

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 5:43-48 | The Impossible Standard of Love
December 18, 2022

WELCOME:

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 5.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.

REVIEW:

We have been studying the Sermon on the Mount—the greatest sermon ever preached—by the Greatest Preacher ever!

Today, we are going to wrap up Matthew chapter five.

We have spent the last five months or so on this chapter alone— 21 sermons.

And we're not done with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—we still have two more chapters!

In Matthew chapter six, Jesus teaches us how to handle our finances, how to handle our possessions, how to pray and fast, and provides a cure for anxiety.

In chapter seven, Jesus teaches how to judge people correctly by using discernment, perseverance in our faith and how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

But before Jesus teaches all those very important things—^{He} Jesus concludes this segment of His sermon on the subject of love.

INTRODUCTION:

Today we come across the most distinctive teaching within Scripture.

We see it in the OT—

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deut 6:5)

We see this teaching in the Gospels—

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV).

We see it in the Epistles—

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (Galatians 5:22)

God’s love is the pinnacle of our faith.

But we do have a problem this morning.

The problem we tend to have with love is that we define it differently than God.

And there is also a reason that it has taken us 21 sermons to get to this point ^{on} love

What is that reason? Why do you care?

Let’s find out!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God’s Word.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:43-48 CSB

Matthew 5:43—“You have heard that it was said, **Love your neighbor**, and hate your enemy.

Matthew 5:44— But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Matthew 5:45— so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Matthew 5:46— For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same?

Matthew 5:47— And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same?

Matthew 5:48— Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

***This is the Word of the Lord for River Bible Church.*

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 5:43—“You have heard that it was said, **Love your neighbor,** and hate your enemy.

Jesus uses his teaching phrase one last time here—

You have heard that it was said...but I tell you.

We've learned that this tool of teaching was called the *halakah*—meaning “to walk” or “to go.”

So, in other words, this was a very practical teaching tool for the Jews regarding Scripture.

It was a way that the scribes and Pharisees taught how to apply Scripture to their daily lives.

Now keep in mind, Jesus is **not** asserting new laws when he says, “***You have heard that it was said...but I tell you.***”

What Jesus **is** doing is teaching the law as it was originally given.

Jesus is upholding the **standard** that was intended from the very beginning.

We've watched Jesus do this repeatedly— with anger, adultery, divorce, keeping promises, and dealing with our so-called rights.

And today, we will learn God's Impossible Standard of Love.

Matthew 5:43— ~~"You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.~~

The first thing to note here is that there is not one verse in the OT that says this—

Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

That's why Jesus repeatedly has said, "***You have heard...***" x3.

Who did they hear this teaching from?

Just like the rest of the teachings—Jesus is exposing The Scribes and the Pharisees.

"***Love your neighbor and hate your enemy***" —it's half a quotation from the Bible and half fabrication from the religious leaders.

So let's look at the first part—

Love your neighbor is in the OT—it may be bolded in your Bible to indicate that.

In Leviticus chapter nineteen, we find this statement in the Holiness Laws.

Leviticus 19:17— "Do not harbor hatred against your brother., Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him.

Leviticus 19:18— Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

If Jesus is repeating what the scribes and Pharisees taught, we should notice something that is in Scripture— but they left out.

The Scribes and Pharisees taught, “Love your neighbor,” but Scripture says, “***Love your neighbor as yourself.***”

Ut, oh!

They got it half right.

But they left the hard part out!

Jesus continues to expose the superficial teachings of the religious leaders by revealing how they reduced God’s standard of love.

Why did they leave out—“***...as yourself?***”

The short answer is that racism was just as bad in the first century as it is today.

Jesus deals with racism in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Luke 10:25– Then an expert in the law stood up to test him, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Luke 10:26– “What is written in the law?” he asked him. “How do you read it?”

In other words, Jesus is asking about his personal interpretation of Scripture.

That’s very important, because if this man’s personal interpretation doesn’t match God’s intention, he has a problem.

Luke 10:27— He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and “your neighbor as yourself.”

So this man responds with a paraphrase of the *Shema*.

The *Shema* is the Jewish confession of faith.

Luke 10:28— “You’ve answered correctly,” he told him. “Do this and you will live.”

Luke 10:29— But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

This question reveals ^{his} this man’s heart attitude—least amount of effort possible.

He wants to know exactly who to love and who not to love.

Notice how Jesus answers ^{his} this man’s question.

He doesn’t give this man a one-word answer—he tells a story.

