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Sermon Notes

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The Supernatural Life: Dealing with Challenging People

Romans 12:14-21

Introduction

The year was 1569. Facing arrest as an Anabaptist, Dirck Willems was running, fleeing for his life. Anabaptists were the courageous Christians who came to believe that baptism was for believers. They got the name because they were rebaptized as adults. Anabaptists believed that baptism apart from faith was meaningless. For their commitment to this belief they were branded as heretics and by 1535 an estimated 50,000 of them were killed for their faith. This of course was at a time when there was no separation of church and state. The guilt of their crime was nothing more than discrediting the practice of infant baptism.

It was in such a climate that Dirck Willems found himself running across a frozen lake. He was running from a pursuer hot on his trail to arrest him. His pursuer broke through the ice. Willems gave up his chance to escape by turning to save his persecutor. Though his pursuer wanted to release him, he was held by the authorities under his contract to catch them. The captured Willems was imprisoned, and then burned at the stake in 1569.

Why did Dirck do it? No mere common decency could have motivated Willems' action that day by the frozen stream. He knew the risk in this act of compassion. Many others would have interpreted this unfortunate turn of events as designed by God to aid his escape. But in that moment of decision he acted from something deep within him that transcended self-interest or fear. He acted from the love he had for Christ. He knew his Lord's words, "Love your enemies."

Willems was living a supernatural life... a life only explainable by the supernatural power of Christ in a human soul

Revenge is a natural response to the intense pain that enemies can cause us in this life. Opportunities for revenge are as numerous as the insults and offenses and slights we experience. But Christ calls us to a supernatural life

Love for Enemies... the most clearly supernatural response in the chapter

The fruit of our supernatural life shows itself most clearly in how we treat the challenging people of our lives... today we'll look at some of the most challenging scenarios we can face: persecutors, joyful and sorrowful people, enemies and all people

Only by the supernatural work of Christ in our hearts will we be godly with the challenge of needy people that surround us every day

I. A Supernatural Life of Harmony with All People

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another.

A. The Challenge: People Are Complex

1. Human beings are the most complex elements of God's creation
 - a. We are a complex physical web of bodily systems, hormones, drives, motives, and yearnings mixed with physical pain
 - b. We are a complex emotional web of hurts, fears, confidence, vulnerability, arrogance, pride, joy, sorrow
 - c. We are a complex mental web of convictions, opinions, beliefs, insights, data, facts, figures... all woven into a unique worldview
 - d. We are also a complex historical web of personal history, experiences, cultural background, and past successes and sufferings
2. Human beings are so complex and potent that some people despair from interacting well with other people and withdraw into psychological shells or withdraw from daily life altogether

Jean Paul Sartre, French existentialist philosopher wrote a play called *No Exit*... one of the characters in the play uttered the most famous line Sartre ever wrote:

“Hell is other people.”

Of course, he was wrong... but interactions with complex people can be so painful, so damaging, so devastating that it seems like Sartre was right

3. Human beings are so complex that it isn't long before you realize the hardest part of a Christian's life is dealing well with the wide array of other human beings on this small planet

B. The Essence of the Supernatural Life: In Large Part Dealing with Challenging People

1. Christ calls us to the supernatural life
2. A life in which His Spirit enables us to love people as He does

3. A life in which His Spirit enables us to live at peace with people no matter how they treat us, no matter what challenges they bring to us

C. Living in Harmony with Others

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another.

1. Literally: Think the same way as each other
2. This is essentially an in-house matter... for Christians only
 - a. We cannot be of the same mind as non-Christians
 - b. This doesn't mean we seek difficulty with others
 - c. The in-house principle of seeking harmony with Christians extends in a reduced way to outsiders

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

- d. Obviously, some people will not permit you to live at peace with them
- e. They will attack you, persecute you, oppose you
- f. Why? Because they themselves are at war with God... and they will take it out on you

D. Christ's Example and Power

1. Christ lived in harmony with people of many different social backgrounds
 - a. He could sit at table with tax collectors and prostitutes
 - b. He could sit at table equally well with Pharisees and religious leaders
 - c. He could relate well to a rich Zaccheaus, a religious leader like Nicodemus
 - d. He could also talk easily and comfortably with a sinful Samaritan woman who was rejected by her own rejected people
 - e. The only people Christ had difficulty relating well to were those whose arrogance blinded them to their need for His saving work... people who were self-sufficient and thought themselves healthy
2. BUT Christ didn't just come to give us an example...
 - a. Then would we be in despair
 - b. For none of us can imitate Him perfectly

