

Matthew 5:43-48

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 August 2018

Preacher: Clay Naylor

[0 : 00] Good morning. Open up your copy of God's Word to Matthew 5. So those of you who are kind of new on the scene, we've been going through a series for quite a while now,! Just an exposition on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

And it has been challenging. It's been, let me think the right word, it has made me really care about not just what I do, but why I do it.

And God has used it to really work in the hearts of the people here. And today we'll pick up in verse 43 of Matthew 5. And previous weeks, a lot has been talked about.

Nathan has, I guess, explained this very well, but just by way of review, following his baptism by John and following the calling of his disciples, Jesus began his earthly ministry in Galilee.

And Galilee roughly had a population of around 300,000, roughly, in a bunch of towns and villages. And he's teaching in the synagogues and he's proclaiming the gospel, the good news about the coming of the kingdom of God.

[1 : 16] And he is healing diseases among the people. As we see often in the scripture, Jesus combines, like his earthly ministry, with teaching and acts of mercy and meeting the needs of physical ailments and physical needs.

And Jesus himself has come as the embodiment of the kingdom of God. He is the king and he has come in humiliation, walking among those created in the image of God.

And as we see, the word of Jesus spreads all over the place. The acts that he's doing, the sick and the afflicted and the demon-possessed, everyone is coming to encounter him and to hear him in hopes that he could heal them.

We read in chapter 4, verse 25, If you skip ahead in chapter 5, Seeing the crowds, he went up on a mountain.

And when he sat down, his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them. So standing on a high plain overlooking the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum, Jesus began teaching his disciples and expounding on the reality of what it meant to be a citizen in God's kingdom and living in his presence in the context of everyday life.

[2 : 46] So that's what we hope to accomplish here. Here, some of you again who are sort of new at this church, we don't just want to teach from the Bible. We just don't want to tell you what we want to say from the Bible.

We hopefully preach the Bible itself. And that's what the power behind the word of God is. It will impact our daily living.

So those who belong to Jesus, those who belong to the King and His kingdom, are characterized by certain things that are so countercultural to a sinful world around us.

And a couple of the main themes that you'll pick up on in the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout His discourse, Jesus is constantly seeking to teach His listeners the difference between external and internal righteousness.

And He does this by contrasting the outward or external righteousness of the Jewish religious leaders of the day. And He contrasts that against the true inward righteousness that God desires.

[3 : 52] And there's a huge difference between the two. There's a huge difference between just outward holy living and what really is on the inside. People can look really great on the outside, as we all know.

A lot of us are really good at putting on a show for other people and kind of displaying how moral and upright we are, humanly speaking. Yet, apart from God, inwardly we are full of pride, anger, envy, sin.

Jesus is pushing the point that it's not just on the outside what we see in somebody's life, but what really matters is what God is doing on the inside of someone.

And He rebukes the Jewish religious leaders constantly for their wrong thinking about external righteousness, what true righteousness is. In Matthew 23, verse 27, He says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

You're like whitewashed tombs. You look great on the outside. You're nice and clean. But inwardly, you're dead men's bones. And that's the outward appearance that they were seeking to put on, as they have everything put together.

[5 : 07] But inwardly, they were full of hypocrisy. So, as our Lord points out, the righteousness of the religious leaders was purely external and insufficient to be a part of God's kingdom.

Astoundingly, we see this as the measure constantly in the Scripture, definitely in the Sermon on the Mount, that God demands perfect righteousness, which, humanly speaking, cannot be achieved by any of our own good works, our morality.

Nothing can achieve this righteousness. So, again, some of you here today may think of yourself as a very good, moral, and upright person. And you might be compared to most humans.

If you would just, you know, pause and think about the most upstanding person you know, the best person you can think of, who's very moral and works very hard to do a lot of things for other people. But in truth, even they cannot measure up to the righteous, holy, perfect standard of God Almighty.

[6 : 15] This is why Jesus says a little earlier in Matthew 5, verse 20, I tell you that unless this righteousness that you're seeking exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

And that's scary because they were the best. They were the most upstanding. They were the most moral. They were the most religious. And Jesus is saying, you have to even go way above that because even what they do falls short of the righteousness that God requires.

So it's not an outward righteousness to show how good we look. It's an inward righteousness that shows how powerful and gracious God is. So that is one of the main themes in this is not just how to be a good person, how to treat other people, but it's how to actually be righteous in the sight of God and what righteousness looks like in everyday living.

