

“Did Jesus Really Mean That? Love Your Enemies

Matthew 5:43-48

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Last week---Resurrection Sunday, Easter and yet we also began a new sermon series entitled, “Did Jesus Really Mean That?” Last week, of course we had the scripture where Jesus said, “the third day he would rise again.” Did He really mean that? Yes, He did. We now begin to look at other things Jesus said and look at the practicality of if He meant that, then how do we do that---how do we implement it.

So today as you have heard in scripture Jesus says to love your enemies. Wow, this is a tough one.

A preacher preaching on this very same topic of loving your enemies: “Now,” he says, “I’ll bet that many of us feel as if we have enemies in our lives,” he says to the congregation. “So, raise your hands,” he says, “if you have many enemies.” And quite a few people raise their hands. “Now raise your hands if you have only a few enemies.” And about half as many people raise their hands. “Now raise your hands if you have only one or two enemies.” And even fewer people raised their hands. “See,” says the preacher, “most of us feel like we have enemies.”

“Now raise your hands if you have no enemies at all.” And the priest looks around, and looks around, and finally, way in the back, a very, very elderly man raises his hand. He stands up and says, “I have no enemies whatsoever!” Delighted, yet surprised, the preacher invites the man to the front of the church. “What a blessing!” the preacher says. “How old are you?”

“I’m 97 years old, and I have no enemies.” The preacher says, “What a wonderful Christian life you lead! And tell us all how it is that you have no enemies.” “All my “blankety blank” enemies have died!”

Most of us are not going to outlive our enemies.

So today we deal with a topic that is countercultural. We sometimes hear the Golden Rule, “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you” which Jesus mentions in Matthew 7 (verse 12), but what we really hear is the modern version that says, “Do unto others before they do unto you.”

I believe we are living in a culture and context that breeds hatred and revenge. A thought system that says, “If people don’t believe the way I do, vote the way I do, see things the way I do---then they are my enemies.” And I say, Lord help us. Our world is polarized with our own agendas that I believe often leaves out some of the practices of Jesus.

So, what about this Love Our Enemies. Did Jesus really mean that? In scripture read this morning Jesus says that the inference is that we love our neighbors and hate our enemy. A couple of things here.

It says, “You have heard the law that says...” Well, to be honest you will not find an Old Testament law that says “hate your enemy.” What may have happened here was a misinterpretation by the Pharisees (the religious leaders of the day) that thought “Okay, I’m to love my neighbors. I can do that. But if I love my neighbors then I have the right to hate my enemies.”

But then Jesus throws a curve ball in Luke chapter 10. He is asked, “Who is my neighbor?” And then Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. It was the one that was least likely that ended up being the true neighbor. You see love was demonstrated no matter what nationality, personality or faith. What?? We are to love people of different nationalities, different personalities and different faiths. Yes...that is what the interpretation of the Good Samaritan is. Your neighbor is all inclusive. God does not discriminate---He loves all.

He reinforces that in the passage read this morning that says that “he gives sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.” I was working on my sermon this week. It began to rain. I looked out and I saw the rain and then I went outside and noticed it wasn’t raining on my house, but it was pouring on that neighbor down the street who I know is a bad person!!! No, just kidding. I have wonderful neighbors. Just as it rains on all of us, and the sun shines on all of us...so God’s love is for all. We are to love.

Now we have to identify what type of love. In the Greek there are 3 words used for love. There is Philio for brotherly love. There is Eros for romantic love. The Greek word here is Agape. A divine love. Now we can even say that we can love someone, but not like them. I suppose there is some measure of truth to that. However, maybe we can rephrase it to “I love them, but I do not like what they do and how they act.”

This is where we begin to really question “Did Jesus really mean this?” How do we love a terrorist? How do we love those who are racially prejudiced and bigoted? It brings it to a whole divine level to look at this through Jesus eyes and love the terrorist but hate what they did. Now before some of you blow a gasket, I’m dealing with a complex scripture that is radical, for you see Jesus was radical. This is countercultural. We must have a higher standard than the world.

Let me explain that I hate terrorism. I hate bigotry. I hate hate. Here is the difficult part to be able to separate in a divine love way what causes the action compared to who is doing the action.

Psalms 97:10 New Living Translation (NLT) ¹⁰ You who love the LORD, hate evil!

We are to hate evil. I hate terrorism. I hate abuse. I hate bigotry. I hate evil. But friends we must go beyond the overly simplistic term of “hate the sin, love the sinner.” You might mean well in that statement. And there is some truth in that statement, however I think we can rest in the comfortability of that statement while we hide behind the truth of putting that in action. Do we really really love? This is difficult.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said in his sermon “Loving Your Enemies,” “When you rise to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems. Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system. (Dr. Martin Luther King (sermon, Loving Your Enemies, Nov.17, 1957)

Beloved the real enemy is Satan. When Jesus was begin tempted at the beginning of His ministry He said, “Get thee behind me Satan! (Matthew 4:10). Or as another translation (New Living Translation) puts it, “Get out of here Satan!” However, just as Jesus is alive and well. Ah the power of last week. He is Risen.... He is risen indeed. So, I believe that the enemy Satan is alive and wants us to be at war. There will be enemies.