3. Rather Christ came to save us from all the ways we fail to meet His example

E. The Future of Our Human Relationships: Perfect Unity

John 17:21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us

As the Church of Jesus Christ more and more learns to live well with others, living in harmony with other Christians and learning to live at peace with other people will our preaching of the saving gospel have the most impact in this disunited world

John 17:23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

II. A Supernatural Life of Compassion toward Emotional People

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

A. The Challenge: The Extremes of Emotion

1. This world is full of extreme situations... from one end of the spectrum to the other
2. Human beings, created in the image of God, are EMOTIONAL beings... we respond with laughter and with tears to the constantly changing circumstances of life
3. What's so challenging is that all of it is going on at once... the ups and the downs... and when you may be down, someone else may be up—and vice versa
4. Paul here commands us to show compassion

B. Christ's Infinite Compassion

1. Jesus Christ was the most compassionate man in history
 - We see it when Jesus had compassion on the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd
 - We see it when Jesus, moved with compassion, reached out and healed a leper
 - We see it when Jesus, moved with compassion at Martha and Mary's agony wept in front of Lazarus's tomb
2. He was the perfect embodiment of His Heavenly Father's compassion on our wretched sin-cursed human race

Exodus 22:26-27 If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, ²⁷ because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

3. It was God the Father's great compassion that led Him to hear the cry of His people when they were slaves in Egypt and He sent Moses to be their deliverer
4. It was God the Father's even greater compassion that led Him to hear the cry of His people in bondage to sin and He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save us from sin and death and hell

C. God's Call to Us: Be Compassionate

1. Compassion means to feel what someone else is feeling

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

2. God calls on us to melt our emotional life into that of others... to care deeply about what's going on with them
3. Rejoice with someone when they get good news
 - a. Perhaps they finally got a job after months of unemployment
 - b. Perhaps they are celebrating the birth of their first child
 - c. Perhaps they have just become engaged to the love of their life
 - d. Perhaps they got an excellent grade on an exam
 - e. Perhaps they just led someone to Christ or got accepted to go on a mission trip
 - f. Maybe they are just happy in Jesus, and have a deep sense of His love
 - g. In any case... rejoice with them as though it were happening to you
4. OR Mourn with someone who is mourning
 - a. Walk with them through their suffering
 - b. Perhaps they have lost a spouse of fifty years or had a miscarriage
 - c. Perhaps they have just heard they have cancer...
 - d. Or a child is suffering in a hospital bed
 - e. Or perhaps they have lost their job

- f. Maybe they are having marital struggles or a hard time with their teenager
 - g. Maybe it's just as simple as this: they are discouraged in life, having a hard time in their walk with Christ
 - h. God is calling us here to mourn genuinely with them
5. Note: it is rejoice WITH those who rejoice, and mourn WITH those who mourn
- a. It is done together
 - b. A shared experience... a communicated experience... not from afar

D. Learning to Get Out of Yourself

Philippians 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

1. In order to do this, you have to get up out of yourself
2. The base line of the human race is cold, selfish, indifference
3. "What's in it for me?" sinners ask
4. "I don't want to get involved" sinners say
5. "I must get dragged down or burned out" we are worried
6. God is calling us to join our hearts together with people around us... to get out of our situations

E. The Key Role of Prayer

1. It is in prayer more than any other way that we work on our hearts
2. It is prayer that we heat ourselves up to care about someone else

III. A Supernatural Life of Humility toward People "Beneath You"

vs. 16 Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

A. Life's Pecking Order

1. British caste system... knowing where you fit in "society"
2. Japanese had a lower class people known as the Burakumin

3. American social order based on money... personal wealth
 - a. God doesn't equally gift everybody with intelligence or talent or opportunities
 - b. God doesn't equally gift everybody with money or strong family backing or business connections or providential help
4. Providence ordains that there will be some people who are of lower position in the ladder of success
 - a. You will always be able to meet people above you on that ladder
 - b. You will also always be able to meet people down the scale as well... people who have nothing to offer of worldly wealth or prestige or honor;
 - c. To worldly people, they are nothings... people who can only mess up their perfect, orderly, wealthy, successful world

B. Pride: The Deadly Enemy of the Christian Life

1. Paul is calling on Christians to live a supernatural life... a life of supernatural humility
2. Pride is the core sin... the root of almost every sin
3. The Greek word here is "Don't think of yourself in a high manner"; perhaps it is don't be snooty, or put on airs, or have your nose in the air

Illus. High school breaks into cliques... the jocks, the chess club nerds, the Goths, the band geeks, the cheerleaders, the burnouts, the rednecks, the preppies... then there's the coveted "in-crowd"—made up of the most popular and attractive kids in school; and their clique opposite: "the losers"—the kids that nobody wanted to associate with

If your ambition was to be in the in-crowd, the last thing you could ever let yourself do was to be seen with a chess nerd or a band geek or, worst of all, a loser.