The second thing that's kind of pointed out by Jesus throughout the Sermon on the Mount is the religious leaders of the day were twisting. They were perverting God's actual commands.

In Jesus' time, there were many misinterpretations and twistings of the Old Testament Scripture.

And multiple times throughout this sermon, verse 21, 27, 33, 38, you'll see Jesus kind of saying this, you have heard it said, and then he'll refer to something that the religious leaders taught.

[7 : 50] And then he'll go on and he'll actually correct that and say, but I say to you. And that is kind of where we find ourselves today in the midst of another commandment that they have twisted.

And today is clearing up the misconception that you're to love the people that are close to you and to love your neighbors, but you're to hate and despise your enemies.

So it's a perversion of God's command to love. And so we will read our text today. Finally, right? So Matthew 5, verse 43.

You have heard it 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 he sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you only love those who love you, what reward do you have?

[8 : 57] Do not even 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. Just join me in prayer. Father, we come to you this morning very needy, very broken, and we're in need of Jesus this morning. And I pray that whether we know him or we don't know him, he would be working in our minds, in our hearts, speaking life into us through your word.

And so, Lord, we just offer this time as an act of worship, and I pray for those here who may not know you, who are separated from you because of their sin, that they would see very clearly the love that you have displayed through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I ask that in his name. Amen. So, in our text, we see very clearly that Jesus is saying, you've misunderstood this commandment. You've heard it said to hate your enemy.

[10:17] And this is, again, a twisting of what the Scripture says. So, does the Scripture actually say that in the Old Testament? No, not at all. Actually, quite the opposite in a lot of ways.

But in the Law of Moses in Leviticus, chapter 19, you read in verses 18 and 34, this is the actual commandment. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself.

For you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. And somehow, they had figured out a way to kind of twist this into justification to have hatred towards their enemies when that's not what it says at all.

But to be sure, before we kind of stand in our context today and look back at the scribes and the Pharisees and a bunch of religious hypocrites, we definitely do the same thing.

[11:28] We, all the time, we do the same thing. We twist what God's word actually says to make it fit a lifestyle that we want. So, we need to be clear about what God says about certain things.

And so, Scripture never says that anyone should maliciously hate his or her enemy. Quite the opposite. God's hatred of sin and God's hatred of evil is a theme in the Old Testament.

And he often chooses, as we can read, to execute judgment on those people that are against him. So, here's a mystery, though, to me. It's a mystery, and it's something that we should just stand in awe of.

Even though God chooses, at his appointed time, to execute judgment on sinners, there is something in the heart of God that still does not delight in just destroying people.

Let me be clear. God says in Ezekiel 18.23, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Scripture indicates that God does destroy the wicked, but it's not done in like a giddy spirit of excitement.

[12:45] It's not done with like maniacal enthusiasm. He destroys the wicked with a noble and heavy heart. It's not something he's just jumping up and down about.

But he does it because he's going to be just, and he's going to display his righteousness and do what's right. But just think about that. He is destroying those who were created in his image, but are now broken and shattered because of sin and are rebelling against him.

It is a mystery, but God takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. He feels something for them. There's immense complexity in the heart of God.

Not contradictive, but something that we as fallen, broken human beings can't really understand. So there are full, many different exhortations in the Old Testament to care for one's enemies.

Proverbs 24, 17 says this, Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles. Even King David expresses such a heartfelt grief towards his enemy, King Saul.

[14:02] He has broken over the man who is seeking to kill him. So, Jesus is pointing out that the Jewish religious leaders have figured out a way to look at people who are non-Jews and say they are not my neighbor, they are my enemy, and I should hate them.

They saw that your neighbor was only your fellow Israelite. Jews should love other Jews. Everyone else was considered considered an enemy, a Gentile treated as an enemy.

So, as we begin to unpack this, Jesus is correcting this false teaching. And so, as Nathan kind of said last week, this is not about the state's authority to defend itself and declare war.

This is not about whether or not you should have the right to defend yourself if attacked. This is not the context of what we're talking about. Those are topics that we could talk about another time.

If you ask me, we'll talk about it. But this is not the main point of what Jesus is emphasizing today. So, I want you to examine your heart as we unpack this.

[15:16] And here's why. This commandment to love our enemies reveals every potential deficiency in our understanding of the gospel.

And it also reveals every potential deficiency in our obedience to that gospel. Are you tempted to think that? Are you tempted to think, yeah, okay, but what about those people?

