

The Sermon on the Mount

The Treatment Of Our Enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. When Jesus sat down with His disciples on a hillside in Galilee over 2000 years ago, He preached what has become the best-known, and certainly the most profound sermon in the history of mankind.
 - A. We know this simply as The Sermon on the Mount.
 1. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one of the most beloved of all the American presidents once said: *"I doubt if there is in the world a single problem, whether social, political, or economic, which would not find ready solution if men and nations would rule their lives according to the plain teaching of the Sermon on the Mount."*
 2. There is no question about the fact that these teachings of Jesus reach deep into the moral consciousness of humankind, and challenge us with a higher standard of living than most would think possible.
 - a. And yet, this is the very standard of righteous living that Jesus requires of all who would be His disciples.

3. From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus made it clear that to be His disciple would require almost unimaginable sacrifices.
 - a. Not only would He demand that His disciples be different from the world around them, but He would also demand that His disciples conform their lives to the very likeness and image of God.
 - b. As the apostle Peter put it, those who would call themselves Christians would need to become "*partakers of the divine nature*" seen in the life of Jesus Christ Himself. **(cf. 2 Peter 1:4)**
- II. The standard of righteousness that Jesus sets forth in the Sermon on the Mount transcends every standard of moral or ethical conduct passed down from the world's greatest philosophers.
- A. Nothing devised by the mind of mere man comes even close to the kind of righteous and holy living and conduct revealed by Jesus in this sermon.
 1. His standard of righteousness was set so high that it seems almost unattainable because it goes against human nature – and yet, this is the very thing Jesus demands.
 - B. One example of this, and perhaps the most difficult of all to imagine are the words of Jesus in **Matthew chapter 5, verses 43 through 48.**

1. **Matthew 5:43-48** – *"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, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father 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. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*
2. Of all the things Jesus said to His disciples on that day, this must have been the most challenging – *"love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you... "*
 - a. I'm sure some may have wondered if they had heard Jesus correctly, thinking, *did He just say what I think He said?*
 - b. Surely Jesus didn't really mean this!
 - c. But there was no mistake here. Jesus clearly said we must love, bless, do good to, and pray for those who are our

enemies, who curse us, who hate us, and who spitefully use and persecute us.

- C. For the remainder of our time together this morning, I want us to really think about what Jesus said here about the treatment of our enemies.
 - 1. If this statement of Jesus is to be taken literally, it would require a radical change in our conduct toward those whom we consider enemies.
 - 2. So let's attempt to dig a little deeper into this statement and see why Jesus requires us to treat our enemies in ways that are simply contrary to our very nature as humans.
 - 3. Let's begin by understanding what the Law of Moses actually taught about loving our neighbors and hating our enemies, and then let's see why the teaching of Jesus is so radically different.

BODY:

- I. What did the Old Testament Law of Moses teach concerning our conduct toward our neighbor and toward our enemies?
 - A. Jesus said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*" **(Matthew 5:43)**
 - 1. So, what DID the Law of Moses actually teach about loving one's neighbor?

- a. **Leviticus 19:17-18** – *"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."*
 - b. That's pretty clear, isn't it? *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself..."*
2. But what did the Law of Moses teach about hating our enemy? While the exact words *"hate your enemy"* are not found in the Law of Moses, the idea of having contempt for ones enemies, and expressing indignation toward ones enemies, is certainly implied in a couple of passages – one from the Law, the other from the Psalms.
- a. **Deuteronomy 7:1-2** – *"When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make*

no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them."

- b. **Psalm 139:21-22** – *"Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies."*

- 3. It should be ABUNDENTLY clear that the Law of Moses permitted the Israelites to cast out the ungodly nations before them, and utterly destroy them off the face of the earth. The psalmist even said He hated the enemies of God *"with a PERFECT hatred!"*

B. However, it might come as a surprise that the Old Testament ALSO taught that we show mercy and kindness toward our enemies.

- 1. For example, in the Law of Moses taught this in Exodus:
 - a. **Exodus 23:4-5** – *"If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. 5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it."*
- 2. A similar principle is taught in Proverbs:
 - a. **Proverbs 25:21-22** – *"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; 22 For so you*

will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you."

- b. In fact, the apostle Paul later quotes from this very passage:

Romans 12:19-21 – *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

- C. So which is it?

1. We understand the part about loving our neighbor.
2. But what about our enemies? Are we supposed to HATE them or LOVE them and DO GOOD to them?

- II. To understand the answer to those questions, we need to turn our attention to the teaching of Jesus in The Sermon on the Mount.

