

The Commands of Jesus Series

“Love Your Enemies” (Matthew 5:43-48)

March 8th, 2020

This morning we're going to be looking at quite a challenging series of commands from Jesus. Certainly some of Jesus' commands are easier to obey than others. This would not be one of those “easier than some” commands. These commands are recorded for us in both Luke and Matthew. We're going to be concentrating on the account in Matthew. And it's there in the midst of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount that he says:

Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV) *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

Actually, this is the easier of the two passages – Luke's account includes even more commands, but I thought this section would be plenty for us to deal with this morning. This morning I want to talk about both the “How” and the “Why” of loving your enemies.

Historical Context: Consider the historical context in which Jesus spoke these strong words. Jesus and His audience lived under an oppressive occupying Roman government. The Romans employed torture and murder to keep people in line. Everyone listening to Jesus talk about this “love your enemies” stuff had plenty of opportunities to experience “I hate you with every ounce of my guts” feelings toward the Romans soldiers and rulers that carried out this daily social domination. One of Jesus' own disciples, Simon the Zealot, may very well have been part of a group of zealous Jews who were very military minded in their agenda and were actively plotting to overthrow the Roman government and were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Messiah to lead them. How utterly ridiculous this teaching must have sounded to Simon and the whole crowd that day. And perhaps to some of you here today it sounds just as ridiculous.

Jesus begins with a fascinating claim. He says: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” Now most often when Jesus says something like that he's quoting from the Old Testament. But in actuality nowhere in the Old Testament does God command that. Actually the Old Testament instructed people to help their enemy.

Exodus 23:4-5 (NIV) *“If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.”*

Proverbs 25:21 (NIV) *If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.*

Although there are passages, which seem to indicate that the Israelites assumed God hated those who were his enemies and therefore they would be justified in hating them as well. Some would consider it a badge of honor to hate God's enemies.

Psalms 139:21-22 (NIV) *Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.*

What I find quite fascinating about this passage is what comes immediately after it. It's a passage many of you are familiar with. It's an invitation, from King David, for God to examine his heart to see if there's anything displeasing to God in it – and it appears David is confident that God won't find anything wrong in his heart. (Psalm 139:23-24).

So, apparently Jesus is not referring to how God taught his people to treat their enemies – but rather what had become the consensus opinion of the time, or more likely what many of the rabbis and teachers of the Law taught that God's attitude was toward his enemies and therefore what our

attitudes should be as well. But one of the things you discover, quite quickly in Jesus' teaching is that it totally went against the common teachings and practices at the time. Jesus turned the consensus thinking upside down and challenged the people of his kingdom to live **radically differently**. And this passage is certainly one such example of that.

Can we all agree that "**loving our enemies**" is not our natural instinct? We are much more naturally inclined to hate our enemies or at the very least become quite **angry, frustrated** and perhaps **bitter** towards our enemies. We tend to want to dig our heels into the sand and resist our enemies. But Jesus doesn't even give us a pass on those emotions – he commands that we "**love**" our enemies.

It might be helpful to first define who our enemies are. Because at first glance, many of us might not be able to even name a single person we'd call an enemy – therefore potentially making this sermon irrelevant to your current situation. But before you quit listening to me completely let's look at the individuals Jesus refers to under the title, "**enemies**" in our passage.

Who is an enemy?

- **Someone who is hateful to you** (vs. 44)
- **Someone who persecutes you** (vs. 44b) (someone pursuing you in order to harass, trouble or hurt you).
- **Someone who is evil & unrighteous** (vs. 45) a person committed to doing bad things, against God's laws. it could be someone who gossips about you, or someone who treats you as worthless, or constantly puts you down or a child who won't obey you.
- **Someone who doesn't love you** (vs. 46) they may not hate you, but they aren't all that concerned about your own well-being, as opposed to theirs. They will always come first.
- **Someone outside of your normal group** (vs. 47). They make you uncomfortable, not because they are evil, but just different (perhaps in their appearance, behavior or beliefs)..

My bet is that there are very few people in this room who can now claim that this sermon doesn't apply to them. So, now that I've got every one on board – I think it's important for everyone of us to realize that we were all once in one of these categories in reference to our relationship with God.

Colossians 1:21 (NIV) *Once you were alienated from God and were **enemies** in your minds because of your evil behavior.* This is the same word Jesus used back in Matthew 5:44 translated "**enemies**" But notice what God's response was to us in the very next verse:

Colossians 1:22 (NIV) *But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation*

And according to **John 3:16** this happened because of God's love for us. So, in calling us to love our enemies, Jesus isn't asking us to do something that he didn't already do for YOU.

This transitions us nicely into **how** we go about loving our enemies and those who've hurt us deeply – either in the past or will in the future.

How do we love our enemies?

