

Kindness

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Now we are looking as I said at the fruit of the Spirit and we are looking at that individually every Sunday morning right up towards Christmas. We have looked at a number already in Galatians chapter 5, we are told the fruit of the Spirit. That is the kind of lives we live because we are united, because we are Christians, because we have come to faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. The kind of lives we live reflect that closeness, reflect that dependence we have on Him or at least should in our lives and we are told the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control against such things there is no law. And we have been looking as I said before, we have been looking at these individually over the last number of weeks but as I said again and again I will say again today they are not individual fruit, they are not the fruits of the Spirit, it is like kind of different shades of one diamond or different segments of one large big orange or however we have looked at in the past and seen it. It is not that some people have some fruit and some of others, we should because we are Christians have in greater or lesser measure all of this because it is a reflection of the Spirit in our lives and of our dependence on Him. So it is the fruit of the Spirit and it comes from an inner change, that is really what we have been talking about and talking about our need for the Lord Jesus Christ to kind of transform our hearts and changes so that these are the characteristics that mark them out because that is what we look for, we look for our lives to be transformed by

Jesus on an ongoing basis. It is not that we believed once and then we just kind of ramble on in our lives until we die. It is much more significant than that, it is that we believed and came to faith in Jesus and we are looking for Him to transform us all the time so that we become more like Christ and less selfish and sinful and bitter and all these things that go in our so often in our hearts. So really what we are trying to consider and think about in these morning worships, morning services is the importance for us as Christians to have a family likeness to Jesus Christ, to God our Father, to Jesus Christ, our elder brother as it were. You know that if there is a family and if there is a loving family and if there is children in that family then you find that the children share the characteristics sometimes genetically, sometimes learned but they do share the characteristics of their parents a greater or lesser degree and that really is very much what we are looking at, that we are looking to share the same kind of characteristics as we are given from Jesus because He has transformed us and we will look at that a little bit today. And we do that not in order to somehow earn favour from God and earn our way to heaven, it is not like that is it? As Christians we believe that we can't reach up and make ourselves right before God and make our way to heaven. I will say a little bit more about that later.

But rather that He has come down to us in Christ and it is through what He has done for us that we out of gratitude live lives that hope to be like Him, making a difference in our lives. So we are looking for that to make a difference and to bear this fruit, to be reliant on Him, to bear this fruit and to ask Him to change us so that we become all of these things in our lives, a great wonderful thing. So that when we look at our Christian lives and when we look at our own thoughts, we recognise there is really something bigger than just ourselves going on. And when we preach and when we look at the Word and when we look at Scripture, it is much more than just being nice, you know? And this isn't just being kind, because that is our theme today, kindness. And I hope how we will not find this in a kind of insipid and weak and kind of soft, gentle and rather meaningless, vague, optimistic hope that we will all be kind to one another. It is not based on wishful thinking, but it comes from all of these, all of this fruit comes from God's character and that is a very radical, very different character from what sometimes we expect. And

I hope that you will see that God's kindness that becomes our kindness has a real shock factor to it. That is a bit unbelievably gobsmacking for us and that it is not just a random and soft wishful thinking, because Jesus has come and Jesus has come to show ourselves what we are like as God sees us. What is most of the time, isn't it? We spend thinking about what we think God should think of us and that is on what we base so much of our lives. Well, I think God should think this about me, so that is how I am going to live. I think God should do this for me and I think, and we often base our assumptions on God from ourselves rather than letting Jesus Christ who has come from heaven and claims, divinity and claims to be God, to tell us, look, this is what God is thinking and this is what God wants you to know and this is what I have come to do to change things for us. So I find that very often when I read the Bible that I have to wake up and smell the coffee. Now I have no idea, I looked on the internet for where that phrase comes from and I have no idea, it is a crazy phrase really, isn't it? Wake up and smell the coffee, what does that mean?