- A. Jesus said, **Matthew 5:44-45** – *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven..."* (Some manuscripts read a little

different, omitting two phrases and leaving: "*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*" – **Matthew 5:44**)

1. The bottom line is that Jesus takes hating our enemies completely out of the equation.
2. In fact, He demands that we treat our enemies in ways that many would find objectionable.
 - a. We are required to "*love*" our enemies (i.e., show "active good will" towards them, or to be "full of good will" toward them – "to wish them well" and "have regard for their welfare").
 - b. We are required to "*bless*" those who curse us (i.e., speak well of them – to express good wishes or to wish them well, or the act of declaring or wishing God's good favor upon them).
 - c. We are required to "*do good*" to those who hate us (i.e., treat them kindly, to perform acts of kindness and generosity to them).
 - d. We are required to "*pray*" for those who spitefully use us and persecute us (i.e., to bring them before the throne of God in prayers, supplications and petitions – to pray FOR them, not just ABOUT them).

- (1). I think implied in this command of Jesus is the idea of praying for their well-being as well as praying for their salvation.
3. The teaching of Jesus here is actually an expansion of the principles He laid down in the preceding verses.
- a. **Matthew 5:38-42** – *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."*
4. Therefore, not only are we to refrain from retaliation or seeking revenge, we are to actually react to wrongs by aggressively loving, blessing, doing good to, and praying for our enemies.
- B. But why would Jesus require us to react in such an unnatural way toward our enemies and toward those who have done us harm or persecuted us?

1. The answer? **Matthew 5:45** – *"...that you may be sons of your Father 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."*
2. In other words, Jesus said loving, blessing, doing good to, and praying for our enemies is the **ONLY** way we may be **SONS** of our Father in heaven.
3. What does that mean?
 - a. The phrase "sons of your Father in heaven" is a common Hebraic way of saying we are partakers to a high degree of the qualities and characteristics of whatever it is that we are a son of.
 - b. For example, in **Mark 3:17** Jesus gave James the son of Zebedee and his brother John the name *"Sons of Thunder,"* suggesting that these two brothers could occasionally become like an angry storm, filled with thunder and lightening – which explains why they wanted to command that fire come down from heaven (like a storm of thunder and lightening) to destroy a certain Samaritan village which refused to receive Jesus (**cf. Luke 9:53-54**).

- c. Also, in **Acts 4:36** the apostles gave Joses the name Barnabas which means "son of consolation," suggesting he was a man of great tenderness and compassion.
4. Therefore, to be "*...sons of your Father in heaven*" is simply another way of saying we become partakers to a high degree of the same qualities and characteristics that are manifested in God the Father.
- a. Which is another way of saying that when we love, bless, do good to, and pray for our enemies, we are demonstrating the trait of GODLINESS – of God-Like-Ness.
 - b. Which is another way of saying we "*become partakers of the divine nature*" (**cf. 2 Peter 1:4**).
5. And to further illustrate His point, Jesus says that God "*makes His sun rise on the evil AND on the good, and sends rain on the just AND on the unjust.*" In other words:
- a. God gives material blessings to both the evil and the good, both the righteous and the unrighteous (**cf. Matthew 5:45b**).
 - b. God is kind to the unthankful and evil: **Luke 6:35-36** – "*But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.* 36 *Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.*"

- c. God also offered His Son while we were yet sinners and enemies: **Romans 5:8-10** – *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*
 - d. He loved us before we loved Him: **1 John 4:10-11** – *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*
6. This concept of becoming like our Father in heaven is taught elsewhere in the writings of the apostles.
- a. **Ephesians 4:31-5:1** – *Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.*

- C. Otherwise, Jesus said, in **Matthew 5:46-47** – *"...if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?"*
1. In the days of Jesus, tax collectors were Jewish businessmen who bought the franchise from the Roman government to collect taxes from Rome.
 2. But they were despised by their fellow Jews for two reasons:
 - a. One, they made themselves rich by also extorting unfair and unreasonable taxes from their Jewish brethren, and then illegally keeping a percentage of the profits for themselves.
 - b. And two, they were easy to bribe and would also give preferential treatment or show favoritism to their friends, giving them an unauthorized tax break – if they required them to pay taxes at all.
 3. And so, in essence Jesus is saying, even the worst of men will love those who love them, and greet those who greet them.
 4. But the Lord demands His disciples rise above that kind of mindset.
 5. Jesus demands that His disciples be like God in heaven who gives blessings to both the evil and the good, both the righteous and the unrighteous – a God who shows no partiality, or favoritism.

D. But all this still leaves us asking "Why?" Why is it so important that we love, bless, do good to, and pray for our enemies.

