

Loving Like the Father

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[0 : 00] Tonight we're thinking about loving our enemies, loving like the Father. So we'll read from Matthew 5 and from verse 43. This is God's Word.

Ryan. Well, you may have noticed that we actually are jumping backwards from where we were last week. There was a little miscommunication with the worship night.

And so we had Thomas Davis preaching chapter 6 verses 1 through 4. And so we've jumped back to chapter 5. We will jump forward again next Sunday night.

But we are in the Sermon on the Mount. And we're in those passages where Jesus, there's six of them, where Jesus has said, You have heard that it was said, but I say to you.

And tonight we're again in one of the most familiar of all of the teachings of Jesus when we're talking about loving your enemy. Now, one of the things that if you know me very well, you probably know, I have a big problem where I Google way too many things.

[1 : 45] Something will come up and Kelly will just say, Ryan, you don't have to Google that. Okay. Well, there has been a little bit of a cure to that problem as Christian. And then Spencer introduced me to chat GPT.

So now it gets all of my questions. And as I was trying to play with Microsoft's AI version called Copilot, I just put in the question, what makes Jesus unique?

I just wanted to see what it would say. What makes Jesus unique? And this is what Copilot said.

While many philosophers emphasized ethical living, self-improvement, or societal structures, Jesus introduced an unwavering focus on selfless love, not only for friends or the deserving, but even for enemies, an idea profoundly countercultural at the time.

So even AI, when you just put in something like what makes Jesus unique, talks about our passage here tonight, which is about loving our enemies.

It is so foundational to the Christian life. And in fact, it's probably so familiar to us if you've grown up in church, that there's a little bit of a temptation to kind of just stop focusing and saying, yeah, I've been there, done that.

[3 : 02] What am I going to hear tonight that I've not heard before? And the answer to that is probably nothing, but that is not the Christian life. The Christian life is not just learning new things, but many times learning how to apply in a fresh way what the Word of God says to us.

In fact, as I was preparing for this for a couple of weeks, I was kind of diving into some of the minutiae and some of the different things that the commentaries were saying, and it just hit me like I'm getting lost in all of these details when just such the basic teaching of Christianity is you must love even your enemies.

And so that's where we are tonight. We're trying to ask this question, how can we love our enemies? There's something so simple about it, yet so profound in this passage, and we must not gloss over it.

So we'll start in chapter 5, verse 43, where Jesus says, you've heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

Now, the Old Testament law did tell us to love our neighbor. And the question that came to my mind was, did the scribes and Pharisees really teach, love your neighbor, but hate your enemies?

[4 : 26] Well, apparently so. But if you think about it, there are passages in the Old Testament where you can kind of see where they get it from. For instance, Psalm 97.10 says, Oh, you who love the Lord, hate evil.

Or if you look at some of the Psalms, they're calling curses down on the enemies of God's people. If you're living in oppression like they are at this time, you can see how it would be easy to say, well, these people are evil, therefore we must love our neighbor.

But it's okay to hate these people because they are evil. They are my enemies. These are evil people who are against God and His people. And so, also, they are not my neighbor. The Pharisees taught that your neighbor were Israelites. If you were not an Israelite, you were not my neighbor. So I didn't have to love you. And Jesus says, that's not what God teaches us. Love your neighbor applies not just to Israelites, but to even your enemies. We do know that the Qumran community that gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls, we know that they did actively teach that you are to love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

[5 : 42] So it was a prevalent teaching at that time. But before we just cast judgment on them, we can convince ourselves of many things. If we want it to be true, we can even convince ourselves of that in Scripture.

I won't give any examples of that, but you know what I'm talking about. If we want it to be true, a lot of times we will even find Scriptures to try to prove our point. And that's what the Pharisees and scribes would do.

You have heard it was 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.

Jesus said, love your enemies. And the word their enemy means someone that is opposed to you, someone that is hostile toward you. It's someone that you hate.

Now, some of you may read this or hear this and think, well, when I think of enemies, I don't really have any enemies. And if you have no one, on one side, if you have no one that you can see is like that person or those people oppose me, you might not be standing on real convictions.

[6 : 55] If no one is opposed to you, you might be a people pleaser and not living according to convictions. On the other side, if you're thinking, okay, I can think of a lot of enemies, then you might just be a jerk.

Neither one of those are good, okay? But we can all think about people in our lives that would be opposed to us. Maybe it's not saying, calling someone an enemy, but we might say, I have a really hard time loving this person.

