

“Saying No To Someone You Love”

June 19, 2016

Luke 2:41-51 John 2:1-12 Mark 3:20-21; 31-35

INTRO: I was listening to the Dave Ramsey show and a caller told how his own parents had made some irresponsible financial decisions and had asked him to bail them out.

So being the dutiful son, he did.

But that put him in a financial bind and brought him into conflict with his wife. And now his parents had gotten into the same situation again and were asking their son to bail them out again and his wife was saying, you better not!

So he called Dave Ramsey for advice, and you can imagine what Dave said. He said: You’re not helping your parents. You are reinforcing their bad behavior.

Bailing them out again is not the loving thing to do.

But you could tell, you could just tell by the way he was talking that he was going to do it anyway—he just couldn’t say no to his parents.

How do you say no to someone you love?

How do you say no without feeling guilty?

You know they will hold it against you and punish you in some way—with the silent treatment or by reminding you of all they’ve done for you.

It’s so much easier to give in for the sake of peace.

Or if you do say no you often feel that you have withdraw from the person or go on the attack to blunt their criticisms.

How do you both say no to them and move toward them in openness and freedom?

As you know, I’ve been preaching a sermon series

based on a book by Paul Miller called *Love Walked Among Us*.

The subtitle is *Learning to Love Like Jesus*.

What Paul Miller does, and what we’ve been doing is look at a wide variety of stories in the Gospels where Jesus interacts with people that give us insight into how Jesus loved.

After we see how Jesus loved people,

then we’ll think about how this applies to us

and our interactions with the people God has put in our lives.

Miller says that the most strident voices in our lives often come from

our closest relationships—mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, children.

They know us best and can use that knowledge to direct our lives.

Often, behind their requests and expectations is the demand that we make their lives trouble-free or that we fill the emptiness of their lives.

He says that when you are in these situations, being pressured—wanting to say no but feeling like you have to say yes, it's like you're at war with the person.

And in warfare, there are just three options.

Surrender—say yes to their demands for the sake of peace.

But then you usually become resentful—which builds a wall.

Attack—point out their failures and flaws in order to blunt their criticism of you when you do say no. Once again, walls are being built.

Retreat—whether you say yes or no, you withdraw, pull away from the person, so you don't get sucked into the situation again—more walls.

Is it possible both to say no and move toward the person in love at the same time?

Jesus did. There are a number of places in Gospels where he said no to people.

The most interesting and fruitful for our discussion are the times he said

no to his own mother. Let's look at those occasions and see what we can learn.

I'm going to do what I did several weeks ago and flip around during this sermon.

We're going to read three passages with three different no's.

I'll give you the points as we go.

MP#1 Love says no to their blame shifting Luke 2:41-52

In Luke's Gospel, no woman is held with higher honor than Mary.

She is depicted as brave, pure, humble, and faith-filled.

Her confidence in God is contrasted sharply with the faith of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist.

Luke describes how Mary received the message of the angel Gabriel without a doubt or a hitch—Zechariah, on the other hand, hemmed and hawed.

But one of the wonderful things about the Bible is that it gives us balanced pictures of its own heroes. No one in the Bible is perfect except Jesus himself. Mary also had some flaws and weaknesses and we're going to see them.

Jesus was twelve years old and had gone to Jerusalem for Passover with parents.

They started back and assumed he was somewhere with the group.

But after a day of travel, they couldn't find him so they returned to Jerusalem and searched for him for three days.

They finally found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers of the law, listening to them and asking them questions and answering their questions.

Now if a 12-year-old is left behind, that's the parents' responsibility, not the child's.

The detail about Jesus being 12 is particularly important, because 13 was considered to be the age of Jewish manhood. In that culture, he was still a child.

If a child is separated from his parents, should the child try to find them or wait for them to come and get him? He should wait. Which Jesus did.

So this looks like one of those accidents that happen in life.

But Mary implied Jesus was at fault.

Why have you treated us this way? Your father and I anxiously searching.

She shifted the blame from herself to her son.

Why did she blame him? Why might you blame your child in same situation?

She probably felt guilty about leaving Jerusalem without checking on him.

We knew a family left a child at gas station on family vacation. Hour down road! So by blaming Jesus she felt less guilty. That's why we do it.

Notice who didn't say a word—Joseph.

Which gives a hint about another side of Mary—aggressive and pushy.

Now if you were in Jesus' place and your mom came and blamed you, you would feel guilty or intimidated or irritated.

But notice Jesus' response, even as a 12 year old.

He said no to her blame-shifting. He didn't accept that he was at fault. At the same time he was gentle with her and respectful.

How was Jesus able to do that, even as a boy?