Luke 10:30— “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead.

This was a common thing.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho certainly went down—it was a harsh landscape.

Many thieves hid alongside the road because it was easy to rob people.

Luke 10:31— A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

~~_____~~
A priest represented God—evidently, this priest was late for an Elders meeting.

Luke 10:32— In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

A Levite is someone from the tribe of Levi—the Levites helped the priests with their priestly duties.

~~This guy acts as if he doesn't even see him.~~

It's important to note that both the priest and the Levite also know the *Shema*.

Luke 10:33— But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion. ^{A Jew}

Here we see the genius of Jesus as a storyteller.

A Samaritan is a half-Jew and half-Gentile.

Samaritans have been around for a long time—700 years before Jesus was born.

Historians aren't exactly sure, but it's a good bet that when the King of Assyria captured the Jews back in 2 Kings 17, some of the Jews started to intermarry during that time.

So the Jews considered the Samaritans a mixed-race.

And the Jews and hated them for marrying Gentiles.

Luke 10:34— He (Samaritan) went over to him (Jew) and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

Luke 10:35— The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. When I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.'

And then Jesus asks an obvious question—

Luke 10:36— "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

Luke 10:37— "The one who showed mercy to him," he said. Then Jesus told him, "Go and do the same."

The parable's point is not primarily to answer the question, "And who is my neighbor?"

The point of Jesus' parable is to show God's definition of love to our neighbor.

A neighbor is anyone who needs our help.

But the Scribes and Pharisees redefined God's definition of 'neighbor.'

For example, the Scribes and Pharisees didn't hang out with those who were poor.

They were not friends, nor were they friendly with those who were uneducated.

The Scribes and Pharisees not only redefined neighbor as another Jew—but someone in their social class.

So, in other words, the Scribes and Pharisees defined "neighbor" as someone who walked like them, talked like them, and looked like them.

Wow, how convenient is that?

~~Some of these scribes and Pharisees went so far as to suggest that it was their moral right and duty to hate all other people.~~

~~And because of this teaching, most Jews regarded all other people groups as dogs.~~

~~As a result, those people groups also despised the Jews.~~

Matthew 5:43— *Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*

So the Scribes and Pharisees not only edited and misinterpreted what God said in Leviticus, but they also added words to the mouth of God.

Hate your enemy.

KEYPOINT #1:

Nowhere in Scripture does it say that you are to hate enemies.

So, where did they get this idea?

Did they just make it up?

Kinda sorta.

They took Scripture out of context.

For example:

Psalms 11:5—*The Lord examines the righteous, but he hates the wicked and those who love violence.*

Psalm 11:6— Let him rain burning coals and sulfur on the wicked;
let a scorching wind be the portion in their cup.

Psalm 139 says,

Psalm 139:21—Lord, don't I hate those who hate you,
and detest those who rebel against you?

Psalm 139:22— I hate them with extreme hatred;
I consider them my enemies.

These Psalms are known as an *imprecatory* Psalm.

KEYPOINT #2:

An imprecatory Psalm invokes divine vengeance on an enemy of God.

There are numerous psalms that fall into this category. (Ps. 58, 68:21-23, 109:5-19, 137:7-9)

It's in these Psalms we see King David invoke curses on people—

And this is where the scribes and Pharisees justified their teaching to hate their enemies.

But once again, nowhere in Scripture does God say that we are to “hate our enemies.”

The mistake that scribes and Pharisees made is the same one we make today.

They focused on themselves rather than God.

This misapplication of God's Word is still done today—

Just last week, I saw a woman on YouTube calling down vengeance on her husband's enemies.

She read an imprecatory Psalm—and said something like, “It’s in the Bible, look it up yourself!”

Never mind the fact that her husband is a prosperity preacher who has committed adultery on her—

+ **Matthew 5:44**— *But I tell you, love your enemies*

At this moment, you probably heard audible gasps from the Disciples.

The Scribes and Pharisees who were listening— may have started laughing, thinking that Jesus must be joking.

Not only is Jesus commanding His Disciples to love their enemies but He is speaking of a particular type of love.

He’s not referring to romantic or sexual love— *eros*.

Nor is Jesus talking about *storge*—love for your family.

Jesus is not referring to even being friends with your enemies—*philia*.

He uses the verb to *agapáō*.

“Love” here is a verb—agape.

+ **KEYPOINT #3:**

Agapē love is an act of sacrifice and service.

It costs us something to love someone in this way.

