



Matthew: The King and His Kingdoms

Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 15: Love Your Enemy-Really?

Matthew 5:43-48

June 5, 2011

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We have come to the last of Jesus' "You have heard that it was said" statements in this section. And remember that Jesus has described for us what a follower of His looks like and what the life of that follower will look like and how his internal righteousness, that exceeds that of the Pharisees in kind and not degree, will evidence itself in how the follower of Christ lives and how he responds in certain situations that he encounters. And this passage is no different but this passage is very hard. Love your enemies---really, I have to do that? This is hard. Think about last week---a follower of Christ, when personally insulted or wronged or inconvenienced, will not seek revenge or retaliate. This is hard enough because our flesh loves it.

-But notice the progression here. Not only are we not to retaliate or seek revenge but we are to go way beyond that and actually love our enemy. We could just not retaliate---we could do that and just let the issue go but Jesus says that is not the way of His follower. It is not just enough to not retaliate but you must love this person sincerely and genuinely. Remember the illustration where Sam cut my hand off and I retaliated by cutting his head off. I could just not do that and accept the fact that I would have only one hand for the rest of my life but I could still hate him in my heart and do it with a passion. But Jesus says that I must love him even if he is my enemy and seeking to do me harm. This is crazy because it is so abnormal and totally different than what you will see in the world.

-But keep in mind that Jesus is addressing the heart of the matter not just the physical. Jesus is focused on the heart of the follower not just some external conformity. What we have studied so far in the Sermon on the Mount has been focused on the internal and the passage today does the same. You can't possibly love you enemy externally and it seem genuine. This must come from the heart.

-So just as last week as we dig into this passage, I want us to focus on our hearts and the type of love that we find their for those who are our enemies---those who seek to do us harm in any way. Let's see what we can learn from this passage.

1 – Be careful not to change Biblical standards (43).

““You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ”
(Matthew 5:43, ESV)

Again, we must understand that when Jesus starts with “You have heard that it was said, He is not changing the Old Testament law but He is correcting a misinterpretation of it. Also, always remember that Scripture interprets Scripture and if your interpretation of a passage conflicts with the testimony of another passage and the message of the bible as a whole then your interpretation is wrong. The Pharisees needed to learn this principle of hermeneutics.

-So just like last week we need to look at the Old Testament context of the law to understand what Jesus is saying here.

“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.” (Leviticus 19:18, ESV)

-Here in the first part of this passage, we see the disobedience of the Pharisees concerning their belief that they had a right to their personal revenge but we see the standard of love that God calls His people to. To love others as you do yourself with a genuine concern and actual care for them has always been God’s standard for human relations. God created human life and in His image. It has always been this way.

-So what had the Pharisees done with this? How had they twisted the passage and misinterpreted it?

A – They narrowed the standard of the love God demanded. Do you see the difference? God’s command was to love your neighbor as “YOURSELF.” The Pharisees had omitted the standard of God in His command to love your neighbor. Well, why would they do that we might ask? Because they didn’t want to have to live up to that standard. Well, why not we still may ask? And the answer is because they loved themselves so much that they didn’t want to have to love anyone else that much and in that way. This is the way it is with the self-righteous. They thought too highly of themselves and it is impossible for them to love anyone else as much as themselves. So what do you do? You leave that part of God’s Word out in the interpretation of it! And that is exactly what the Pharisees did. And they didn’t stop with just taking away from God’s Word but they added to it. Look at this.

B – They narrowed the object of God’s love by exclusion. In this Leviticus passage, it says nothing of hating your enemy. The Old Testament never commands to hate your enemy. The passage says you shall love your neighbor as yourself but the Pharisees had excluded enemies

from this command and actually had interpreted it to mean that you had a right to hate your enemies. How did they do this? By redefining who your neighbor is! If I only have to love my neighbor and I define who my neighbors are, then it is ok to exclude others from my love and not only that, I have the right to hate them.