To say no without guilt or irritation, respectfully moving toward mother in love? He explained it to his parents.

He explained that his fundamental loyalty in life was to his heavenly Father. He knew he was doing God's will and that was best.

But notice how the passage ends. This is so important.

The fact that Jesus had another and higher source of authority and dependence in his life did not lead to rebellion against his parents.

He said no to his mother's blame-shifting.

Mother, I've done nothing wrong. I'm following my heavenly Father.

And then he went with her and was submissive—willing, prompt obedience. Because that was also his heavenly Father's will.

Honor thy father and thy mother, says the fifth commandment.

Guilt and blame-shifting are powerful weapons often used by people in your life who are not just trying to get you to do something, but also make themselves feel less guilty about the things they've done.

Think about the Dave Ramsey caller I mentioned and the blame-shifting he was facing from parents—Son, because of you we're going to lose our house.

As a twelve-year-old Jesus shows us that the key to saying no to that is knowing the will of your Father in heaven and striving to do his business.

That means prayer, meditation on his Word, counsel of godly friends.

You won't know God's will perfectly like Jesus,

but you can come to a place where you say to the blame-shifter:

As far as I know my own conscience before God, I'm not to blame for this.

This is your responsibility.

But notice what Jesus' example also show us. That having done this, said no.

Then sometimes that frees you to say:

But I will do what you want because I love you. Not because guilty. Love you. It takes wisdom to know when, situations are different.

But how wonderful when you can say yes after first saying important no.

MP#2 Love says no to their idols John 2:1-11

Fast forward 18 years. Jesus is about 30. He's at a wedding feast.

These were close friends, perhaps relatives. Mary was obviously close to them.

She had been informed about the wine crisis and spoke to servants like an insider.

Mary knew what a humiliation this would be for the family, to run out of wine.

So tells her son: They have no more wine.

Mary is concerned about the happiness and honor of the wedding party.

She tells that concern to Jesus and expects him to do something.

But Jesus' response suggests Mary had another motive as well.

He says, Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.

He was telling his mother no about something.

What was it? What was he saying no to her about?

He addresses her as "Woman" not as "Mother."

This was not disrespectful or rude, but it was formal.

It was like saying ma'am. Ma'am, what does this have to do with me?

You can hear the formality that way.

Jesus was making a point about their relationship.

Not that he had ceased to be her son or quit regarding her as his mother,

but that he had a calling to pursue, and he had to do things and live in ways

that were consistent with his calling. In that sense, he did not answer to her.

She wanted him to do things her way. He replied, No ma'am, I have a calling.

Then he says: My hour has not yet come.

Here's where Mary's other motive becomes more clear.

Throughout John's Gospel there is this repeated reference to Jesus' hour.

Jesus' hour is the revelation of his glory as the Messiah of God.

And that glory is ultimately revealed in his death, burial, and resurrection.

Mary wanted her son to get the glory right then.

She wanted him to show his stuff. She wanted him to make a splash.

This problem with the wine was a great opportunity in her mind

for everybody to see how wonderful her son was.

Richard Segal is a Jewish believer and he says this about Mary:

We get an inkling of Mary's presumptiveness, another characteristic common to the Jewish mother who know what is best for her son. Whether these traits are common to Gentile mothers I don't know, but they are so famous or infamous among Jewish women that jokes are made about them. The proud Jewish mother is utterly devoted to "my son the doctor," "my son the lawyer," or "my son the messiah." She places him on a pedestal, but at the same

time is also very possessive and demanding of him, often attempting to control him by healthy applications of guilt.

That's Mary. She had a mother's idolatry of her son, in the sense that she found her identity and meaning in her son's success as she defined it and directed it.

You see how deeply this was ingrained in her is her response to Jesus' gentle no.

When he says: My hour has not yet come—

she brushes right past him and tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Mary could be pushy when her idol was challenged.

Jesus' response is fascinating.

He recognized that his mother was pushing him to glorify himself so everybody would see how wonderful her son is. He saw how spiritually unhealthy that was for her and it was wrong for him to encourage that.

So he told her no. Which she ignored.

But at the same time Jesus recognized she also had a good motive for the request.

She was concerned about her friends' wedding party, and their honor.

Jesus was concerned for them too.

So he turned the water into wine

but did it in a private way so only his disciples knew, and the servants.

Everybody else thought the groom had provided it—bride & groom got the honor.

He maintained no he told his mother, not to promote himself as she directed.

But he saw she had a legitimate concern about the wine so he said yes to that.

Oftentimes books on boundaries or counselors telling people to learn to say no are one-dimensional. It's all about my personal emotional health.

I have to say no and establish boundaries because it's good for me.