Or what about this guy? I get it, but still, should I love this guy? Surely there's some sort of exception to the rule. And when we seek to wiggle free of those words, of this command, we're minimizing the gospel behind that command.

So, pay attention and examine your hearts. Ask God to search you. So, we're going to unpack this in asking three questions. Number one, who is our enemy?

Right? Who is our enemy? We can see it in verse 34 that in one sense, it's those who persecute you. People on whose account you are suffering because of Christ.

[16:29] Those who are acting hostile towards you because of your relationship with him. The word actually kind of implies people who are pursuing you, actively pursuing you with great hostility in order to inflict harm on you or mistreat you, in the hopes that they will cause you to flee, or drive you away.

That's kind of what persecution means, at least in a grammatical sense of the word. And it's done because of your faith in Christ. It's because of your attachment and relationship to him.

We know that during the past century, there have been more Christian martyrs in the world than all the previous centuries combined. Just in 2018, okay, three days ago, in Sri Lanka, a pastor, his wife, and two other believers were walking home from a birthday party of a fellow believer, and they'd been experiencing some hostility from local Buddhists.

And as they were walking home, attackers began yelling things at them and began throwing really big stones at them. It struck his wife and one of the other women with them injured them severely. April 10th, just April 10th, Hindu activists burned down the home of a pastor who had a wife and three children.

[18:02] and they were on their way home from an all-night prayer meeting and they were getting angry at the evangelistic work that he was doing among the Hindus there, and so they burned down his house and have been trying to force him out of that area.

This past July, in Nigeria, militant Muslims attacked Christian villages, killing around 200 and forcing thousands to be displaced.

And very recently, in Columbia, where we sent a dear brother of ours recently, a pastor there who was doing gospel work in one of the most dangerous, poorest areas in Columbia, he constantly received death threats from paramilitary groups and guerrillas and members of street gangs.

So he's been warned you'll be killed if you don't leave, if you don't stop this, but he's remaining faithful among the other Christians who are there to lead them. And they've chosen to stick it out there because they say Christ has taught us to love our enemies.

And it goes on that since they've stuck it out and really asked God to work, they're starting to change the attitude of the community around them. People are starting to respect them and wonder why in the heck they're there.

[19:29] So according to Jesus in our text, persecution doesn't necessarily have to be violent, meaning it might not put you in the hospital or in prison or in the grave.

Earlier in the discourse, Jesus lumps in insults and slander with persecution. Verse 11, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

So many American Christians, we're so weak and we're so soft and we're so overly sensitive that that would seem like the most violent thing in the world to us, but put in perspective in many other places in the world and in the context in which Jesus is speaking, it's not really worthy to be compared.

But he says, nonetheless, Paul said, when we are reviled, we bless. And so, persecution, those who persecute you are in the category of an enemy, but we are to love them.

To go on a little further, if you look at our text, it could really just mean those who oppose your desires, those who are set against you. Many Christians, I've heard it even this past week, someone who would say that they are a follower of Jesus, quote, I hate those darn liberal Democrats.

[21:09] And on the other side, I hate those conservative Republicans. Some of you wouldn't consider Republicans conservative, but nonetheless, we have all these divisions that take precedence over who we are in the kingdom of God.

And that's total nonsense. There's so much junk like that in the church today. We love or despise someone based on their political views, their social background, or their ethnic background, instead of our identity as children of the Most High.

God and the gospel demands that we love all who oppose our personal desires. It's a demand. For God himself is kind to those who oppose him.

So, to carry it one more step further, if you kind of look at our text, an enemy could really be summed up as those who don't love you are someone who is not your brother.

another illustration of an enemy. If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even tax collectors do the same.

[22 : 22] And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? So, you might consider yourself a loving person. You might consider someone you know to be a very loving person.

But, how far does that love extend to those who oppose you, those who are different than you? Jesus presses this point with unusual force, as if he's saying, yeah, even the tax collectors, the people that you despise and consider to be outsiders and traitors, even they love the people who love them.

What's so special about this kind of love that you think you have, if that's where it stops? Then he goes on and says, even pagan non-believers who don't even know God, they care about the people who care about them, and they greet those who love them.

He is saying that the gospel demands a different kind of love, that is an extraordinary godly love that is to be demonstrated by believers. If you consider someone on the news, we always seem to be pittered against different countries a lot of the time, Muslim countries, for example, we should see them as captive to the enemy and be broken hearted for them.

