

Love Your Enemies: Matthew 5:43-48

Good morning. My name is Matthew, one of the pastors here. It is a joy to gather with you and a joy to bring Christ to you through the Scriptures. If you would, please open in your Bibles, or you may follow along on the screen, to Matthew ch.5:43-48.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

For those of you that are just joining us, we have been walking through the book of Matthew, we took a break for advent, but now jumping back in the saddle. Matthew, in his gospel letter, has identified Jesus to be the promised Messiah, the King, and we pick up today back in the middle of Jesus first sermon, commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon Jesus is laying down the new kingdom ethic, how christians are to behave.

Beginning in chapter 5, Jesus has been teaching that He did not come to abolish the law in the OT but to fulfill it, and He’s been arguing that one’s righteousness must surpass the Pharisees. Think high jump, not limbo. What follows is 6 sections of Jesus raising the standard of righteousness of the Pharisees—anger He compares to murder, lust with adultery, He raises the bar on marriage, on honesty, He calls for the surrender of rights, and finally today, what some call the height of the christian ethic, love.

1967 Beatles song, “all you need is love”, global hit. I don’t necessary disagree, but the scriptures say that love must be defined and we need a power source to help us love.

1. Love like God Loves

He begins in v.43, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**

We see once again, as with all of the previous sections, that Jesus first brings up the teaching of the Pharisees —this is what He is against, not the Scriptures themselves. It’s you’ve heard it said, not, you’ve read it in your Bibles. Love you neighbor and hate your enemy.

They’ve twisted the Word of God to suite their own desires. God doesn’t say love your neighbor and hate your enemy. He says love your neighbor as yourself. The pharisees dropped the as yourself part (Lev. 19:18), and added, hate your enemy. The command to hate your enemy is nowhere found in Scripture. In fact, even in Lev. 19 the same chapter argues for the extension of love to their enemies, the gentiles. So they took the law and made it into what they wanted, love for one group of people meant they didn’t have to love another group of people. Love for Chick-fil-a meant you needed to hate Zaxby’s.

They also narrowed their view of who they considered their neighbor. Neighbor, as a correct interpretation, is any fellow human being that you are near. They made their neighbor one of their fellow Jews. Non-neighbors, the Gentiles, were enemies.

Jesus says, you don’t have the right to choose who you are going to love, and let me clarify, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Why? v.45

45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

When we love our enemies, Jesus says, we bear the image of our Father, proving He's our father and not the Devil. This love that we are called to have is the true evidence of who we are. But we must be clear, it's not that by loving others we become sons of God. It's by loving others that our sonship shows. "Jesus' concern in this text was not with the status of sonship but with the characteristics of sonship." -Quarles

We take cues for how we are to act from our Father in heaven. We look to Him for how we should love. We don't look to ourselves, or at the self-help section, or some blog or podcast. We don't look at ourselves, our extended family, or our friends. We look at God.

We get our eyes on God. How does our Father in heaven love? Jesus gives us the answer. **"He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."**

The most important point that Jesus is here making about God's love is that it is all-embracing, non-discriminating love. This directly confronts the teaching of the Pharisees. They divided people into categories... there are certain types of people that I am to love—my neighbors, and there are certain types of people I am to not love—my enemies. They took the command that addressed how to love and made it all about who they should love.

Jesus steers them back on course. Notice Jesus does not tell them to wipe away their categories of good and evil, or just and unjust. What he tells them to do is wipe away the prejudice that would only allocate love in one direction. Love doesn't discriminate.

Why? Because God causes His sun to rise and His rain to fall on everyone, completely irrespective of the world's inhabitants. It doesn't matter who you are, how young or old, short or tall, light or dark you are. It doesn't matter where you've been—to brothels or bible studies. It doesn't matter what you've done—a murderer or missionary. To all people the sun comes up—to the good and the evil, and to the just and unjust. The sun doesn't come up because people are good, and the sun doesn't not come up because people are bad. The sun comes up because God is gracious and His love does not discriminate. He is the uncaused blesser. God does not have a bag of sunshine and he's looking out for some reason to give it other. The causation is to found in Himself alone, not outside Himself. He loves because He loves, because that's who He is. That's not our picture, not how we love. We are so conditional in our love. We've created categories.

So you might have some real differences with people. Some real enemies. Nonbelievers. Or real offense. God's not telling you those differences aren't justified, He's not telling you to pretend like you didn't get hurt, He's asking for a love that would embrace them as much as those that are easy to love. That love is practical, sacrificial, it's not the thought that counts.