That's why Jesus gave the example of the Good Samaritan.

KEYPOINT #4:

Agapē love may involve emotion, but it must include action.

In 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul provides fifteen characteristics of *Agapē* love.

All fifteen are verbs— these are actions.

1 Corinthians 13:4— Love is patient (even-tempered), love is kind (useful or gentle). Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant,

1 Corinthians 13:5— is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs.

1 Corinthians 13:6— Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:7— It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:8— Love never ends.

KEYPOINT #5:

Agapē love is where your behaviors override your feelings for the person.

How do we make sense of all this?

When you love those who don't like you—you confuse them.

You catch them off guard.

You take away the energy that feeds their dislike or distaste for you.

I heard of a story of a young man that went into the military.

For whatever reason, this man's superior officer got mad at the Private—and kicked him repeatedly. *—in front of everyone—*

The next day, the officer found those same boots he used to kick the Private thoroughly cleaned and shined.

The Private cleaned the very boots that he was assaulted with the day prior.

The superior officer—broke—couldn't understand it.

He couldn't understand that type of agape love.

So when Jesus says, "Love your enemies," He's saying that —

We must love people because of *who* they are—sinners who are broken and deceived by the world and by Satan.

We must love people because, just like you and me, they are in need of God's forgiveness and amazing grace.

Loving people we don't care for— is not a human standard. It's a supernatural standard —and that's the whole point.

If love is the greatest of all things. If love never ends.

KEYPOINT #6:

If love is the greatest thing someone can do—then loving our enemies is the greatest thing love can do.

In other words, we will never experience love as God designed it— if we don't learn to love our enemies.

And if we think that's impossible, just wait. There's more!

Matthew 5:44— *and pray for those who persecute you,*

If Jesus were a spiritual trainer, He just added some more weight.
Why would Jesus command us to pray for people we don't even like?

These are the people that drive you crazy!

The very mention of their names brings about an emotional response to you physically.

But, when you pray for these people, something divine begins to happen:

You're the one who begins change.

We think to ourselves, wait a second—I don't need to change!

He's the one that needs to change—him changing is why I'm praying in the first place!

It might take some time, but slowly yet surely, you'll begin to see a change in yourself.

By praying for people who drive you crazy, you'll become more compassionate and merciful.

By praying for people who you can't stand to be around, you may even become interested in how this person is doing.

KEYPOINT #7:

By loving and praying for our enemies, we overcome evil with good.

3 pray for
Did Jesus love His enemies?

Luke 23:32— Two others—criminals—were also led away to be executed with him.

Luke 23:33— When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified ~~him~~ ^{Jesus} there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one on the left.

Luke 23:34— Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.", And they divided his clothes and cast lots. ^{-gamble}

Luke 23:35— The people stood watching, and even the leaders were scoffing: "He saved others; let him save himself if this is God's Messiah, the Chosen One!"

Luke 23:36— The soldiers also mocked him. They came offering him sour wine

Luke 23:37— and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!"

The most interesting thing about Jesus' prayer, "Father forgive them they don't know what they're doing,"—is that it's in the imperfect tense in Greek.

Meaning that Jesus didn't just pray this prayer one time—it's entirely possible that he repeated it over and over again.

KEYPOINT #8:

~~Loving~~ ^{Back to...} and praying for your enemies proves that Jesus is Lord of your life.

Matthew 5:44— But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Why?

Matthew 5:45— *so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

First, note that when we choose to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors, we demonstrate that something supernatural has happened to us.

When we love our enemies and go out of our way to serve people, we don't like or care for. We prove to the world that we are not of this world.

Matthew 5:45— *For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

Theologically we call this God's common grace.

Common grace is God's goodness to a sin-cursed world.

God allows the same rain to fall both on the Christian farmer AND the most wicked farmer.

In other words, God's love is indiscriminate.

God's love is nonselective.

Everyone receives God's common grace.

We see many examples of this in the OT. Let me show you one in particular.

Notice how many times God says, "I will..."

Genesis 17:15— *God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah will be her name.*

Genesis 17:16— I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Genesis 17:17— Abraham fell facedown. Then he laughed and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a hundred-year-old man? Can Sarah, a ninety-year-old woman, give birth?"

Genesis 17:18— So Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael were acceptable to you!"

Pause— Ishmael is an illegitimate child— born from a lack of faith and trust on Abraham's part.

Ishmael is a symbol of what man can do—not God.

Genesis 17:19— But God said, "No. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will confirm my covenant with him as a permanent covenant for his future offspring."

