplished in word alone, but must be in deed.

This commandment accomplishes two things. First, it is the only way to respond to the hatred that comes from the world: "As I have loved you...love one another" (13:34). Our love for each other is a refuge and safe haven for all in the body of Christ.

Second, through this commandment the Holy Spirit reveals to our generation *their great sense of need*. Why have so many young people turned to mindless binge drinking? Why have multitudes turned to drugs as never before? Why is the rate of suicide on the rise? The explanation is simple: People everywhere are hurting. There is sin-sickness among the masses, with multitudes plagued by emptiness.

People today have so little to trust in. Long-trusted institutions are crumbling. Economic and moral structures have disintegrated. There is no security, financial or personal. To whom can people turn? Where can they find examples of real, enduring love in such a shaky, perilous time?

The world needs illustrated sermons — powerful personal examples — of God's love. In John 17:21, Jesus made this prayer: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they

also may be one in us: *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me*" (my italics).

Think of it: Even in his final hours, Jesus was still yearning over lost humanity. And he was giving his church specific direction on how to win those lost multitudes. Consider his final words on the subject: "Be as one! Put aside all strife and division, *that the world may believe in me.*"

You may think, "This sounds so simplistic. Is that really how the church is going to reach hardened hearts? Is it how we're supposed to battle gross darkness? Does simply loving each other truly provide supernatural power to combat hatred?"

The answer is yes, yes and yes, absolutely! According to Jesus, the powerful love of God is revealed most clearly to the world by *the unconditional love between his people.*

Right now, one of Satan's primary strategies against the church is to plant division and strife. Everywhere I look in the body of Christ worldwide, I am convinced hordes of demons have been sent on assignment within church walls. And their aim is to destroy the love of Christians for one another.

The devil's strategy is subtle: He pits race against race and rich against poor in the body of Christ. The racial strife, specifically, is being fed worldwide through television and other media. I have not seen such racial hatred spewed forth in years, and now it is infiltrating the walls of God's house.

I thank God that Times Square Church was raised up with no color lines and no distinction between rich or poor. All who come through our doors are treated with the same respect and welcoming love. We have enjoyed God's blessing for twenty-two years now, and I believe this is partly because we have obeyed Christ's command to love one another as he has loved us.

Of course, every Christian claims not to have prejudice. But if we don't obey God on this matter — if we do not cry out to him to remove from our hearts the slightest seed of division — our witness to the world will lose its power. We'll have nothing to impact the gross darkness. And the testimony God has entrusted to us will be lost.

Tragically, the religious world has been divided for centuries. Down through the generations, terrible divisions have pitted Christians against each other. Brother has come against brother, sister against sister, and entire denominations have been ruined.

The truth is, I truly love my brother only when I can stand side by side with him in worship of Jesus. I know I truly love my brother when I can stand confidently before Christ's throne knowing I have nothing in my heart against him. I know I truly love my brother when I have the same love for him that Jesus has shown to me.

How do we truly love one another as Christ loves us?

It happens when we forgive those who have hurt us, just as Christ has forgiven us.

It happens when we reach out to the backslidden, doing all in our power to restore them.

It happens when we esteem others better than ourselves.

Dear saint, I plead with you today: Lay down all bitterness, strife and disrespect. Do not hinder the

blessing of God in your life and home. Obey his new commandment to you and remember his Word: “By this shall all men know you are mine — when you love one another!” Then the lost will see and know God’s love, through his obedient, joyful, sacrificing people — the church. Amen!

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