

Jesus on Enemies

Text: Matthew 5:43-48

Introduction: Who is my neighbor?

That's the question the lawyer asks Jesus in Luke 10.

Let me ask you this morning: Who is your neighbor?

In response to the lawyer's question, Jesus told a parable. A parable we know as the Good Samaritan.

A man fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead. A couple of religious leaders saw the man lying on the side of the road, and rather than helping him, they passed by on the other side. But then came a Samaritan man who saw him, had compassion on him, and sacrificially cared for him and tended to his needs.

Jesus then asked, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

The obvious answer was the Samaritan man. The one who showed mercy.

See, for followers of Jesus, your neighbor isn't just the person who lives next door to you. Or the person in the cubicle next to you at work. Or the person who sits in the pew next to you at church. Your neighbor is everyone God places in your path. Whether you like them or not. Whether they like you or not.

That's what we're going to see this morning in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus expands our understanding of who we are called to love. Yes, you should love your neighbor. But what if your neighbor is your enemy?

Go ahead and turn in your Bible to Matthew 5. We're going to be looking at verses 43-48. It's on page 761 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read Matthew 5:43-48...Pray)

Followers of Jesus obey God's commandments by loving our neighbors, even our enemies.

I think the first part of that is pretty non-controversial on the surface. Surely, we can all agree that...

I. Followers of Jesus love our neighbors (Matthew 5:43).

Jesus says... (Read vs. 43a)

A. Just like in verse 38, which we looked at last week, Jesus doesn't quote a specific one of the Ten Commandments here. But He does quote something that was clearly taught in the Old Testament Law and is really the underlying principle behind commandments 5-10 (vs. 43a).

1. See, if you look at the Ten Commandments, one of the things you'll notice is that the first four commandments have to do with our relationship with God and the final six commandments have to do with our relationships with other people. We call the first four commandments the first table of the law and the final six commandments the second table of the law.
2. So, in Matthew 22, Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment" (Matt. 22:37-38). He's summarizing the first four commandments. All four of them—no other gods, no idols, do not misuse God's name, and remember the Sabbath—all fit under this first and greatest commandment to love God.
3. Then Jesus says, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). And in this He's summarizing the final six commandments. All six of them—honor your father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, and do not covet—all fit under this second greatest commandment.

4. And catch what He says next, “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:40). It’s all summarized in these two. Love God and love neighbor.
5. In fact, two of the commandments specifically mention “your neighbor.” Commandments number 9 and 10. Exodus 20:16, “You shall not bear false witness against YOUR NEIGHBOR.” And Exodus 20:17, “You shall not covet YOUR NEIGHBOR’S wife or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is YOUR NEIGHBOR’S.
6. We also see in Leviticus 19 where God gives a number of specific ways that His covenant people were to love their neighbor, and then He says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18).
7. The Old Testament Law is full of ways that that God’s covenant people were supposed to love their neighbor.
8. The people Jesus was speaking to, both His disciples and the crowd, would have been familiar with these commands of God.

B. But what about the second part of what Jesus says they had heard said (vs. 43b)?

1. Look at verse 43 again. (Read vs. 43)
2. Hate your enemy. Now, we have to ask ourselves, “Where had they heard that they were supposed to hate their enemy?”
3. Was it in the Old Testament law? No. You can do a thorough search of the OT law and you will not find a command from God to hate your enemy.
4. In fact, God actually says the opposite.
 - a. One of the places we see that is Exodus 23 that was read for us during our Scripture reading this morning. Exodus 23:4 says, “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him.” God says in Exodus 23 that a way you are to love your enemy is to return his ox or his donkey to him.

- b. We also read in Proverbs 24:17, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles.”
- c. And then in the next chapter, Proverbs 25:21, “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.”

5. God does not authorize His people to hate their enemies in the OT. In fact, He commands them to do exactly the opposite. To love their enemies.
6. So, where had the people listening to Jesus deliver the Sermon on the Mount heard this instruction to hate their enemies?

- a. Apparently, some, perhaps even the religious leaders, argued that the command to “love your neighbor” also implied the inverse, “to hate your enemy.” There is some evidence of this in the ancient literature from the time (Quarles, 159).
- b. I trust you can see that’s a pretty twisted way to read the Bible. But the truth is that people today still twist the Scriptures to attempt to make them say what they want them to say. Perhaps you’ve even been guilty of that before in your own life. We all must be careful to ensure that we are rightly dividing the Word of God and submitting ourselves to it rather than seeking to make it say what we want it to say.