Our enemies are:

- 1. people who oppose us**
- 2. people who try to hurt us**
- 3. people who persecute us.**

I believe Satan loves for us to have enemies and fight one another. How do we see enemies through the eyes of Jesus? The neighbors and the people are not our enemies---sin is.

So, if Jesus really meant what He said then what do we do?

We are to:

- 1. love our enemies.**
- 2. do good to them.**
- 3. pray for them.**

That’s what scripture says. In fact, it says, “If you love only those who love you.... (and now I paraphrase), what’s the big deal? Sinners do that to each other.”

“If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else?” Oh my, Jesus sets a new standard. We are to be kind to those we don’t like? I don’t like that...it is hard. Yet here it is and Jesus really meant it.

In common language: If someone acts like a jerk to you it doesn’t mean you have to respond and be a jerk back. Take the high road. Someone can be an enemy to you, but you don’t have to be an enemy to them. You can’t control their actions and feelings, but you are responsible for yours.

And it continues to be difficult. When we are hurt that person becomes the enemy. Our tendency, in one sense our natural tendency, is to lash out and become reactionary. We must live a transformative life that is above this.

Nelson Mandela was the leader of the movement to end South African apartheid (extreme racial discrimination). He was jailed for 27 years. He said this: **(image)** As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.

Don't be imprisoned by your feelings and hatred. Let's minimize, let's get rid of the hatred and focus on a divine love.

Romans 12:21 New Living Translation (NLT) ²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Love our enemies. Do good. Pray for them. What? Pray for those who hate you? Pray for those who work against you? Pray for those who want us to fail? And friends this is not the prayer: "Lord please give that person what they have coming to them!!!"

Prayer is one of the practical ways that love expresses itself. My guess is that when you pray you pray for your families. What about also praying for your enemies? Hmm...Prayer often opens your heart and can even give you a Jesus eyesight—to see people as Jesus sees them, to love them as Jesus loves them. And yes, even to forgive them. Next week the series will continue with "Did Jesus really mean to forgive others as he has forgiven?"

Wow, a love without exceptions. Jesus doesn't say love your neighbors unless their beliefs are different from yours. Jesus doesn't say just love those who think the same way you do, who have a similar agenda that you do.

If Jesus really meant for us to love our enemies, and I believe He did, then we may need to rethink our attitudes towards others. Let's also identify that it is hard to "love" with this type of love when we have been hurt. Hard practical examples: adult children who no longer talk to their parents, divorced parents that have put children in the middle. People that have wronged you or your dear friend or spouse. Anger rises to the top. Now let me be clear. Anger is not a sin...oh it could be. But we find in scripture that Jesus got angry. He turned tables over, He made a whip and chased people out of the temple who were taking advantage of others. I believe we must be angry for the things that made Jesus angry.

Jesus embraced the disenfranchised, the outcast, the lonely, the misfits, and strangers. Jesus engaged with those who did not think like Him. Jesus in His day continued to break down social barriers. He talked to women (taboo in that day), He went against the normal religious views of the day and touched the unclean and was often accused of breaking the religious rules. Why, because of divine love.

I'm not saying that loving your enemies is easy. In fact, I might find myself saying, "God loves you and I'm.... trying!"

Yes, in this sermon series we are dealing with uncomfortable things that Jesus said. We are going to be challenged to get out of our comfort zone. We also may hear some things that may make shake us up. And that's not at all bad. Beloved for the sake of Jesus we need to be shook up! We are called to transform the world.

Allow me to share an old story that at first glance may sound outdated, but I have found that the theme of it is still relevant today.

Rodney “Gipsy” Smith, was a British evangelist, preached to audiences of hundreds of thousands. Preached several times in America. Died in 1947. He was Methodist and was recruited by William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army to be an evangelist. He later went on his own to preach the Good News around the world.

A delegation came to ask him how they could experience mass revival as he had.

And this was his reply, “Go home. Lock yourself in your room. Kneel down in the middle of the floor, and with a piece of chalk draw a circle around yourself. There, on your knees, pray fervently and brokenly that God would start a revival within that chalk circle.”

In order to follow Jesus should we not do what He says. And according to scripture that means loving our enemies.

And so, with my imaginary piece of chalk...I kneel and draw a circle---and pray “Lord, begin within this circle. Help me to love my enemies. Lord in this very circle start a revival to do what Jesus says.”