1. Jesus said, **Matthew 5:48** – *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*
2. The word "perfect" means "brought to completion, full-grown, lacking nothing."
3. In other words, when we display love and show compassion and mercy to our enemies – to those who persecute us or seek to do us harm – we become "complete" and "full-grown" in developing the qualities of godliness in our lives – showing love, kindness and tender compassion to those who are evil and unthankful.

III. And so as we come to the end of **Matthew chapter 5 verses 21 through 48** we now understand a little more of what Jesus expects of those who would be His disciples.

A. Throughout these verses Jesus gets down to the very essence of what it means to be righteous.

1. He reveals that righteousness isn't simply EXTERNAL COMPLIANCE with the Law of God.
2. TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS goes to the INTERNAL CONDITION of our heart that MOTIVATES us to be compliant with the Law of God.

- B. In **verses 21 through 48** Jesus repeatedly said *"You have heard that it was said... But I say to you..."*
1. As Jesus Himself said just a few verses earlier, He had not come to destroy the Law of Moses, or in any way diminish its importance.
 - a. Jesus and His disciples were Jews living the time when the Law of Moses (the Old Testament) was in effect, and they were obligated to faithfully keep that Law.
 - b. However, the Jewish people of His day had lost sight of the true essence of that Law and were following the traditional INTERPRETATIONS of the Law MORE THAN they were following what God had actually said.
- C. And so, in **verses 21 through 48 of Matthew chapter 5** Jesus did two things.
1. First, He swept away all the man-made doctrines and traditional interpretations of the Law of Moses by showing what the Law of Moses actually taught about such things as murder, adultery, the sanctity of marriage, keeping oaths, revenge, and the treatment of our enemies.
 2. And second, Jesus revealed the fundamental truths of the LAW OF CHRIST – the NEW COVENANT that would eventually replace the Law of Moses.

- a. Therefore, Jesus took His disciples back to those eternal truths and those timeless moral and ethical principles God expected all people to live by.
 - b. These eternal truths and timeless principles would be the foundation of the NEW COVENANT – the GOSPEL of the KINGDOM.
- D. Therefore, the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are KINGDOM PRINCIPLES – truths by which you and I are to live by today.
- 1. It isn't just EXTERNAL COMPLIANCE with Law that Jesus is emphasizing in these verses, He speaks about the INTERNAL CONDITION OF THE HEART.
 - a. It's the condition of our HEART that determines whether or not we will be OBEDIENT to the commandments of God or DISOBEDIENT.
 - b. And it's the condition of our HEART that determines whether our actions toward OTHERS will be governed by TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS or by hatred, lust, greed and all other sins of the heart.

CONCLUSION:

- I. This section of Scripture is just another vivid demonstration of how OUR "righteousness" MUST exceed the "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees."
 - A. If we think we can go through life as Christians DOING the right things, but not fully BEING Christ-like in the deepest recesses of our hearts, then we are only deceiving ourselves.
 1. Those who would be disciples of the Lord are people who are changed from the INSIDE out.
 2. And throughout the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will repeatedly stress the importance of the condition of our hearts.
 3. If the heart has been radically changed and converted to mirror the life of Jesus Christ, then our actions will follow.
 4. But – and this is the hard part – if our actions are not consistently those we would expect to see demonstrated by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then our heart may never have been truly converted.
 - a. We might be a Christian in name only – but not truly a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ.
 - B. Has your heart been radically changed and converted to mirror the life of Jesus Christ?

1. There is a very beautiful hymn that expresses our need to reflect the character of Jesus in our lives – written by Albert W. T. Osborn (1886-1967). It's titled "*Let The Beauty of Jesus Be Seen In Me.*"

- a. *Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.*

All His wonderful passion and purity;

May His spirit divine, all my being refine

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

When somebody has been so unkind to you.

Some word's spoken that pierces you through and through.

Think how he was beguiled, spat upon and reviled.

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in you.

2. The beauty of Jesus isn't a beauty that can be seen with the physical eyes.
 - a. That's the way man sees.
 - b. Rather, it's a beauty that radiates from the heart of one who lives a Christ-like life – it's the beauty of a Holy character and an inward righteousness.

C. Do you want the beauty of Jesus to be seen in you?

1. You can begin today by giving your heart and your life completely to Him in faith and obedience – coming to Him in faith, repenting of all your past sins, and be washed clean in the waters of baptism.

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2. Or, you can come back to the Lord and give Him your heart and your life completely once again by repenting of any sins you may have committed in the past, and by confessing those sins to your Father in heaven.