

The Vital Need of the Church in This Hour

Years ago, like a number of other pastors, I found a beautiful sermon illustration about the uniqueness of Christian love in the movie *Les Misérables*.

This story is set in the early 1800s and involves a man, Jean Valjean, who is released from prison following 19 years of imprisonment. He had stolen a loaf of bread to feed family members and had tried to break out of prison, but at last he is free—a broken man, now with a deformed soul.

He comes upon the house of a bishop who takes him in and feeds him despite his housekeeper's misgivings. She is right in assessing the dangerous state of Valjean. After giving him a place to stay for the night in the bishop's house, Valjean gets up in the night and fills a sack with most of the bishop's silver.

The next day, apprehended by the police, Valjean is brought back to the bishop's house. Seeing the sack full of stolen silver, the bishop does not get angry or accuse. Instead, he says, "Why Valjean, how could you have forgotten the candlesticks? I told you to take those too!" The bishop convinces the police that the silver was a gift, and they leave.

Then the bishop says to Valjean, who cannot believe that he was shown such great mercy, "Never forget, Jean Valjean, that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man. Jean Valjean, my brother, you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you." Jean Valjean does change completely as a result.

This story demonstrates one aspect of the radical way in which Christ in us makes us love other people, especially those very

difficult to love, as Jean Valjean was, at first.

Receiving the true love of Jesus for ourselves radically changes us. We, like Valjean, become brand new people if we really receive it. And then, it is the plan of God that we would give it away to others. Consider the kind of love described in Acts 2, where there was no one in need. "All the believers were together and had everything in common ... they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:44, 46).

In this hour, where many see chaos and signs of the end times, we can think that our most important task is to present apologetics arguments or elaborate on the details of the book of Revelation, but what really draws and wins people to Christ? It is His love deeply and sincerely, often sacrificially, displayed for others. It is His manifestations of healing.

Melissa Pearce speaks so eloquently of the love of Abba Father, of the need for us to demonstrate it far better than we do in our Christian gatherings. To say, "Turn and shake hands," after the worship set, just before the sermon, is not the agape love that radiates from the Bible narratives of Jesus and the early church. It is not the level of love that transforms and sets people free. We must discover again the love of God for ourselves and then learn how to give it away generously.

To hear Rev. Melissa Pearce of Enduring Hope Ministries, speak about the love that is needed in the church in this hour, which will precede awakening in our nation, listen to this episode of Rooted by the Stream on Charisma Podcast Network.

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