-And the Pharisees had defined a neighbor to be a fellow Jew, one to be only of their race and their religion. And they were selective even in their own standards. The Pharisees often looked down on the common people because of their high view of themselves. Remember the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple. What did the Pharisee pray? I am glad that I am not like this man because he is a tax collector. There was no recognition of his own sin but only the recognition of another man's sin that he was comparing himself too. Jesus wasn't the standard, a tax collector was and in his eyes he was perfect. So they had really narrowed the meaning of neighbor to be ones that were like them.

-Remember the interpretation principle---Scripture interprets Scripture. Last week we saw the Pharisees disregard other Scripture in their interpretation and this week is no different. The Pharisees had interpreted this law in Lev. 19 to exclude strangers and enemies and since the command was to love only your neighbors then they could hate others. The problem with that is that it contradicts the testimony of God's Word.

-“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.” (Leviticus 19:34, ESV)

-This command of God is in the same chapter. They had to intentionally overlook this Scripture to justify their actions concerning strangers.

-But what about enemies---what does Scripture say about them?

““If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.” (Exodus 23:4–5, ESV)

“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,” (Proverbs 25:21, ESV)

-This is not hatred beloved!

-Seriously, the Pharisees would not have helped a common Jew this way much less a stranger or an enemy but this is what God commanded and they ignored it to justify their fleshly hatred.

““If I have rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me, or exulted when evil overtook him (I have not let my mouth sin by asking for his life with a curse),” (Job 31:29–30, ESV)

-In this passage, hating an enemy or even desiring his ruin is equated with sinning. You would think that the Pharisees would hate sin and seek to let it not reign in them but they overlooked their sin in the justification of their actions by twisting and disregarding the very words of God. So it is with the self-righteous.

-Application Question: What do we do with the Word of God when it commands something of us that is hard and requires something of us? Are we willing to twist it to justify our actions which is an overflow of our heart? Do we really seek and desire to apply God’s Word to our life? Is our opinion or God’s Word the standard by which we live.

-And just so we know, asking who is my neighbor is the wrong question and it reveals a heart that is in the wrong place. The question that should be asked is how can I be a good neighbor. Jesus addresses this in a parable that you all know very well but let’s briefly revisit it so that we know who our neighbors are and so that we will be asking the right question.

-You remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. A lawyer stood up and asked how to inherit eternal life. Jesus returned question for question and asked the lawyer what was written in the law and the lawyer got it right. He said to love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. Get this now---he knew the Scriptures. He had the knowledge. And Jesus answered him, you got it correct, do this and you will live. But the lawyer only wanted to justify himself and in doing so he asked the wrong question. What did he ask---who is my neighbor? Jesus gave him the illustration where the Samaritan (who would be an enemy of the Jews) is the one who helps the man who has been robbed and beaten (the priest and the Levite just pass by) and He ask the lawyer who had been the neighbor. The lawyer had only one option and it was the Samaritan who had showed mercy (and thus reflected the mercy of God) and Jesus told him to go and do likewise. And in this Jesus not only answered the lawyers question of who is our neighbor (everybody) but He also addressed the real issue of the heart and that issue is that we should be a good neighbor. We are to be doing likewise. A heart that seeks to redefine neighbor is in the wrong place. Love’s question is never who to love, because we are to love everyone, but only how to love most helpfully. How is our heart today? Are we asking who is my neighbor? We should be asking how can I be a good neighbor and reflect most God’s character and nature.

-So we see the Pharisees adding to their interpretation to hate your enemy. Well, isn’t there a sense in which we should hate the enemy of God? Isn’t there a righteous hatred just like there is a righteous anger? Yes, there is but we need to be very careful that we don’t allow our flesh

to use righteous hatred and anger as an excuse to not love our neighbor. This is what the Pharisees had done. They used 2 excuses for adding hate your enemy---the holy war of the Old Testament in Joshua and the imprecatory Psalms. I want to briefly look at both so that we get an understanding of the concept of a righteous hatred.

-Holy War---this refers to the conquest by Joshua when God commanded to destroy the Canaanites. The Canaanites were known for being corrupt and vile in their religion and culture. They were among the most vile, corrupt and depraved people known to history and unbelievably immoral, cruel and idolatrous. And if Israel were to inhabit the land with these people and follow their customs they would also share in their fate. So God, out of love for His chosen people, used Israel as an instrument of His judgment against the Canaanites to protect His people and to war against idolatry. And it was God's war against His enemy. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote this about the conquest and this passage in Matthew...

