

I have seen a bumper sticker that read: "I don't get mad, I get even." I guess that sentiment really did not surprise me, for it has been around for ages. That is really the reason behind road rage. This is really a natural reaction that arises so easily within each one of us. All you have to do is watch two young children playing together for a while, and invariably it will not be too long before you will need to intervene because one has done something to other, so the first one felt he needed to retaliate. In defense, the one will most likely claim that that the other one acted first, so they had to respond. What we are speaking of here is revenge, and there is a part of each one of us that desires to get revenge whenever we feel that we have been wronged. However, this evening, as we see our Savior being crucified, we are to learn something else. LET US LEARN OF HIM TO FORGIVE. After all, I. Jesus has every reason to want revenge, but II. He had only one reason to forgive.

If given the choice between getting revenge or forgiving someone, I think most people would opt for revenge. It is something which is that strong within us. That is probably why it is so striking what Jesus did. After all, He had every reason to want revenge. He was being crucified unjustly. He had been arrested by people who hated Him. The trials which He was forced to endure were nothing but a mockery of justice. The false charges which they brought against Him could not even stand up in their court system. Still they found Him worthy of the death penalty. Before that could be carried out, they beat Him, ridiculed Him, and whipped Him. On top of all of this, they grouped Him with known criminals as they executed Him, placing Him in the position usually assigned to the worst of the bunch. Everything in connection with His crucifixion was unjust, immoral and illegal. So, humanly speaking, Jesus had every right to want vengeance upon His enemies.

Jesus could have lashed out against all of these abuses. He was given plenty of opportunities to speak at each one of His trials. He could have given an impassioned speech about the immorality of what they were doing. He possibly could have even produced evidence to prove His innocence. Maybe He could even have vented His rage against all of the abuses to which He was being subjected. In fact, Jesus could have used His almighty power to prevent all of these things from happening, maybe even frying those who were pounding the nails into His hands and feet. Jesus had every reason to want revenge for everything that was happening to Him was unjust. Jesus was the sinless Son of God, and did not deserve any mistreatment by anyone.

But we are speaking here according to our human nature. For us it is easier to love those who love us, and to hate those who hate us, especially those who have wronged us in any way. It is human nature to want vengeance. When we hear of mass shootings, it seems that the motive is usually revenge because of some wrong which had happened to them. Every action seems to require a certain response. News reporters could not believe it when members of one church that had been targeted in a mass shooting said that they forgave the shooter. They were asked, "How can you do that?" Anger and revenge are the expected responses to any injustice.

But in Jesus' case, we need to remember who it was that caused Him to suffer and die on the cross. It was not just the soldiers who pounded the nails into His hands. Nor was it just the chief priests and leaders who stirred up the people to demand Jesus' crucifixion. If Jesus were to have demanded revenge on all who caused Him to be crucified, His anger would also have to be directed against you and me. It was because of all of our sins that Jesus needed to suffer and die on the cross. Our sins put Him there, just as surely as those who are recorded for us in the passion history.

But Jesus did not demand revenge, instead He offered forgiveness. And there was only one reason for Him to forgive, and that reason was His love and compassion for fallen mankind. That love was evident as Jesus was being crucified, for He said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**" (34) Instead of desiring revenge on them for killing Him, Jesus showed compassion upon them, feeling sorry for them since they were trapped in sin with no way out. That was the love which compelled Him to come down from heaven to be the Savior of the world. That is the love which moved

Him to say as He prayed in Gethsemane that He would do what God required so that all mankind would be saved from eternal death in hell. This love and compassion reached out even to those who were pounding the nails in His hands and feet. He desired them to be in heaven with Him, as well as every other person that has ever lived on this earth.

Jesus did not desire vengeance for He had the concern for the soul as His primary motive. He truly wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. So He laid down His life as a payment for the sins which you and I have committed. It is for that reason that He is still able to pray for us today, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He asks God no longer to consider our sins any longer because they have all been washed clean in the blood which He shed for us while hanging on the cross. His love and concern for us causes Him to earn our forgiveness so that we would not suffer because of our sins, but would receive the free gift of eternal life with Him in heaven. And when Jesus forgives our sins, they are forgotten forever, never to be brought up before us again.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. This evening we are to learn of Jesus to forgive. Both mean the same thing. Since we have received forgiveness from God for all of the horrible things which we have done to Him, so we will now want to learn to imitate that love for others, putting away thoughts of vengeance. There is only one reason which we would ever have for doing that to our fellow man, and that is not that he deserves it, but because we have been loved like that and desire now to share that same love with others.