Genesis 17:20— As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I will certainly bless him; I will make him fruitful and will multiply him greatly. He will father twelve tribal leaders, and I will make him into a great nation.

Genesis 17:21— But I will confirm my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this time next year."


So yes, Ishmael received the love and blessings of God. *Thru common grace.*

But Isaac was chosen for God's covenant love. *—That's different*

God's common grace is given without merit.

God chooses to bless— because He chooses to bless—it's not based on what we have done or will do.

If God does that for everyone, shouldn't we, as His children, reflect that same attitude?

 **Matthew 5:46**— *For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same?*

This is probably  the biggest insult from Jesus to the Scribes and Pharisees yet.

Why? Because Jesus compared them to the IRS.

Many tax collectors were Jews who extorted money from fellow Jews.

Tax collectors were despised—and keep in mind who penned this Gospel—Matthew.

The Scribes and Pharisees must have been some kind of mad. Why?


Because Jesus compares them to tax collectors who were traitors to their own people.

The Scribes and Pharisees were sure of one thing—and that is that they were better than everybody else.

And yet Jesus reveals the selfish love they have for themselves.

Today, we tend to pride ourselves on being nice.

We return favors and are polite to those who are polite to us.

And Jesus reveals that there is  nothing special about that.

Everybody does that!

Even gang members within the same gang love and are kind to one another—they care for one another.

God is not going to reward that kind of love.

Matthew 5:47— *And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary?, Don't even the Gentiles do the same?*

There's only thing one thing worse than a tax collector—Gentile.

Jesus is asking, “what makes you different?”

“Why should you be rewarded for acting like everyone else?”

Jesus was showing the religious people that they were no better off than heathens.

We're all sinners —the only thing that makes us different is the kind of sin we engage in.

Matthew 5:48— *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

This is the summary of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

—be perfect.

Many people will say, “Jesus doesn't really mean that we're called to be perfect, because He understood that no one's perfect.

Everyone falls short of the glory of God, so He must have meant something else.”


Other people try to soften this command by appealing to the Greek, for the Greek word —*Teleios* (perfect)—It's also translated as “mature.”

Now I don't know about you, but it's hardly a relief to learn that we need only need to be mature as God!

The meaning here in verse 48 is obviously that of perfection.

Why? Because the *heavenly Father* is the standard.

Jesus' statement is similar to

 **Lev. 11:44**— "*Be holy; for I am holy*"

What's the problem?

We cannot be holy the way God is holy, nor can we reach perfection before we get to heaven.

Jesus does know that.

Jesus also knows that we tend to pick and choose which commands of His that we will follow.

We all do this.

Instead of striving to build spiritual muscle, we simply reduce God's standard.

"God will forgive me!"—that's called cheap grace.

So what Jesus is explaining here is that God's moral standards never change.

And God's standard is perfection.

So let's not miss Jesus' point throughout the entire Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus' sermon has left us with an overpowering sense of spiritual bankruptcy.

Nobody has done or will ever reach the standards of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus is revealing how much we need Him as a Savior

We need Someone, not just anyone, but Someone who is both the Son of God and the Son of Man to empower us to meet God's standard of perfection.

If we as a church don't love like this, that's called sin.

As a Church, this message is a call to repentance.

For those of you who don't believe, this is a call to salvation.

That's the beauty of the cross.

Spiritually speaking,

Our sins were transferred to Jesus, and Jesus' perfect life was then transferred back to us.

The Impartation of Jesus' perfect life is how we meet the Impossible Standard of Love.

What does this look like practically in our own lives today?

KEYPOINT #9:

As we experience God verse-by-verse and apply these teaching into our lives, we are pursuing the very perfection of God.

How do we know this to be true?

Matthew 5:48— *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

There's something important in Greek that we're not seeing in English.

The Greek is a future indicative: "You *shall be perfect*, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

In Greek, the term "you" is emphatic.

Jesus is speaking directly to His disciples.

Jesus doesn't expect the world to love enemies or be perfect—nor should we.

PREACH:

 **KEYPOINT #10:**

If we refuse to love our enemies, we will never experience love as God loves.

From a practical standpoint—pursuing the impossible standard of love looks like this:

When I look into the rearview mirror of my life, am I a more loving and kind person than I was last year?

Do I have more patience?

Am I less irritable?

And if I'm not, why is that?

 **PRAYER**

BENEDICTION

Eph. 6:23/24—Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.,

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