"The wars of Israel were the only holy wars in history, for they were the wars of God against the world of idols. It is not this enmity which Jesus condemns, for then He would have condemned the whole of history of God's dealing with His people. On the contrary, He affirms the Old Covenant."

-Holy War was God's war against His enemy and gives us no right to hate our own enemy.

-Imprecatory Psalms---Imprecatory means to invoke or call down on someone. We see in Psalms the invoking of God's judgment and hatred on the wicked.

"Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain! Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies." (Psalm 139:19-22, ESV)

-How do we reconcile this beloved?

-So how can the David, a man after God's own heart, be right in this Psalm? How can David say that he hates these enemies with a complete hatred when he is supposed to love them? The answer is that he is hating God's enemies and not his own. David is speaking as a representative of God's chosen people and he regards the enemies of God his enemies because he has completely identified himself with the cause of God and he hates wickedness because he loves God. His hatred is a hatred of God's enemies and not his own and his hatred is not laced with spite or vindictiveness but is driven only by a love for God's honor and glory. And David is so sure that this hatred is righteous that in the next verses of the same Psalm he calls upon God to examine his heart concerning it. Look at it.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23–24, ESV)

-These Psalms of David did not represent David’s personal vendetta against his own enemies but his concern for God’s holiness and justice to be executed and glorified. That’s why David could write in Psalm 69:9...

“For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.” (Psalm 69:9, ESV)

-This is the verse that Jesus quotes when He clears the temple and we see that David and Jesus share the same passion for the honor and glory of the Father.

-So we see it is one thing to defend the honor and glory of the Lord but it is entirely another thing to hate people personally as our own enemies. Beloved, guard your hearts against using righteous hatred and righteous anger as an excuse to disobey God’s command to love your enemy and to love your neighbor as yourself! And Jesus responds to this issue in verse 44.

2 – Love and pray for your enemies! (44).

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” (Matthew 5:44, ESV)

-So how are we supposed to love our enemies? What does that look like? How do we find the balance of loving them and having a righteous hatred of evil? That’s a good question that we need to address.

-The first thing we need to know is that the righteous hatred of evil and the enemies of God is rooted in His glory and it is with an eternal perspective. What that means is that our hatred of them is a hatred that is focused upon God’s judgment at the day of Christ of those who refuse to repent and believe. To hate God’s enemy is to desire that because of their refusal to repent and due to their rejection of Christ that they will incur the judgment of God and therefore glorify God’s justness on the reckoning day of the Lord.

-But where does that leave us right now? It leaves us in the here and now. It leaves us in the present life that we now live by faith in the Son of God. It leaves us having to know that we are not God and we don’t know who will repent and believe because only God knows men’s hearts--we don’t. So what does that mean for us? Well, Jesus tells us---love your enemies. So how do we do that in light of an eternal perspective? To love our enemies means that we have a heartfelt desire that their eyes and hearts will be opened to see who Christ really is. That they will see His holiness and glory and will see their sin and their desperate need for a Savior. To love our enemies is to hope and desire that they repent and be saved.

-R.C.H. Lenski wrote this..."Love indeed, sees all the hatefulness and the wickedness of the enemy, feels his stabs and his blows, may even have something to do toward warding them off; but all this simply fills the loving heart with the one desire and aim, to free its enemy from his hate, to rescue him from his sin, and thus to save his soul."

-And how is this heartfelt desire for our enemies repentance to manifest itself practically? In a parallel passage in Luke, Jesus says to:

"“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ” (Luke 6:27–28, ESV)

-Jesus tells us that practically we are to do good to them, to bless them and to pray for them. Not only are we not supposed to seek retaliation or revenge, not only are we not to hate them but we are supposed to love them from our hearts and desire their repentance and that will manifest itself in a follower of Christ by our serving our enemies. Really, I need to serve my enemies. According to Jesus, yes. True love for someone will seek to serve them. And this doing good to them will not be sentiment but true service. Christ gave His life for His enemies. Romans 5 says that while we were weak, ungodly, sinners and enemies that Christ died for us. We are to give ourselves to serving our enemies like that. That is nuts to the world---but it is God’s Word to us!