Jesus argues that our love must be like God's love and next, in the same vein, that this love must be greater than the the world's love.

2. Love More Than The World Loves

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

The main point here is that we as the church have to stand out. In standing out we demonstrate the character and love of God to the world.

There's that moment when a child comes out of the womb, that everyone is looking at the features of the baby and calling out which features of which parent the child got, he's got his mom's eyes, she's got his dad's mouth, and on and on. There's a particular glory in lining up the features and seeing the family resemblance.

And then as the child grows there begins the mannerisms, qualities of personality, and behavior that begin to surface and you can call these out as well. I mean we have so much fun in our house, whether it's positives or negatives, it's amazing how you see your resemblance in your children. I got this tendency when I get in trouble to make funny faces and joke, whatever I can to ease the tension of the moment, and sweet little Lydia got blessed with that, and I think Iris got some too, our 1 year old— the other day I have to confront her on her behavior and she immediately flips into silly mode—faces and lip rolls. This type of thing is usually followed up with a bit of sarcastic humor from my wife, "She is soooo your daughter!" I got nothing to stand on at that point. It's obvious who she's taking after. It's obvious that she bears resemblance to her dad.

And that is the same way it is supposed to be for us, the church, the family of God. It is to be obvious to the watching world who our Father is. We are to stand out. We aren't to blend in, not in holiness. They shouldn't be questioning who we are and who we belong to. Whether they agree with us or not... they should be saying, "those people are sooo like their God in heaven, their love and integrity and joy is on a different level." As Jesus tells us in the beginning of this sermon, 5:14, **"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. . . Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."**

If we are going to shine and we want to shine in such a way that the world stands in awe and glorifies God, we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Certainly all the matters we've covered in the sermon on the mount cause our light to shine, but there is something so otherworldly about loving the unlovable. The world has its peacemakers and pacifists... the world even has strong marriages and folks that don't get angry, don't lust, and don't lie... of course we know biblically inwardly in the spirit they're hearts are still wicked, but regardless, there's a decent moral code that many follow. What the world doesn't have is a sincere, sacrificial, practical love toward their enemies, toward those that hurt them.

It is this question of doing more than others... like from 5:20, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" That's what the whole sermon on the mount is about, a righteousness that exceeds, out of the ordinary, extraordinary, that surpasses the standard, that is heavenly. That's the driving point here by Jesus. Don't tax collectors do the same. Don't Gentiles do the same. You got to be doing more.

Jesus draws out two groups of people. Tax collectors and Gentiles. Both groups in their own ways represent the bottom of the barrel, Tax collectors for their sin, Gentiles for their race.

Tax collectors were Jewish sellouts and traitors. You could work for Rome as a tax collector and charge insane rates in order to cash in themselves. And these tax collectors Jesus says, know how to love each other.

Gentiles are everyone who is not a Jew, not a part of God's chosen race. Animosity was at a high on more of a national, political, genetic level. These gentiles were good at greeting one another. In their time, the greeting was more of a blessing, we don't get it so much, it's like our peace, or even goodbye, which comes from God be with you. But it's not mechanical and autopilot, it's sincere and intentional. A blessing of wellbeing and prosperity.

So where's the sting? Jesus looks at his audience and says, if you don't love and bless your enemies, you are no better than your enemies—you are just like the tax collectors and the gentiles. The worst sinners among us display your type of love. So your love doesn't stand out, it doesn't shine, it make any distinction or cause others to glorify God. God's not on display through you.

The love that Jesus calls for is a love that willingly and joyfully breaks through and crosses over pain and offense and injury of the most incredible kind in order to bless the ones who are least deserving of our blessing. *"Many have learned how to offer the other cheek, but do not know how to love him by whom they were struck."* -Augustine

Turning the other cheek is from the previous text in this sermon. The world has its pacifists. Our call is to not only surrender our right to retaliate, but to bless. One scholar summarizes it well, "To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine." -Alfred Plummer

The command to love and pray for our enemies is in a special tense that denotes ongoing action. It's not a love that extends and prayer that arises once the healing has taken place and the memory faded. It implies simultaneous love during the heat of persecution and pain.

Jesus has given us the ultimate example of blessing His enemies. There is textual reason to believe that during the crucifixion of Jesus, His prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," was an ongoing prayer, meaning he kept on asking and kept on blessing, as each stake was pounded into his flesh, he prayed all the more earnestly for their salvation. As they kept on persecuting, He kept on blessing.

