

God Loves You, and We Love You

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One day, the Master is teaching his students that God created everything in the world to be appreciated, because everything in the world is here to teach us a lesson.

One clever student asks, what lesson can we learn from atheists? Why did God create atheists?

The Master responds, God created atheists to teach us the most important lesson of them all—the lesson of true compassion.

You see, the Master continues, when the atheist performs an act of charity, visits someone who's sick, helps someone in need, and cares for the world, the atheist isn't doing so because of a religious teaching. The atheist doesn't believe that God commands the atheist to perform this act. In fact, the atheist doesn't believe in God at all, so the atheist's acts are based on an inner sense of morality. And look at the kindness the atheist bestows upon others simply because the atheist feels it to be right.

This means, the Master stresses, that when someone reaches out to you for help, you should never say, I pray that God will help you. Instead, for the moment, you should become an atheist, imagine there is no God, and say, I will help you.

A powerful story.

A Chassidic Jewish story. The Master in this story is a master of Chassidic Judaism.

For this Master, *the most important lesson of them all*, is true compassion. Of all the important things to spiritually master in order to become a Master of Chassidic Judaism, true compassion is the most important of all. The Master's deepest and ultimate identity is that of a truly compassionate human being.

Imagine being a truly compassionate human being. Acting on behalf of others because you're internally motivated to do so, because the impulse to do so comes from deep within your heart, and mind, and soul. From so deep, it's beyond you. And yet, *it is you*. It's *you* acting on behalf of others.

Performing acts of charity.

Organizing for justice.

Visiting the sick.

Helping someone in need.

Caring for the world.

Because your heart, mind, and soul are spiritually-inclined, naturally-inclined, to do those things. Without being told to, instructed to, commanded to, obligated to.

Look at the kindness the atheist bestows upon others, the Master says, simply because the atheist feels it to be right.

True compassion. It feels right.

Kindness towards others. It feels right.

I will help you. It feels right.

Does this mean we should do whatever we feel like doing?

Hey man, if it feels right, if it feels good, just do it.

No, that's not what it means.

Remember, this is a spiritual Master talking. Most likely, an elderly person who's dedicated most of their life to learning, teaching, and mastering their spiritual tradition and its various disciplines. And in doing so, becoming a person of true compassion.

A Master of true compassion—a human being with an acute feel for what's right and wrong. What's helpful and harmful. What's godly and ungodly, holy and unholy, sacred and sacrilegious.

We can't underestimate the power of practice, the necessity of practice, when it comes to learning, teaching, and gradually mastering a spiritual tradition, becoming a master of true compassion.

And that's something we do together—learning from one another, teaching one another, practicing with one another, growing, deepening, and maturing together over time, as we master our tradition and its disciplines.

Churches today find it relatively easy to proclaim messages like—God loves you, God cares for you, God will help you. Turn your cares over to God. God demands justice!

But churches find it far more challenging to proclaim messages like—we love you, we care for you, we will help you. Turn your cares over to us. We demand justice!

It's far easier to proclaim, someone else will do it, than to proclaim, we'll do it.

It's far easier to write a referral—here, go to God, God will take care of it—than to say, come here, I'll take care of you.

I suspect the Chassidic Master, the Master of true compassion, would tell Christian churches the same story he told his Jewish students.

I have to confess, hearing the Master's story is like receiving a spear through my heart. It's painful. I get up here and talk about compassion all the time, yet I've not come close to mastering true compassion.

What happens when we say, God loves you, but we can't bring ourselves to say, we love you, or I love you?

What happens when we say, God will help you, but we can't bring ourselves to say, we will help you, or I will help you?

I think it's important today for churches to proclaim God's love for all people, especially to people that some churches are hurting by telling them, God hates you, rejects you, and condemns you.

But that's only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is the church proclaiming, just as loudly, we love all people, especially those of you some churches are hurting by hating you, rejecting you, and condemning you.

We love you.

Yes, God loves you. But *we* love you.

And *we* will help you.

For a coin to be of value, both sides must be stamped.

God loves you, on one side. We love you, on the other side.

That's the only coin that has any currency in what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. God's way of living here on earth.

God loves you, on one side. We love you, on the other side.

When we proclaim God's love, and not our own, our lives have no currency in the kingdom of God.

Remember, today's story began with the Master telling his students to appreciate everything in the world, because everything that God created has a lesson.

Just now, we learned a lesson from the atheist. But there are many more lessons to be learned. Countless lessons. So keep your eyes and ears, your hearts and minds, open.

Pay attention. Be curious. Be receptive.

There are so many more lessons to be learned.