Well, I think it means that we just need to sit up sometimes and take note. I am not sure why smelling the coffee should make you want to take up. Maybe it is just when you smell the coffee you wake up in the morning and then you kind of hit life as it were. But spiritually I think we do sometimes need to wake up and smell the coffee and analyse the world in which we live and analyse our own hearts and listen to what God is saying to us and above all what Jesus has come to do and I know I am rambling but what I am wanting to come round to is kindness eventually. We will I promise and it will not take long, it will come round to kindness. But I want us to set it in context and then I want to apply it and look to recognise that it is relevant for parents, new parents, old parents, not parents, single people, old people, young people, families, individuals, it is relevant for us all. Because we recognise, don't we from Scripture, as we spiritually as it were wake up and smell the coffee that God has made clear and in reality we see it around about us that humanity is collectively, humanity of which we are apart, is collectively rejected him. Don't want him, want to be kind of as it were our own gods, don't want God to be involved in our lives, part of our lives, apart from maybe at Christmas and apart from now and again when we think we can invite him in. But the result of that God would say is brokenness and confusion, war, division, separation from one another sometimes but more significantly separation from him and from life. So we have the onset of death in humanity and in the world in which we live. And individually if we were to look at it that way and this is where it sometimes for us becomes a little bit uncomfortable, there is a sense in which he tells us or puts in this language that we are estranged children from him. The family relationship if we take God as our father is broken with each of us as individuals. We bear the marks of God in our lives. There is a pale reflection and we know that deep down but we are estranged from him. The love has gone, a recognition of him is greater than us has gone and of who he is has gone. There is a resistance, welling up resistance to him in our lives, a rejection of the truth that he has and that relationship of love simply isn't there for us. We mock the idea very often of accountability to him.

[9 : 16] Don't be ridiculous, we are accountable to God or the reality of his sovereignty and his right as God to be the judge of mankind. We can't see him so he is not there and that is convenient for us very often in our lives because we can't see him then, we can't prove him. Science has disproved him so he is not there and we move on from there. It is almost like sometimes in our lives because of our choices against him and a rebellion from him.

We are like an apprentice who has maybe been working for one day, maybe a craftsman of some kind and he goes in and he has been there for a day and he says, yep, I have got it all. I know all there is to know now and he goes straight into the master craftsman's office and throws him out. He says, don't need you any longer. I know you have been doing what you have been doing for 40 years and you are the man according to yourself and you know all the crafts, abilities but I don't need you anymore and I am going to take over, I am going to be in charge so on your bike. We would think that in life was foolish wouldn't we, that we take over, that we become the chief executive officer, that we deny the rightful place of a manager, of a boss or a master craftsman, whoever it is and yet in a sense that is what we do so often with God in our lives. We reject his creative authority, we reject him as the author of life, we reject his laws and his morality and his grace which he has given to us because we would rather be sovereign over our own lives and of course God's verdict on that is unpalatable, absolutely politically incorrect, horrible for us that we are estranged from him and it is perfect goodness and rightness that we can't do anything to reach up and make that right. We can't do it, we just haven't got the ability to do that, to be perfect and to be right with him again but the great thing is that is not the end of the story and that is the glorious thing about the gospel and it is a glorious thing about what we are going to speak about, kindness because I want you just for a moment to sense and I hope to speak reverently here, to sense a divine dilemma if we can talk about God having this dilemma in his character because he is perfect and he knows that our efforts to make ourselves right with him are futile, it is like a minnow trying to swim up the Niagara Falls to get to the top, can't be done, it is impossible to do, we can't reach God in his standards and his perfection again, that is broken, it is perfect and he also recognizes that he is just himself and that he is right to do what he has done and the banishment and the estrangement however unpalatable it is for us is a right thing for him to do and we go ouch, we don't want to hear that message, we don't want to hear what that is and yet all of us will believe in the reality of justice don't we, especially when we are wronged, especially when things happen to us that are unjust, we cry right from deep down somewhere in here, justice comes up, we want justice to be done because we have been wronged and if that is true with us in our imperfect lives, how much truer is it of God that he also has this great perfect sense of justice and when he has been wronged that needs to be dealt with and it is dealt with as we are separated from him in his justice and don't know spiritual life and don't know forgiveness and hope, this is very uncomfortable because the finger then is beginning not to point at everyone else who might be rubbish and bad and horrible and might deserve God's justice but it points into my heart and it points into every heart before a maker and the reality of that is death, separation from life, something we all face. So there is a