I have a couple of dear friends of mine who were in the army, they served in the ranger regiment, and they have been deployed multiple times to Iraq, Afghanistan, other places, and because of these brothers' love for Jesus, they realized, man, this is not going to solve the real problem.

[24 : 20] And now that they are out of the army, they have moved themselves and their families to closed, dangerous places in the Middle East to share the gospel with Muslims.

that's loving your enemy. So, to go on, the second question, that is, the first question was, who are our enemies?

The second question, what does this look like? What kind of, how does this love look, look, excuse me, what does this love look like, is the question.

All right, so in other words, how do we manifest this love? How do we actually carry out this love? Well, first of all, we see in our text, to pray for them.

Praying for our enemies is a humble recognition from God's saving grace towards us. We would be just as evil as they are, and just as lost as they are, had not God saved us.

[25 : 24] And it recognizes that unless God acts grace and grant them mercy, they will remain in that place of judgment. So nothing will transform your heart towards the one you consider to be your enemy than getting on your knees before God and pleading with him on their behalf.

Nothing will change your heart more. When you're on your knees praying for them, you might do nice things for them, kind of on the surface, but then behind the scenes, you're kind of grumbling about them and despising them.

but praying for them, getting on your knees in the presence of God, who knows your heart and has full awareness of your intentions towards those people, that changes you.

Paul prayed for his fellow Jews that hated him. He says, brothers, my heart desire is for them to be saved. And in doing this, we portray our suffering, crucified Lord, when he prayed.

for his enemies. Even in the worst possible position, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. So, the first way we actually can manifest out love towards those that we might consider an enemy is to pray for them, to intercede on their behalf before God.

[26 : 47] And then to go on, it is simply dismeaned from our text, just to greet them. If you greet those who only greet you, right? To greet someone means to warmly welcome them, to receive one joyfully.

To greet someone does not just mean that you kind of begrudgingly shake their hand and put on a fake smile and a fake conversation and then forget about them. It's not just a touch-and-go thing. It means extending a friendly welcome to one who you consider to be an outsider, to someone who is opposed to you. So who do you welcome and greet into your life and welcome into your home? Is it those who you know that will repay you and greet you as well and love you as well or someone that you know would not love you in return?

So if that's the case, like, where and what kind of love are we displaying to the world? What's so special about us? to go on.

[27 : 50] A third way we can manifest the love of Christ to other people, also seen in the word here, is to meet their needs.

Know that true love for others actually takes action on behalf of that person. We all know that. We don't just want lip service. We actually want what we say to manifest itself in real life in action. not just words. And so though God hates evil, he still brings many blessings in the life of his enemies. Jesus says, for he makes his son rise on the evil and on the good. And he sends rain on the just and the unjust. It says in verse 45. And in Luke's account of this gospel passage, this is what he says, this, God himself is kind to the ungrateful and evil. So this is what we would call theologically speaking, common grace, meaning that it's the grace of God and the blessings of God that extend to all people, regardless of whether they are saved or not.

[29 : 00] God graciously extends his love to his enemies. So as true children of God, we're to imitate such love towards our enemies.

And in such a way where it leaves them puzzled, asking why, like what kind of power is behind this person to enable them to love me in this way, asking them why.

Paul says in Romans 12, verse 17, he says, to the contrary, and then he goes on to quote from the Old Testament and Proverbs.

He says, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Have you ever done that for someone who opposed you, done something, an act of kindness to serve them to meet your need and they were astonished?

[30 : 05] This is the kind of love to display. And so, the third question, the last question, is how can we love our enemies?

So, in other words, like, what enables us, what is the power behind this to motivate us to do such a thing as love our enemies? That's a good question, because humanly speaking, it's impossible. I'm not good at loving people I don't like, or that are opposed to me. I've even gone through seasons in my life, and this has convicted me, where I walk around just sizing people up that I think look either hostile towards me or different than me, instead of feeling a heart of compassion towards them.

This kind of love cannot be faked. It cannot be imitated in a false way. The love that we need to have for these people comes only by the gospel alone, and only by the power of Jesus Christ working through us alone.

So, here are three things, under this question, of motivations or powers behind the ability to love our enemies.

[31 : 25] Number one is, God will carry out justice. All right? We're always afraid to think if we just let this go, if we don't repay them for the wrong they've done to us, they're just going to get away.

They're going to go unpunished and justice will not be done. But what God is saying is be confident, I will handle this. I will deal with this person.