-To bless our enemies is to have thoughts and words of desire for their good. When they wish to harm us and for bad to come our way, our heart and words will desire for good to come their way.

-And the love that wishes to serve and do good and bless our enemies will also evidence itself in our prayers for our enemies. Jesus said to pray for those who persecute you. Bonhoeffer also wrote,

“Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God.”

-And as we continue to pray more and more for our enemies our love for them will grow. That’s the way it is with prayer. The more we pray for someone the more we love them.

-And Jesus is not telling us to do anything here that He did not do Himself. When He was hanging on the cross He prayed for those who were killing Him, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). And we see this worked out in the followers of Jesus. Stephen when he was being stoned, he cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

-There was a Scottish reformer named George Wishart who was a contemporary and friend of John Knox and he was sentenced to die because of his faith. He had selflessly ministered to hundreds of people who were dying of the plague and his executioner knew of it. The executioner was hesitant to carry out his task and the remorse showed on his face. Wishart saw the remorse on the face of the one who would execute him and he walked over to him, kissed him on the cheek and said this, "Sir, may that be a token that I forgive you." This is a prayer acted out and this is how you love your enemy.

-Application question: Are we seeking to do good and serve our enemies, seeking to bless them and do we pray for them with a heartfelt love like this?

Jesus goes on to tell us why this kind of love is important.

3 – Loving our enemies reflects the character and the nature of God (45-47).

"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 sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? 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?" (Matthew 5:45-47, ESV)

-Now is Jesus teaching here that in order to become a son of the heavenly Father that we must love our enemy? Is Jesus teaching that this work of loving our enemy is what brings us into the Father's family? No, we all know better than that because that would be a works based salvation and totally go against the testimony of Scripture. We know that only by the grace of God in Christ and His finished work on the cross is one justified before God and adopted into His family.

-So what is Jesus getting at here---what is His point here? Well, it is very simple. Jesus is saying that by loving our enemy we don't become a son but we reflect and demonstrate that we are already a son or daughter of the family. The testimony of Scripture is that true saving faith always evidences itself in a life of obedience. And Jesus says here that part of that obedient life that proves that you belong to the Father is loving your enemies.

-Application of this is so hard. We can find so many excuses to not love our enemy. And we can hear these words and let them rattle around in our brains and have this knowledge but that will not reflect God's character and nature and that is what is so hard here. It's only when this teaching of Jesus is actually applied in our life do we reflect the nature and character of God. So it is with all of God's Word---it must be applied to daily life. And there is no way we can love

our enemies without the power of the Holy Spirit. It just won't happen. So my prayer today is that we would desire the work of God in our hearts to enable us to apply this teaching and thus love our enemies and bring glory to God by reflecting His divine love.

-This is how we will be known as His disciples---by the way that we love. Divine love is a mark of a follower of Christ and this is what Jesus has been describing to us-what the life of a true follower of His looks like. One thing that we have to add to the list---loving our enemies.

-Why loving our enemies? Why should we do this? Just because it reflects the way the Father loves. Look at it.

-“For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ” (Matthew 5:45, ESV)

-God gives the sun and the rain, His common blessings, to the good and to the evil, to the just and the unjust. Most theologians call this God's common grace. God's benevolence is indiscriminate and it is expressed in the gifts of creation---sun and the rain. And the purpose for these gifts of God's kindness---repentance.

“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4, ESV)

-And so we see the connection to the meaning of loving our enemy is to desire their repentance and salvation. That is a reflection of the heart of the Father.

-And the divine love of the Father that we are to reflect will exceed the love that the world reflects. Jesus gives us some examples to show this.

“For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? 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?” (Matthew 5:46–47, ESV)

-You know the tax collectors were hated---remember Zaccheus. They extorted money from their own people. They were puppets for the Roman government who was oppressing the Jews. So the Jews hated the tax collectors. And the Gentiles is the pagan world---the dogs of the world. Even these people love and greet those who love and greet them. Even fallen man can love but fallen love is filled with self-interest. And what Jesus is saying to us here is that if we love and greet only those who love and greet us then we are no better than the pagans. Christians are called to love their enemies! It is not good enough just to resemble non-Christians! Jesus is asking us here, “What more are you doing than those of the world? To Jesus, the hallmark of a true follower of His is the extraordinary. What is the extraordinary? Jesus displayed it when He went to the cross and died for us who were at the time HIS ENEMY.