And that has some truth. Jesus was concerned for his own calling.

But what's striking about Jesus' boundaries and Jesus saying no,

is how multi-dimensional he is. It's not just about his well-being.

He's concerned for his mother's heart.

He doesn't want to encourage her idolatry by saying yes. Bad for her.

At the same time, he's willing to consider she has good motives mixed with bad.

So he says no to her about one thing, but yes about something else.

And furthermore, he recognizes that in this case, other people involved.

Too strict a boundary would cut off an opportunity to bless them.

Don't say no just because of your emotional health or well-being.

Be open to seeking the Spirit of Christ as you work through matters.

MP#3 Love says no to their unbelief Mark 3:20-21; 31-35

Fast forward a year or so from the wedding in Cana.

Jesus is doing the work God has called him to do.

He's proclaiming the message of repentance and salvation by faith.

Crowds of people began to follow him, asking for healing and counsel.

He was spending so much time and energy that sometimes he didn't even eat.

His family thought he had lost his mind so they decided to seize him,

take custody of him and force him to go back home with them

so they could talk some sense into him.

His brothers and his mother went to where he was but they couldn't get in

because of the crowd. So they sent a message for him to come out to them.

Jesus said no. And then he took the opportunity to explain that when you are

a believer, you are part of the family of God, that's where highest loyalties are.

Why did his family think he had lost his mind?

Because these crowds of people who swarmed around Jesus were mostly the

lowest, poorest, most desperate strata of society.

Certainly there were others who came, like Jairus who we saw last week.

But mostly this crowd was the great unwashed.

These were the lowliest of the low—lots of poverty, lots of illness, bad smells.

To Jesus' family, this was such a waste of his obvious talents and abilities,

and if he possibly could be the Messiah, it was so antithetical to what they

Messiah should be doing and who he should spend time with, thought lost mind.

There's an interesting passage in John 7 that sheds more light on Jesus' family.

It says that Jesus' brothers kept trying to get him to go to Judea and do

big miracles there. They said, no one becomes famous doing things in secret.

Here you are, in the sticks, spending time with beggars and lepers—

you ought to be in Jerusalem where the action is, making a splash,

rubbing shoulders with people of influence. Very similar to Mary's attitude.

Then John makes an insightful comment:

For even his brothers did not believe in him.

That's really why they thought he had lost his mind. They didn't believe.

So they couldn't understand why he was doing what he was doing.

Even Mary, who certainly believed he was the Son of God and the Messiah,

was influenced enough by her other sons to say, Yes, he's out of his mind.

We've got to make him listen to us.

In addition to all this, the dynamic of shame and honor was enormously powerful

in that culture. You were always expected to do things in step with the family,

to honor the wishes and expectations of the family.

In our culture we mostly admire family members who strike out on own path.
We live in an individualistic culture. They lived in a corporate culture.
Jesus' odd behavior and the company he kept was shameful to them.

The Lord Jesus shows us a specific no that you may have to say to people you love.
I've never had to say this no, but I know people who have—and it's tough.
It's when you, as a Christian are called to obey God or serve God or live in
a certain way and those closest to you—family and friends, think you're
making a huge mistake—it hurts or offends or confuses them.
But they make those objections because they don't believe.
They might actually be believers—like Mary—but their values influenced by world.
You have to say no their unbelief.

Just a few examples over the years that I've seen.
Saying no to parents about going to law school and going to seminary instead.
Nothing wrong with being an attorney, but in this case, parents pushing hard.
Young man called to ministry. Parents unbelievers, hurt, feeling disrespected.

Saying no to advice of friends and extended family to take a promotion because it
would mean moving children away from church and youth group at key age.
Unbelievers dumbfounded. How could you pass up more money? Out of mind.

Saying no to children and expectations of family members regarding athletic
involvement at the expense of regular church involvement.
Response of family: How can you deny your child this?
You know what a powerful idol athletics is for many people.
So saying no is almost considered child abuse.
Because we want to worship in our church on Sundays doesn't make sense.

If you feel the pressure and expectations of unbelief,
even if it is a matter of Christian liberty and not a moral matter—
may be time for you to say no to someone you love.

CONC: Sometimes people say that love should be unconditional.
You ever hear that? Unconditional love.

But Jesus' love wasn't unconditional.

His love for his parents, his brothers, his family was shaped by and conditioned by his relationship with his heavenly Father, the callings God had placed on his life, his obligation to push back against idolatry and unbelief—even when that took the form of the expectations and demands of people he loved. And that meant that the Lord Jesus sometimes perfectly, lovingly said no.

We're not perfect, we're not always loving.

So we need his forgiveness and the help of his Spirit to say no when we should.