1. **Remember how God treated you when you were His enemy.** (Jesus died on a cross for you)
2. **Pray for them** (vs. 44) What should you pray? Perhaps we can find some help from the parallel passage in Luke. **Luke 6:28 (NIV)** *bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*
 - a. It would appear that at least part of our praying for them is asking that **God would bless them**. And what would be their greatest blessing? To come into a saving relationship with their Heavenly Father. So, pray for their salvation.

Pray that God would bless them in every area of their lives – and that it would be unmistakably evident that the blessings are from God's hand.

- b. **Pray that they might grasp how deeply they are loved by God and how special and valuable they are in His sight.**

c. Pray that they might be overwhelmed by God's majesty and greatness.

3. **Treat them as a child of God would (vs. 45).** This verse doesn't mean that by loving your enemies you're **becoming** a child of your Father in heaven. It's clear from the beginning of Jesus' sermon that he's describing how people who are already a part of his kingdom act. So, Jesus is saying that as you love your enemies, you're **showing** how a child of God treats those who mistreat them – and as you do that you both **reflect** your new nature, and **grow deeper** into your new nature. Praying for your enemies will be **transformational** in your own life. It will cut off your anger before it goes into full "**blow up**" mode. And you'll begin to marvel at yourself and thank God for His transformational work in your life.
4. **Greet them (vs. 47):** you don't ignore them but you greet them and wish them well.
5. **Help meet their physical needs (vs. 45):** God shows impartiality on how He treats people. Paul expounds on this further when he says: **Romans 12:20 (NIV)** *"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."*
Romans 12:21 (NIV) *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Realize that you can't likely do this on your own internal strength and will power, so ask God to be your strength as you live this command out. And your ultimate goal is to think and act and have the same desires that your heavenly father does. That's why this section ends with: *"Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect."* Loving your enemies, and those who mistreat you, will challenge you to the very core of your being. But at that core, lives the Holy Spirit, who's committed to transforming you to be just like Jesus. Jesus modeled this for us while dying on the cross for your sins and mine as he called out to His Heavenly Father: *"Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."*

Loving your enemy does not mean you have to add them to your Christmas list, or make them your best friend. It doesn't mean you excuse their actions. It means you forgive them, with the knowledge that God is both merciful and just. You leave judgment of them to God. Your job, while stationed here on this earth is to display God's love to a hurting, broken and often mean-spirited people, with the goal that they might be convicted of their sin and drawn to the source of your love – their Heavenly Father. **Romans 2:4** states that it's the *"kindness of God that is intended to lead us to repentance"* and God's plan is for His **counter-cultural kindness, mercy and love** to flow through you to people who expect quite a different response.

Through prayer and forgiveness in our hearts, let us go forth to conquer injustice in our time by the courage not to demand retribution, but rather to repay injury with blessing and hate with love. That's when God's intentions expressed in Ephesians 2:6-7 come alive.

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

One of the spectacular ways God does this is by you loving your enemies, with the love of God flowing from the inside of you through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. That answers the **"Why"** I promised to talk about at the beginning of the sermon.

Why love your enemies? Because Jesus commanded it, but also so that lost people might be brought into a right relationship with their Heavenly Father, who wants to display His love for them through YOU!!!

The Commands of Jesus Series

“Love Your Enemies” (Matthew 5:43-48)

Who is an enemy?

- Someone who is _____ to you (vs. 44)
- Someone who _____ you (vs. 44b) (
- Someone who is _____ & _____ (vs. 45)
- Someone who doesn’t _____ you (vs. 46
- Someone outside of your _____ (vs. 47)

How do we love our enemies?

1. Remember how God treated you when you were His _____.
2. _____ for them (vs. 44
 - a. Ask God to _____ them.
 - b. Pray that they might grasp how deeply they are _____ by God and how _____ and _____ they are in His sight.
 - c. Pray that they might be overwhelmed by God’s _____ and _____.
3. Treat them as a _____ of God would (vs. 45)
4. _____ them (vs. 47)
5. Help meet their _____ (vs. 45)

Who is your enemy?

How are you treating them?

What changes do you need to make to obey Jesus’ teaching?

The Commands of Jesus Series

“Love Your Enemies” (Matthew 5:43-48)

Who is an enemy?

- Someone who is _____ to you (vs. 44)
- Someone who _____ you (vs. 44b) (
- Someone who is _____ & _____ (vs. 45)
- Someone who doesn’t _____ you (vs. 46
- Someone outside of your _____ (vs. 47)

How do we love our enemies?

1. Remember how God treated you when you were His _____.
2. _____ for them (vs. 44
 - a. Ask God to _____ them.
 - b. Pray that they might grasp how deeply they are _____ by God and how _____ and _____ they are in His sight.
 - c. Pray that they might be overwhelmed by God’s _____ and _____.
3. Treat them as a _____ of God would (vs. 45)
4. _____ them (vs. 47)
5. Help meet their _____ (vs. 45)

Who is your enemy?

How are you treating them?

What changes do you need to make to obey Jesus’ teaching?