C. And on this point specifically, the temptation of all of our hearts is to so narrow the obligation to love our neighbors that it really becomes devoid of any meaning at all.

1. Like the lawyer in Luke 10, our hearts want to ask, “And who is my neighbor?” We want Jesus to tell us who we don’t have to love.
2. Yeah, we’ll love the people closest to us. The people who look like us, think like us, talk like us, vote like us.
3. But surely Jesus doesn’t mean that I have to love the person at work who gets on my nerves. Surely I’m not

supposed to love the family member who hurt me deeply. Surely I don't have to love the person who mocks my faith in Jesus. Surely I don't have to love Democrats or Republicans or immigrants or nationalists or Muslims or homosexuals. Surely I don't have to love those people.

To which Jesus says... (Read vs. 44)

See, followers of Jesus love our neighbors. But that also means that...

II. Followers of Jesus love our enemies (Matthew 5:44-47).

A. The command is straightforward: Love your enemies (vs. 44).

- 1. But it's a lot easier said than done, isn't it?**
- 2. And isn't that true of so much of what we have seen in the Sermon on the Mount, especially in these last few sermons. It's not easy to deal with the anger in our hearts. It's not easy to fight against lust. It's not easy to always be people of the truth. It's not easy to refuse retaliation.**
- 3. And this might be the hardest of them all. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."**
- 4. Chuck Quarles points out that "in the context of the [Sermon on the Mount], the enemy is not merely an individual with whom the disciple has a personality conflict or a citizen of another county with which he is at war. The enemy is rather the one who persecutes the Christian disciple as an expression of his hatred for the Christian's faith and his God" (Quarles, 161).**
- 5. I think Quarles is right in that. But if we are to love those enemies who persecute us for our faith in Christ, then certainly we are to love anyone whom we might view as an enemy, whatever the reason.**
- 6. We love those who are diametrically opposed to all that we believe, stand for, and hold precious: our faith, our moral convictions, and our Lord (Quarles 162).**

7. That's hard, isn't it? Because of all the different things I am involved with in the community, I have a lot of relationships with unbelievers in our community. And some of them are my friends on Facebook. And anytime I go to post something controversial, especially when it has to do with my biblical convictions as a Christian, I know that I may experience some pushback. Sometimes in my flesh, I'd like to just let em have it. So, I have to constantly remind myself that I represent Jesus, and He calls me to love even those who see the world very differently than I do. The same is true for you, brothers and sisters. It's so easy for us to treat our ideological enemies with hate rather than love.

8. Notice that one of the ways Jesus says we should love our enemies is by praying for them. Do you pray for your enemies? Notice that Jesus says we are to pray FOR our enemies not AGAINST our enemies. I'm not necessarily saying there isn't a way to pray against our enemies and trust them in God's hands. But our primary posture in prayer with regard to our enemies should be one of praying FOR them. Pray for them to come to a knowledge of the truth. Pray for them to experience the goodness of God in a way that would draw them to Him. Pray for them to turn from their sin and place their trust in Jesus. Pray that God would turn their heart toward Him.

9. The parallel command to this one in Luke 6 says, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Lk. 6:27-28). This is what it looks like for us to love our enemies.

10. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 12, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (Rom. 12:14). May we be people who bless those who persecute us. They may curse us. But as followers of Jesus, we will bless them in return.