Romans 5 tells us that while we were weak, ungodly, sinners and enemies, that Christ died for us. John tells us that is the love of God---that HE would send His son to be the propitiation for our sins! That Jesus would bear the wrath of God for His enemies. And we are to love our enemies with the same kind of love---the love of God! And God's love is perfect and Jesus tells us to love with that kind of perfect love. Look at it.

4 – Strive for perfection (48).

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. ” (Matthew 5:48, ESV)

-This is amazing---Jesus brings us full circle here. He ends the “You have heard that it was said” statements the same way that He began.

-Look at verses 17-21 again. Jesus says that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill them. All the Law and the Prophets point to Him. He determines their meaning, their fulfillment and their continuity. And Jesus tells us in Matthew 22 these words.

-“And he said to him, “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. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” ” (Matthew 22:37–40, ESV)

-All the Law and the Prophets hang on the law of love. And Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of God's law of love and now He is commanding us to reflect that divine love and so reflect God's holiness and nature and so bring Him glory. He is commanding us to love the way He loved and reflect the perfect love of the Father. And beloved, there is nothing external about this. This is all about our the internal. And our imitating God's holiness in this divine, perfect love precludes all religious hypocrisy and religious duties. These teachings of Jesus are directed straight at our hearts as His followers. The love that God shows is the kind of love that He commands---
PERFECT.

-I want to close with a quote from Frederick Buechner who put it this way.

-The love for equals is a human thing---of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love what is loving and lovely. The world smiles.

The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing---the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world.

The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing---to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich. The world is always bewildered by its saints.

And then there is love for the enemy---love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured's love for the torturer. This is God's love. It conquers the world."

5 – Application

-Believer first: (those who know that you are a son/daughter of the heavenly Father)

-Who are your enemies today?

-How are you loving them?

-How are you serving them?

-Do you have a heartfelt desire to see the grace of God poured into their lives or are you like Jonah?

-How are you praying for them?

-Is your sonship being evidenced in the way you are loving your enemies?

-This is not easy and this is one area that once again shows our total dependence upon God. Fall before the cross in total dependence of our Lord and cry out for God's grace and mercy to enable you to love your enemies and so reflect God's character and nature and perfection and so bring Him glory.

-Meditate on the beautiful life that Jesus is describing here. A life is filled with the blessings of God as seen in the Beattitudes. A life that is salt and light to the world around you. A life that is free of unrighteous anger and lust. A life that sees Christ and the church in marriage. A life that values the truth. A life that doesn't desire retaliation or revenge but desires to love your enemies. A life that is possible only because Christ died for His enemy---you. This is a beautiful heart that Jesus is putting before us in these passages. Is this your heart. Does this describe your life? Cry out to God for His grace and mercy that it would! Cry out to Him in total dependence today.

-Unbeliever:

-I can tell you today that you are definitely not loving your enemy because the testimony of Scripture is that if you have rejected Christ, your only hope of salvation, then you are an enemy

of God because of your sin. There is a dividing wall of hostility between you and God. There is enmity (or hatred) that exist between you and God. If you honestly sit back and think about this and realize that you are an enemy of the creator God of this universe, the all powerful God that created everything that you see, including yourself, and that this powerful God is opposed to you because of your sin, that should make you tremble in yours shoes. Your knees should be shaking right now because you have no hope of victory. But there is good news. God has provided a way for you to be reconciled to Him. He has provided a way for that wall of hostility to be torn down. That way is Christ and His sacrifice on the cross where He died to save enemies of God. Jesus said to repent and believe---repent and believe. Fall on your face today and beg God for His grace and mercy to grant you repentance and to give you the faith to believe. Do it today---do it today! Look to Jesus and come to Him---He is your only hope! Repent and believe in the gospel.

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