These immature clique groupings take on a different feel once we move on into adulthood... but there's still the basic concept... there are some people who can help you achieve your worldly, ladder-climbing goals, and those who can't

4. God calls on us, as an act of faith, humility, and love, specifically to reach out to the lowly and the rejected and the spurned and the isolated people... the ones no one will love

Luke 14:12-14 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be

blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

5. God is calling us to a whole different way of viewing people... seeing them as God sees them, not in terms of how they can stoke your ego

C. Christ's Example of Humility

1. The basic lesson of faith: Christ delights to associate with the lowly and the rejects... around the world he has MOSTLY built His church out of people that no one wants
2. Samaritan woman, John 4

John 4:7-9 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"... ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Ronnie Stevens:

- a. The Jews were the rejects of the world
- b. The Samaritans were the rejects of the Jews
- c. The Samaritan women were the rejects of the Samaritan men
- d. This woman was the reject of the Samaritan women
- e. She was one of the lowliest people on the face of the earth at that time
- f. She was also chosen by Christ to be one of His prized disciples

D. Practical Ministry to the Lowly

1. What does that mean to us at FBC?
2. Does it mean being willing to get involved with the Durham Rescue Mission?
3. Does it mean bringing people to church who don't have it all together yet? Who still smell like the sin the Lord is trying to save them from?
4. Does it mean being willing to get dirty and nasty and pulling a precious human being out of the Prodigal Son's pig sty so he can become an adopted child of God?
5. Does it mean pro-life ministry to unwed mothers? Does it mean mission trips to places like Haiti and India where the standard of living is so low?

IV. A Supernatural Life of Loving Your Enemies

A. The Pervasiveness of Revenge

1. Revenge is one of the major forces shaping the world we live in
 - a. It was revenge that led the Chechen terrorists to seize hundreds of children as hostages in a school in Beslan, North Ossetia on September 1, 2004; they were taking vengeance for the recent political election of a Kremlin backed politician
 - b. It was revenge that has fueled the relationship between Hamas and Israel and Islamic Jihad and Israel over the issue of the Gaza Strip or the assassination of militant leader Abu Ghanem Nihad; the radical Islamic groups vow vengeance and bomb Israeli citizens as a reprisal
 - c. It was revenge (among other things) that led American troops into Afghanistan and Iraq to find Osama bin Laden after the September 11, 2001 attacks
 - d. It was revenge that led a group of Holocaust victims to form themselves into a vigilante group called the Avengers and to hunt down Nazi SS officers, finding them in their homes after the war, pulling them out into the street and executing them
 - e. It was revenge that motivated a 48 year old Russian man, Vitaly Kaloyev to fulfill a two-year vendetta after his wife, daughter and son died in a mid-air collision in July, 2002. Kaloyev systematically hunted down the Danish air traffic controller, Peter Nielsen, and murder him in February of 2004.
 - f. AND it was revenge that led an Australian man, Michael Skehan to cut down over 1000 trees with a chainsaw to punish the trees for a bushfire that destroyed his property
2. Revenge is a major motive in much of the ugliness surrounding divorce settlements and gang-related violence
3. Revenge is behind road rage... when the driver of a car that's cut off from passing speeds up and puts its high beam on and honks and makes life miserable for the offending driver
4. Revenge is behind office politics and slander and gossip
5. Revenge is behind the strange delight families of victims get at watching a murderer be executed for his crimes

6. Revenge is a major theme in famous stories like *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Ben Hur*
 - a. In the Count of Monte Cristo, Edmund Dantes uses his immense, newly found wealth to destroy the three men who put him in prison... crafting a cold-hearted revenge suitable for each of them
 - b. In *Ben Hur*, the lead character is wrongfully arrested by a former friend, a Roman commander, and sent to the slave galleys; the whole story focuses on the hatred Judah ben Hur feels first for Messala, then for the Roman Empire itself...
 - c. IT IS ONLY WHEN JUDAH sees CHRIST ON THE CROSS that his desire for vengeance is healed

When he hears Christ utter the words, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing” that Judah ben Hur at last is free... he says **“I felt His voice take the sword from my hand.”**

Christ’s gracious love for His enemies is meant to take the sword of vengeance from every Christian’s hand

B. The Root of Revenge: Pride

1. What fuels the passionate anger, the rage behind revenge?
2. Certainly there is pain involved... the pain of the loss of something precious and dear
3. But many people feel the pain of loss without wanting to take vengeance
4. What really drives vengeance is PRIDE... in which the offended person becomes like a little deity, exercising all his strength and creativity and resources to the destruction of another human being? Why? “Because that human being has WRONGED me! He has HURT me! And he must pay the price!!”