dilemma between his perfection and his justice but his great love, his divine and perfect love and this is where his kindness kicks in because you know what kindness is really, Biblically kindness is love in action. All of the fruit that we have been looking at in Galatians is the really all linked as we have said and so kindness is really simply just love in action, it is practical love. So if someone for example you say oh that was a really kind thing, it is usually not a really kind thing to do, sometimes people say that is a kind thing to say but I guess speaking is a bit of an action as well, it is something that is either verbalised or in action, something, it is an out working of a loving attitude and so in God's kindness we see his love in action. So what I mean to move away from the beginning what I said about just being a kind of benign and insipid and bland thing, let's be really kind and nice to one another and not put any meat on it, we find the meat on it coming from Jesus Christ because he paid a phenomenal cost to deal as it were with this divine dilemma between his justice and his perfection and his love in that he came to provide the answer to our death and to our lostness and to our separation and estrangement from it. We couldn't reach ourselves back up to him but he reaches down. In his kindness he gave Jesus Christ his son. Span the gap to live that perfect, perfectly right life that we can never live both in motive and in action and then face the death that we deserve on the cross, the separation, the estrangement from God that we deserve. Greater love has no man in this and they lay down his life for his friends. So there's a kind of uncomfortableness isn't there about the message of the good news but good news is always sharper and greater and more wonderful in the context of need isn't it? It's not good news really if we don't need it but God says we need it in our lives therefore it's usually great news. Crazy news, crazy. This Jewish guy 2000 years ago died in a cross, an itinerant preacher who had nothing and was nothing and is hardly mentioned in any of the secular history because at the time secular history wasn't interested in someone like him. No influence, no power, no importance, wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth and yet this Christ, historically dead, risen from the dead on the third day is this divine and exquisite gift to humanity. The one who has changed thousands upon thousands upon millions of people's lives since. Professors, scientists, road sweepers, people of massive brains, people of tiny brains, people from all races and nations and different types of people have had their lives transformed by this risen Savior, this author of life,

Jesus Christ who brings hope and through what he's done acceptance again with God because he then has the authority to forgive us for anything we do wrong because he's paid the price, meeting God's justice and perfection and he says you're covered in my righteousness and the good thing I have done on your behalf. It's reconciliation, it's the way back to God and to a new heart. That's great good news, it's changed an ordinary punter like me, it's changed lots of people's lives because we've come to recognise who God is and how far, far bigger than our own understanding he is and yet what he has done that we can see and believe and trust in him through Jesus Christ his Son, he is Lord, he's worthy and we worship him. So very briefly in conclusion, what response, what are the kind of responses he looks from us to his kindness and I'm speaking about his kindness in the context of this love in action, the crucifixion, the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus on our behalf. Well he looks for us, all of us to turn to him in Romans 2 and verse 4 he says do you know, not know sorry, or do you show contempt for the kindness, the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience not realising that God's kindness leads you towards repentance.

So there's this great sense in which it's his kindness that we emphasise his love in action that he's done something that we couldn't do for ourselves, hugely important that takes this thing out of death and gives us the hope of eternal life. In your life and in mine the things that have affected us most usually that have changed us have been other people's kindness to us, doesn't it? Doesn't that really change our understanding of them and it's just such a radical thing, kindness changes us, changes our perception and it breaks down stereotypes, doesn't it? You can have an opinion that person's a real just a real egghead or something's going on in their life and then you don't realise them, you don't know them, you've just made that sort of assumption and then they do something for you that you know, they have no reason to do it, they were kind when you needed that and that changes your perception and so the kindness of God is something that he wants it to lead us to turning round and facing him rather than maybe turning our back to him. As we examine our own hearts and our own need and our own inability to reach up to him, he wants us to just think about his kindness, think about his words, is he right? Is God's verdict right? Is it just nonsense? Are people's lives changed because they're just wanting a psychological crutch? Are they wanting wishful thinking or because they're unrealistic in their lives or they're just daft religious lunatics? Is my understanding of life right? Does it bring me answers? Does it give me hope at the grave side of a friend? My answer's about morality, about evil, about goodness, about death, about eternity. Are they there? Are they solid? Are they based on something real? Or have I just listened to something on Radio 4 or picked up something from the internet about that just is a symbol that I'm going to trust him? Or will I turn towards Jesus and consider what he is and also consider his kindness? As he says in verse 7 of that passage we read in Ephesians that the common ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace to express in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus, the riches of his grace. Now Christmas time's coming up, people will give you gifts. Now Danjean Moe, you like Christmas. You will respond to someone, won't you, by their kindness or otherwise? You tell quite a lot about a person by the kinds of gifts they give. Now my children aren't listening at this point. But you know, the resources you'll know whether they have or have not. It's not about expensive things, it's about costly things. Do you see the difference? It might be that we don't have much, but if we're kind we give costly gifts at one level or another, but it's just love. I'm saying that. My kids can listen. I love you. I don't need to buy anything. I just love you. No,

[22 : 13] I don't mean that. But we recognise, don't we, quite a lot about someone by the gifts they give. Are they stingy? Are they kind? Stingy? They're kind. By the gifts they give.