Or those who oppose us that we're like, I can't even stand to be around them. Who are the people that push our buttons, that set us off? I mean, just to even pull out a little bit further, think about the political leaders that you're just eager to talk bad about.

Think about the very least, those in the media, when we're seeing like social media or something, that just makes our blood boil. Those would be our enemies. Maybe it hits a little closer to home and it's someone that has made fun of you or mistreated you.

Maybe someone that bullied us. Someone who actively mistreats others. Maybe not us, but someone we love. Who are those that we are most likely to avoid?

[8 : 09] And this would even apply, maybe you wouldn't call this person an enemy, but that person that just annoys us. Who are those people that come to your mind? And Jesus says, love your enemies.

Jesus doesn't just say, don't retaliate. He doesn't just tell us to avoid, don't be mean or anything like that. He tells us to actively love our enemies.

Now, love is obviously linked to showing kindness in Luke 6, in the same kind of passage. We call Luke 6 the Sermon on the Plains. It says he came down from a mountain.

Sermon on the Plains, Sermon on the Mount has some of the same things. And in that passage, he tells us to actively do good to our enemies. But this, when he says, love your neighbor as yourself, that would apply to this.

We are to love them. And when Jesus says, love your neighbor as yourself, I mean, we can think about it to the same extent that I would try to feed myself when I'm hungry.

[9 : 13] that's the extent to which I should love my enemies to make sure they have food as well. To make sure my needs are met, that's the same extent to which I should love my enemies and make sure their needs are met.

This sounds kind of crazy. Could we really actually live like this? Paul says that love bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things.

Can I really bear all things for the sake of love in regard to my enemy? Can I really think the best of them and hope that good things happen to my enemy?

Because that's what love does. Love your enemies. Can I really extend this kind of love, the love that Jesus calls us to, to my enemies.

And look what he says. He says, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Pray for them. Why does he say pray for them? Dallas Willard, who wrote a book called Divine Conspiracy, which addresses the Sermon on the Mount, he says that prayer is the highest form of loving someone.

[10:24] When you pray for someone, you really are wishing for their good. You want their good to happen. So when he says pray for those who persecute you, that is one of the highest forms that we can have of loving someone.

Praying is also connected, when we think about prayer, we think about provision, we think about prosperity for thriving. Do we really pray for the thriving of those who are actively against us? This word persecute here, it literally means active pursuit. that someone who is chasing after you in order to overtake and harm you.

Pray for those people. The people who actively want bad things for you, we are to pray for them, to want their good, and to even ask God to give them good things.

Like the change of heart? Those who actively seek our harm. Pray for those that persecute you. And Jesus says, do this so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

[11:35] This doesn't mean in order to become sons of your Father who is in heaven. It means because you are His sons. Because you are God's children, children, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

Demonstrate that you are a child of your Father in heaven by loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you. How in the world could we possibly do this?

This is exactly how the Father treated us. Romans chapter 5, verses 8 through 10, says that God demonstrated His love for us and while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

It goes down to verse 10 and says, 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.

We were enemies when God pursued us. That same word for enemy is used in Colossians 1.21 that says we were hostile toward God.

[12:50] Those who are without Christ are actively opposed against God just like we were. This is how God treated us.

That while we were enemies, He pursued us. In order to overtake us with His grace and His mercy. This is one of the clearest truths of the Gospel.

That is, it is love for His enemies that brought Christ to earth to die on the cross for your sins. And if you get nothing else out of the sermon tonight, let your heart just be full of love and worship for the Father, that He would pursue you while you were His active enemy.

And if you just get that, if you just meditate on that and get that at the deep down heart level, all of a sudden, God's love will then overflow out of you even to your enemies.

That's how we love like the Father. Father. As we understand that this is how He loved us. That while we were His enemies, He pursued us. He loved us.

[14:04] Now, this teaching, as ChatGPT and Co-Pilot would tell us, this teaching was unique during the time. Now, there were some other teachings that would basically say stuff like maybe avoid your enemies, maybe don't try to do things to disrupt things with your enemies, but nothing to go as far as to say love your enemy.

Pray for your enemy. This was something that was completely new, completely unique, and it has changed our world. It has changed our world and it is even depicted in our stories now.

You can look up, I mean, just do a Google search if you want to, shout out to Google still, but just movies that portray loving your enemies, books that portray loving your enemies, and just look at all the list of things that show up.