B. Why? Because in loving our enemies, we reflect the image of God our Father (vs. 45).

- 1. Look at verse 45. (Read vs. 45)**

2. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **SO THAT** you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”
 3. Does Jesus mean that the way we become children of God is by loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us? No. Salvation is by grace through faith. We become children of God by turning from our sin and placing our trust in Jesus. Jesus is saying that we show ourselves to be children of God by loving our enemies.
 4. Think about God’s common grace for a minute. Jesus says, “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”
 5. When the sun rises, it’s not like the Lion King where the light only shines on the good guys and the darkness belongs to the bad guys. God’s sun shines on everyone. It shines on the person who loves God and the person who hates God. The same is true of the rain. It rains on the Christian and the unbeliever. The righteous and the unrighteous.
 6. That’s the point Jesus is making. God shows kindness even to those who oppose Him. And if our heavenly Father is willing to show that kind of kindness to His enemies, how much more should we be willing to love and show kindness to our enemies?
- C. Jesus also says that loving our enemies distinguishes us from the world (vs. 46-47).
1. Look at verses 46-47. (Read vs. 46-47)
 2. Everyone loves those who love them. There’s nothing impressive about that. Loving only those who love in return is self-serving pragmatism (Quarles, 166). There’s no reward from God for this kind of so-called love.
 3. Jesus says that even the tax collectors love like this. Tax collectors were universally despised in Jesus’ day as traitors and thieves. They had aligned themselves with the Roman government and sought to enrich themselves by taking advantage of the people. But even tax collectors loved one another.
 4. Jesus’ point is that if you only love those who love you, you’re no better than the tax collectors. Which would have been deeply offensive to a first century Jew who wanted to think that he had nothing in common with tax collectors.
 5. But then Jesus takes it a step farther. (Read vs. 47)
 6. Gentiles were pagans. Those outside God’s covenant people.
 7. Chuck Quarles notes that ancient greetings typically expressed some kind of blessing. The Hebrew greeting *shalom* wished the peace that results from divine favor on the one being greeted. It essentially meant, “May it be well with you.” Apparently, some Jews were hesitant to pronounce such greetings on their enemies in fear that they might ensure their enemies’ prosperity and success. In fact, the rabbis debated whether Jews should greet Gentiles (Quarles, 167).
 8. But Jesus says that even the Gentiles greet fellow Gentiles. There’s nothing special about that. If you want to stand out as someone who is different. If you want to show yourself to truly be a child of God, you have to love your enemies.
 9. Think about the people you despise. Think about those who have wronged you. Think about those who hate your God and everything you believe in and stand for. That’s what we’re talking about here with these examples Jesus gives. It’s hard for us to fully comprehend just how much the Jews of Jesus’ day despised Gentiles and tax collectors. Yet, Jesus makes clear that His followers are to love even those they would otherwise despise.
 10. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
- Followers of Jesus love our neighbors, even our enemies. And finally...
- ### III. Followers of Jesus love like our Father (Matt. 5:45, 48).
- A. We mentioned this briefly already in verse 45.

1. Jesus says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”
2. I saw an old friend recently and commented to Ashley, “Wow, he looks more and more like his dad the older he gets.” Then yesterday, we were at Hudson’s baseball game and were struck by just how much this little girl we saw looks just like a mini version of her mom. We all have physical characteristics that we got from our parents. Your height. Or lack thereof. Your nose. Your eyes. Your ears. Your smile. Your hairline. We resemble our parents in many ways.
3. And in the same way, if we are truly children of God, we will resemble our heavenly Father in our lives. Particularly in the way that we love other people.
4. As a dad, I want to live my life in such a way that my kids can look up to me and say, “I want to be like dad.” I hope that’s your desire too, parents. Your children are watching you. And they will imitate you in many ways. Let us imitate our Father who is in heaven so that as our children and grandchildren imitate us, they will be imitating God.

**B. Jesus continues the Father imagery down in verse 48.
(Read vs. 48)**

1. Jesus is talking here about moral perfection.
2. This is similar to Leviticus 19:2 where God says, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” God’s standard is perfection. God’s standard is holiness.
3. The verb here is a future indicative, but it has the force of a command. Jesus is saying that you, as a Christian, will one day be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, and now, you are to live like it.
4. Especially with regard to loving your enemies.

C. We talked about God’s COMMON grace toward His enemies in that He makes the sun to shine on the evil and the good and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. But I also want to remind us this morning of His SAVING grace toward those who were His enemies.

1. Not only have you and I received COMMON grace. We have received SAVING grace.
2. And the truth is that you and I were enemies of God because of our sin. We were rebels against God. We were “dead in [our] trespasses and sins.” We were “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” We “lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph. 1:1-3).
3. We were enemies of God. God made us. But we rebelled against Him. Like our first parents, Adam and Eve, we thought that we knew better than God. We went our own way. We did our own thing. And in doing so, made ourselves God’s enemies.
4. BUT. BUT. God intervened on our behalf!
5. “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:4-9).
6. Listen to Paul in Romans 5, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have

now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 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. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Conclusion: Goshen, you and I were enemies of God because of our sin.

But God has brought us near. He has saved us by the blood of His Son. He has adopted us into His family. He calls us His children. We were enemies. But now we are children!

And now, as children of God, we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. And in doing so, we show ourselves to be children of our Father who is in heaven.