Oh God, in Christ has given the greatest gift he could. He's laid down as a great... No person has ever given a greater gift to you than that he laid down his life for his friends.

And that's what God has done, not just a fellow human being, but the creator of the universe, the sustainer of life, has given himself so that we might know life and forgiveness and hope and a future. And he wants us to confess that we have been greedy and selfish and have rejected him and he wants us to confess that hopelessness that's in our lives. So we consider this kindness. And as Christians, we live this kindness. We live kindness. We're talking in our sermons in the morning about the fruit of the Spirit. Now each of us as Christians has that great responsibility to live kindness. The old hymn writer F. W. Faber said kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence and learning. Isn't that right? We can know it all in our heads, but we could be cold and callous. We could be judgmental. We cannot really understand it at all because if we do know it in our heads, it will really transform our hearts and we will be humble, recognizing the kindness that's been shown to us by Jesus Christ. So we have to have grace in our hearts to show kindness.

That is what is kindness? Active love. Not just that we say we either love God and Christ or love one another, but we actively show it. And we need the Spirit, don't we, of God to do that. We need to recognize that we're in relationship with Him. And every day you and I will need as Christians the Holy Spirit to help us live a life of kindness. Being kind for no other reason. That's what grace is. And that's why we need Christ to help us be kind like this. To be kind for no other reason. Just because, in other words, just because we can. Just because that's what He has done for us. We're not giving out active kindness in order to be liked by other people, in order to be accepted by other people. And all of these motives are in our lives and hearts at different times, aren't they? But we're seeking to get to the place where we simply have an opportunity to be kind. And we're kind just for the sake of it. We're just kind. And it's not to a certain socioeconomic group that we're kind. We're just kind. And also we recognize that that kindness extends in

Jesus' teaching to our enemies. Love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you. Do kindness to those who are not sympathetic to you or who don't understand you. Don't get even, Jesus says. Get kind. That's fairly radical thinking, isn't it? That we want to get our own back. We want revenge so often. But He says because of what Jesus has done for you, don't get even. Just get kind. That's how Christ treats us every day as Christians.

[25 : 42] Every day we let Him down. Every day we fail and fall. Every day we have greed and selfishness and lust and impurity in our hearts. But every day He forgives us because He's kind and because He has come to pay the price for our sins. And that is how we are to think in our day-to-day living and also obviously in the Christian community. Kindness. Such a great characteristic for a church, for a church community, for a people, for the families in the church, for the marriages in the church, for the individuals in the church. That kindness is that active love that we put into practice. Patience we looked at last week, that's kind of more passive, isn't it? It's about bearing difficulties, bearing bad situations and maybe people who irritate or annoy us in our lives. But this kindness is much more positive, it's active, it's practical. So in our lives as Christians, because of what Jesus has done for us, we're looking to be caring, sacrificial. You will find it memorable when people do that for you. That's what sticks out so often in people's lives, when people have been kind to them.

Especially if they haven't deserved it. Especially if they've been mean and kind of nasty and yet the response has been one of kindness. It's the opposite of being stubborn or cutting or arrogant or vain or suspicious or sarcastic or selfish. It's saying kind things, doing kind things. And that's a strong truth. It's not an insipid and weak truth. It's a really strong thing. And that is what we're to do in Christ. And as parents, we're to be kind.

As children, we're to be kind. Then the family, the family is the fundamental basic unit where we express our grace as Christians and it's the easiest place not to for us so often. So again we're reminded of the truth that Andrew so, Stephen, sorry, so memorable, I forgot his name. Stephen said so powerfully last week to us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not the diving board into which we go into life. It's the pool itself. In other words, all our motivation as Christians is because of what Christ has done and our life is a gospel life. So kindness is not moralistic. I'm not saying this from a moralistic point. Be kind.

God will love you. Get to heaven. Not at all. Be kind because God has come down from heaven and has offered us eternal life through Jesus Christ. Be kind because of what he's done and recognize his goodness and his grace. So the question in our lives is, are we kind?

We recognize the kindness of God in Jesus Christ and maybe that we're kind out of gratitude to what God has done as we turn to him as we confess our unbelief and our rebellion against him and as we love him and follow him. Amen.