It has changed the way we tell our stories. Now, all of my kids have loved the Marvel movies, the Avengers. There's one movie in the Avengers that I particularly like called the Black Panther, and spoiler alert, but if you haven't seen it, it's your fault.

King T'Challa has been defeated by Killmonger. He is the Black Panther, and he has lost the mantle of the Black Panther. He's left for dead.

[15:29] He's nursed back to health, and he has dreams and plans of coming back and taking back the throne, taking back the mantle of Black Panther. and when he fights Killmonger, he wins, but instead of destroying him, he has mercy on him and even tries to save him and offer him healing.

He even honors him by taking him to the top of the mountain where he can look over at the sunset, setting over Wakanda, kind of one of his last dreams. This is a depiction of loving even your enemy. They get that from Jesus. Maybe a little bit closer to home, Joe Rowling happened to put this in the Harry Potter series as the villain, like, you know, well, not the main villain, but one of the guys that just drives you crazy from the very beginning of the book, Draco Malfoy, all the way through, you can't stand the guy, you really do have this distaste, dislike.

He's awful, right? But it's the end of the books. Again, spoiler alert, but if you haven't seen it, it's your fault or haven't read it. It's been available for a long time. At the end, they're in the room of requirement.

You know what I'm talking about? And Crab calls the fiend fire or whatever it's called, and it gets out of control. They get brooms. Harry and his friends get brooms, and they're flying out.

[17:00] And they see Draco hanging there. They see him in trouble. And Harry's friends are like, see ya. Harry's like, no, I gotta go back for him.

And all of a sudden, we see this valor, this courageous thing where he risks his life for his specific enemy. And it changed everything.

It changed Harry's heart. It changed Draco's heart. And that's one of the things that we see. That when we love our enemies, it changes things.

And at the very least, it changes our own hearts when we allow the love of God to spill out to us, even to our enemies. It will certainly change you.

Verse 45 says, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

[18:01] Now, don't miss the significance of this. In an agrarian society, having sun and rain is completely, it's so important for prosperity, even for life.

Without sun and rain, there is gonna be complete death. Famine. In an agrarian society, sun and rain are basic necessities that they must have in order to survive.

So if you think about the idolatry of Israel that they were tempted with in the Old Testament, think about some of the names. The Baal, Asherah, Dagon, Chemosh.

Baal was the storm god. Asherah was the goddess of fertility. Dagon, grain and agriculture.

Chemosh, fertility. So much of it was linked to just crying out to anything that they thought would listen so that they would get sun and rain for their crops to grow, for the society to flourish.

God sends His sun and rain even on the enemies. He knows that by sending sun and rain to the pagans, to those who actively oppose Him, they are not gonna give Him credit for it, but give these false idols, these false gods credit for sending the storms, for sending the sun, and for sending the rain.

[19:27] If God were petty and spiteful, He would withhold the sun and the rain except for those who recognize Him from exactly where it came from. But He gives His sun and rain even to those who don't recognize Him, to His enemies, those who actively oppose Him.

Now in modern times, if you even think about it, the sun rising and setting is one of those things that is foundational for why science works.

Science relies on the assumption that the universe operates according to consistent laws that can be observed, tested, and predicted. God's gift of sun leads some to trust in science instead of Him. But that is the love of our Father, that He sends His Son and His rain even on His enemies, on the evil and on the good.

When we love our enemies, we are acting like children of the Father in heaven. Now, remember in the Sermon on the Mount and these passages we've been talking about that Jesus isn't just giving us some rules to obey.

[20:47] He's telling us how to become kingdom people so that love overflows from our hearts even towards our enemies. Remember, He's getting to the heart of things.

You've heard that it was said, you shall not murder, but I say to you, don't even be angry with your brother. Anger, murder, adultery, lust.

He's getting at the heart. And with this passage, He's helping us see how love can overflow from our hearts into the way that we live our lives so that it even spills out to our enemies.

And then in verse 46, He says, For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

For if you love those that love you, He's starting to list some of the enemies of these people. Tax collectors. They were like the ultimate betrayers of Israel.

[21 : 49] One way that we would think about people, the way that we think about terrorists and racists and fascists, awful people in our minds, like that's the way they would think of tax collectors.

And He's saying, even those people love those who love them. How different are you if you only love people that love you? Do not even the 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? Now this idea of greeting someone, it means to embrace or to welcome, to receive them.

It was often done in that culture with a kiss on the cheek. But it has this idea of showing honor and respect. So we're to greet people.

In other words, we're to welcome, receive, show honor to people who are not just people that we know and love, but all people. And one of the things that we need to understand from this passage is that our treatment of people must never depend on who they are, but it depends on who we are.