We see almost the exact theme play out in Stephen's death. Because he bears the mark of Christ, he is captured and while the soldiers pummel him with stones, he cries out with a prayer for their salvation and it says his face shown like an angel. He died at the hand of his persecutors, but he died using his last breath to pray for them.

"This is the supreme command" wrote Bonhoeffer... "Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God." That's the work.

(That parent or uncle or brother that molested you, that husband that cheated on you, the business partner that stole from you,) Sometimes we have a hard time identifying our enemies. I would like to ask if we can draw this out of the theoretical and into the tangible. who is the last person you would want to pray for? Who is it that if you saw in the grocery isle you would dive under the produce? Nothing wars against our flesh like this. We want justice. We will have justice. this is not about universal salvation.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them...19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

God is on a mission to glorify Himself among all the nations of the world. He does this through the proclamation of His word and the deeds of His saints. Loving our enemies allows the character of God to shine through to the world and adorns the gospel that we preach. Revenge and Racism have no place in the kingdom of God.

3. Love In God's Power

48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus summarizes our section and His sermon here. If we hear this command and get discouraged, We are hearing it correctly. We can't be perfect. But we are not left on our own. "All you need is love. its easy, go figure it out... we can't just do it. We need steps. The first step to loving in God's power is realizing and confessing you aren't godly and you have no power to become godly in yourself. Everyone must understand that the standard is perfection, and wrath is reserved for all who aren't perfect. If you are an unbeliever this morning, you need the weight of this command to press down on you.

We are utterly incapable of saving ourselves. The scripture tells us that we are the enemies of God.

The second step to love in God's power is to believe and embrace His love for you.

Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Here we see the great love of God in action. The ultimate display of love for enemies. For God so loved the world that He sent His only son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. We are no longer enemies. We've been reconciled to God. The "You" and the "your" in our passage are both emphatic and both are key to us understanding what it means to and how to strive for perfection.

When Jesus says "you" He is identifying them as God's chosen people, who have had their sins paid for, who have been redeemed, and who stand eternally justified in God's sight. 1 Cor. 6, you were enemies, immoral, but you've been washed. And Jesus says your Father, our special relationship to God. He's saying you ARE sons and daughters of God. You already have been adopted into the family by faith in the Son. The call is to act like who you are. There is zero expectation of condemnation and every anticipation of a glorious inheritance beyond all comprehension.

Any conversation on the pursuit of holiness must begin with our identity in Christ.

If you don't get your sonship, there's no way suffer well at the hands of enemies. We love our enemies because we realize that we were once enemies of God, that we've already have everything we could ever want in Christ, and we want our enemies to receive salvation. To do otherwise would proclaim a different God and a different gospel.

But being in Christ means we have have not only been delivered from the penalty of sin, but we have been delivered from the power of sin. It no longer has dominion over us, we belong to God. His Spirit dwelling in us as well. We've been born again, not of flesh, but of the Spirit of God. The old is gone, the new has come. That's the Spirit of sonship by whom we cry abba father. In our flesh we cannot please God and cannot love God and others well, but with His Spirit we can.

This is our call as Christians... to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus isn't joking, and its not just a tool to make us feel our need for Jesus—it's what Jesus expects of us. Are we going to be perfect this side of glory? no. But is the church supposed to look like the world? Not at all. We are to stand out. We are the new humanity with a new blood running through our veins. How can we be the same? JESUS says we are to shine our new humanity in our holiness. H

This is the already not yet of the christian life. We are already made righteous in Christ, perfectly acceptable to the Father, but we do not yet fully display the truth of our sonship to the world. We must hold two truths in perfect tension—christians will never be perfect in this life—and we must strive for perfection in this life.

Our source of strength is not found in ourselves, nor is it found in Christ's example, but from Christ's work on our behalf. Let us fix our eyes firmly on the One who loves His enemies and shed His blood for them, blessing them as they crucified Him. We will fail, but Christ has perfectly demonstrated to us Sonship and in Him alone can we be found faithful. Our only hope of perfection is found in the perfect person of Jesus Christ. He is the only perfect one to perfectly manifest the Father. Hebrews tells us He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being. Our job church is to be in Christ, and only as so far as we are abiding in Him, shall we truly prove our sonship to the world, and display God's love that they might glorify our Father in heaven.

Let's pray.