Turn to Romans 12. We're going to look at a couple passages in Romans before we close. Romans 12, go to verse 17.

So, we're unable to love our enemies because we know at the end of the day, God is going to carry out justice. Even if they get away with things in this life, they won't in eternity.

They will be brought before the judgment seat of God and he will deal with it. Romans 12, verse 17. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

[32 : 39] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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. That is a big struggle for me because I always want to see justice done.

If someone has wronged me, I want to see them paid back. Some of you are just better than me, I guess, but I'm very quick to want justice to be done, not forgetting that if God treated me that way, I would be separated.

from him. So we are to repay evil with good. God will settle it. Just trust him. We can put that in his hands.

He will carry out justice. With such a holy and sovereign vow from Almighty God, we can believe that. Don't feel like someone is going to get away with their sin.

[33 : 44] And then secondly, another motivation, another empowering, so that you'll prove your sonship. Look at verse 45.

We don't have to because you just turn, but verse 45, Jesus says about loving your enemies so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. So loving others the way God loved doesn't make us his children, but what it does do is it proves, it evidences that we do belong to God because that kind of love, again, can't just be faked.

It can't be created by human ability so that if we love the way that God does, we evidence ourselves to be his children.

It proves. It stirs the heart of any parent, though one day I hope to experience this, to be a father, but it stirs any good parent to have someone say of them, you are so like your father, you are so like your mother.

And it is our spiritual DNA to love other people the way that God loves. A supernatural empowering kind of love so we can prove our sonship.

[35 : 03] And then lastly, and this is huge, another motivation, give what you have received. And here it is, we can love our enemies because we have experienced being loved as an enemy.

Many of you have come from different backgrounds where you are taught God is all-loving and he'll never do anything to hurt you or he won't judge you.

On the other side, you might have been taught God is holy and God is going to destroy you and there's no love in him at all. And both of those are wrong. Romans 5, we'll end things here, but look at Romans 5.

And I want you to see that God's love is not opposed to his justice. What kind of love God has shown us? Romans 5, look at verse 8.

It says, God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall I be saved by him from the wrath of God.

[36 : 24] So in two verses you see the idea of God's love, you see the reality of God's wrath right side by side. Then it goes on in verse 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.

And more than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation. So this so extraordinary is the love of our father.

It extends beyond his kingdom to his enemies. God demonstrated his great love in the while we were rebelling against him, not while we were all put together and good people, but while we were his enemies, while we were still in that place of rebellion, God demonstrated his love towards us by sending his beloved son to die the death that we deserve and to give us the life that we cannot live. He died in our place. God demands that we recognize this as those who belong to him. We were separated from him and Jesus restored us back to him so that we can know him, have relationship with him, that we can once again reflect who he was and glorify him as we were created to do.

So if God were not that generous and merciful to sinners, we would perish. And so we are to reflect this kind of love that we see in the gospel. And there's no debate.

[38 : 04] God loves his enemies. So, in conclusion, we see in verse 48, he ends up by kind of summing up this whole section of the Sermon on the Mount by saying, you, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

So in case anyone was there listening, saying, that still thought, I can still be good on my own, I can still achieve right standing with God on my own, he kind of just throws that out there to sum it up. You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Which would have devastated them because God demands total perfection.

So he intentionally does that to make them despair of any kind of self-righteousness they have so that they'll flee to him for salvation.

To recognize that they will need a Savior, that their own efforts will not achieve it. And that's what he's saying. He's like, I'm here. I'm the one who's going to deliver you from your sin.

[39 : 13] You cannot do this on your own. And that's the marvelous truth of the gospel, that we could not attain perfection. You ever heard anybody say, nobody's perfect.

They have no idea the intensity and the truth of what they're saying. No, no one is. And God demands it. You can't achieve it on your own, so you go to Jesus. And it says in 2 Corinthians 4, 21, for our sake, God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the

righteousness of God.

It can only come, that righteousness only comes when we are saved completely and fully by the work of Jesus Christ. And once united to him, being saved in him, he enables us to live righteously before other people.

So that's it. That's the beauty of the gospel, that God loved his enemies. And so if you feel and you know that you are separated from him today, he's calling you to come.

Be reconciled to him through the death of his son. And if you do belong to Jesus, rejoice that he did not treat you and did not treat me the way that we deserve to be treated.

[40 : 38] Let's pray together. Let's pray together. pray together.