C. Christ’s Perfect Example

1. Teaching against revenge

Luke 6:27-29 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

2. Dying on the cross

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

3. His heart of trust in His Father

1 Peter 2:23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

D. Paul's Commands

1. Negative: Do Not

Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my friends

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil

Example: someone cuts you down with office gossip and slander; for two weeks, you have to suffer the embarrassing whispers of co-workers who spread the malicious story about you; the heart of vengeance moves in you to find some way to get back at the person who caused you such pain. Take it to the Lord in prayer... pray specifically for a way to bless them and put Christ on display

2. Positive: Do

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Romans 12:17-18 Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath

Romans 12:20 "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Summary: Paul commands a life of self-restraint in the area of vengeance...

In its place, he commands a life of active blessing for enemies... a life of seeking to pray for and feed, and minister to and heal and hope for your enemy

E. God's Unique Role: Vengeance is Mine

Romans 12:19 it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

1. God stakes out His claim

2. Vengeance is HIS prerogative... not ours
3. Vengeance is part of His role as judge of all the earth
4. It is not given to us to execute wrath on evildoers
5. God here makes a promise... HE will execute judgment on the evildoer on behalf of the righteous

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

6. Those suffering persecution always ask the mournful question: WHEN, O LORD? HOW LONG UNTIL YOU AVENGE US?

Revelation 6:10 The martyrs called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

The Book of Revelation is the future story of God keeping this promise!!

Revelation 16:4-6 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; ⁶ for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

The history of the gospel advance is soaked with the blood of martyrs in every generation

Some of the most sadistic murderous tyrants in history have set their power against God's humble, lowly, sheeplike people... they have been tortured by having hot pokers shoved in their flesh, having their limbs ripped from their bodies, having their bodies burned slowly with smoky sap-laden wood

Their blood screams from the ground for vengeance... yet God still waits

Waits for what? For the proper time for eternal and perfect vengeance:

Deuteronomy 32:35 It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."

This was the text of Jonathan Edward's terrifying sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

God alone knows when the "due time" is that the enemies of God will fall into their wrath-filled eternal doom

But it will happen... in God's perfect time

F. Paul's Surprising Motive: Leave Room for the Wrath of God

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath

Romans 12:20 "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

1. This means that, if you act on your behalf, why should God also act?
2. God does not delight in watching you delight in someone else's downfall

Proverbs 24:17-18 Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, ¹⁸ or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from him.

3. Leaving room for the wrath of God means letting God take up your case
4. The more good you do to a persecutor who in the end never comes to Christ, the greater will be His judgment in the end

G. Biblical Corollary: Leave Room for the Grace of God

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Acts 26:14-15 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

1 Timothy 1:15-16 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

H. Permanent Ethics: Only Good Can Conquer Evil

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1. If we take vengeance, how are we any different than the enemy we seek to destroy
2. How can human vengeance be any more than one more evil thing in this universe?
3. How can two wrongs make a right?

4. The example of the apostle Paul's conversion shows one powerful thing: Evil people can be transformed to become good by the gospel... but it only by the "goads" of kindness and tenderness and compassion and a supernatural life
5. It was the example of Stephen the martyr that was the most powerful goad in Saul's conscience: As Stephen died, he cried out

Acts 7:59-60 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

This is the supernatural, Spirit-filled life... and it alone has the power to put the Gospel on display for all the world to see

V. Application

By God's grace, are you leading a supernatural life?

- A. A Supernatural Life of Harmony with Everyone
- B. A Supernatural Life of Compassion with the Joyful and the Sorrowful
- C. A Supernatural Life of Humility toward the Lowly
- D. A Supernatural Life of Love and Patience toward Enemies
- E. Christ Is Our Savior
 1. Only Christ can save us from the sins that are connected by dealing poorly with challenging people
 2. Christ is FIRST AND FOREMOST SAVIOR... then He is example
 3. Come to Christ
 4. Then, by His power you can live the supernatural life!!