[23 : 00] We're children of our Father who is in heaven. And this Father in heaven loves even His enemies. This should transform our lives.

And then it says, you know, what reward have you? He brings up the idea of reward. He'll do it again in chapter 6. This idea of reward, to be kingdom people, to be able to love our enemies, we have to understand that life is not just about the here and now.

There's also a life that is yet to come that we are to live for, living in light of eternity, knowing that our time here is a short time before Jesus comes back and will make all things new.

We are to live in light of that, in light of eternity. There is reward. And when we think about that life, when we think about that this life on earth is just a blip on the radar, it allows us to understand that, okay, we can live differently because there is a time that is to come where Jesus will make all things new.

And I want even my enemies to be there with me. I want them to know the love of the Father. And if that's not our heart, where we want our enemies to come to know the love of the Father, we need to question the love that is in us.

[24 : 18] Because that's how He taught us to love. To want the world to know. Even our enemies to know the love of the Father. Loving your enemy is foundational to the Christian life.

It is the most basic teaching of Jesus. But it's tough. It's not easy to love those who annoy us.

It's not easy to love those who push our buttons. Who set us off. And even enjoy doing so. How do we love those who bully others and mistreat others?

How do we love them? Those people that have come to our mind tonight while we've been in this passage. How do we love them? We must meditate on the love of our Father and what He did for us.

He loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die. He sent Jesus to fulfill all righteousness that we could not do. To live the life that we couldn't live.

[25 : 26] And then He died the death that we deserved to die. His enemies. And in doing so He brought us into the family of God.

So now we have a Father who loves His enemies and He's teaching us and empowering us by His Spirit to do the same. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

One final word. This verse 48 here. In my Bible it's put with this same paragraph.

You therefore must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. There are many that will say that this verse is actually a summary of everything going back to verse 17.

All the passages that are you've heard that it was said but I say to you all of those passages that this verse you therefore must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect that it applies to all of that.

[26 : 24] It's a summary of those kind of things. In all of those things Jesus is not just telling us we have a new law to obey. He's not giving us a new law.

He's helping us get to the intent the matters of the heart. And in verse 20 He even says that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees.

He's basically saying that the scribes and the Pharisees are all about outward obedience. I'm telling you it goes to the heart. So we get to verse 48.

You therefore must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. That word therefore perfect that might not be the best English translation of it.

There's one commentator that makes a great case and he's not alone in this but makes a great case that this word is often translated as complete or whole.

[27 : 22] You must be whole as your Heavenly Father is whole. This word you may know the Old Testament was translated into Greek it's called the Septuagint and this word that's used here teleos in the Old Testament is sometimes translated shalom it's replacing the Hebrew word shalom completeness wholeness okay you must be whole as your Heavenly Father is whole and basically what that would mean is it's this idea that to be whole your inside heart attitudes and motivations must line up with your outward actions and behaviors to be whole as God is whole means that your heart and your actions are aligned to that of the Heavenly Father you must be perfect or whole as your Heavenly Father is whole Jesus cares about our hearts here not just an outward obedience he is going for the heart as we follow

Jesus we're not following a teaching we're following a person and as we do we become more and more like him conforming our lives to his word it's about becoming kingdom people and when we love like the Father we learn how to love even our enemies and he empowers us to do so we're called to love our neighbor as ourself that extends to everyone including our enemies so what my challenge for us myself included is tonight is to as we think about who those people are that we feel like actively oppose us are those people that are against us who push our buttons who annoy us who we try to avoid who we just don't like we can't even stand to be around them whoever those people are we must learn to meditate on God's love for us and what he has done for us as his enemies what he did for us in Jesus

Christ making us enemies now into his family his children meditate on that until it gets us deep down so that we can then love like our heavenly father let us pray God we thank you that even though we were opposed to you we were not giving you the credit you deserve for everything in our life we were not recognizing that you were the giver of all good things in fact we didn't even want to give up control of our lives but yet you a loving father pursued us that while we were enemies you made us your children through the blood of Jesus Christ thank you for doing that may we worship you may our hearts be turned toward you in complete allegiance in complete loyalty love in a fire in a passion that we would want to love as you love and may that spill over into all of our neighbors including our enemies help us to love this world to love the people around us as you love them thank you for giving us your spirit who applies your word to our lives so that we are empowered as your children because we have your spirit to love like you love please help us to do this in Jesus name amen