

Be Like Your Father

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- [0 : 00] Well, turn with me, if you would, to Matthew chapter 5.
- We're at the end, or we're sort of halfway through, I suppose, the Sermon on the Mount at this point. Matthew 5, taking up the text at verse 43.
- Okay. Jesus speaking here, he says, You have heard that 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, 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 he sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?
- [1 : 25] 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? Do not even the same? Do not even the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
- Okay. So there's a command of Jesus. We're to be perfect. Hands up all those who have achieved that. If we're looking for sinless perfection, we've misunderstood Jesus.
- That's not what he's saying here. He's not telling us that we must have no sin in our lives, although he would tell us not to have sin in our lives. But he's not saying that we need to have reached the stage of sinless perfection at some time or other before we go to heaven.
- But he is saying that we must be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect. He is saying that. So what on earth does he mean by it?
- [2 : 43] Let's see if we can unpick this and have Father's help. Because, you know, we need Father's help more than we realize. If you are going to take another breath right now, you've got Father's help to do that.
- Don't ever take your next breath for granted. Because he's the one who will give it to us. He sustains us through life. My daughter was worried about my health a while ago, and I said to her, you're stuck with me.
- I'm immortal until God calls me home. And then I'm immortal. And that's the reality, folks. It's God.
- When we say, Lord, help us to number our days, the way to number our days, is to thank God that he has numbered them. And nobody else can. Nothing else can. People today are frightened of microbes.
- They're frightened of minuscule, microscopic things that can get into the bloodstream and cause havoc with our health. and maybe even bring about our death.
- [3 : 58] People are afraid of microbes. But who makes the microbes? So, brothers and sisters, we need to begin to think more biblically about who we are and how we behave and how we live in this life.

God never, and I mean this, please, you could go from Genesis right through to the maps at the back and you will never find God commanding something that's impossible.

So, if Jesus has commanded us to be perfect, it's possible to be perfect. Let's try and see what he means by that. You have heard that it was said, he says.

Actually, if you go back through chapter 5, you'll find that that phrase occurs several times. You have heard that it was said. What's he doing? He's attacking tradition.

He's attacking rules and regulations that men and women didn't get from God. He's attacking an imperfect understanding and an imperfect application of the law of Moses.

[5 : 11] Moses' law says love your neighbor. But that doesn't mean that you hate your enemy. But that's the tradition that was being taught by the first century.

Love your neighbor, hate your enemy. It's okay to hate your enemy, but make sure you love your neighbor. And of course, people weren't even doing that. Or the parable of the good Samaritan would never have been told.

You have heard that it was said, says Jesus. But he says, I'm saying to you, there's a, there's a, what's happening here, there's a new authority coming to play.

This is Jesus speaking. This is the Son of God speaking. This is heaven speaking. I don't care what you've heard. I don't care what you've been taught. This is heaven speaking.

And I'm speaking with the, this is the new authority that there has to be in your life. Don't listen to these teachers who are twisting the law, who are twisting Moses, and picking out the bits that they like.

[6 : 16] They like the bit that says, love your neighbor. That's fine. But they don't like the bit that tells you to be kind to your enemy. Where it does, actually.

And we'll look at that later on. But it does actually say to be kind to your enemy. Do you remember the story of Elisha, who was being sought by an armed group of Syrians?

And he actually, he went out to them and he said, he had prayed that God would strike them with blindness. And God did. So Elisha went out and he said, you're going the wrong direction.

Let me show you where you should be going. And he led them right inside his own city, locked the doors, and then said, Lord, open their eyes. And they opened their eyes and they were captured by the man they had been seeking to capture.

And Elisha's servant said to him, shall we kill them, master? Shall we kill them? He says, no, why would you do that? Let's have a feast. Let's have a banquet. Feed them well and we'll send them home.

[7 : 17] And that's what he did. And what was he doing? He was just obeying the teaching that was there in Scripture. In the Old Testament, people think the Old Testament is full of blood and guts and all sorts of horrific things.

But the Old Testament actually teaches us to be kind to our enemies. So here's Jesus bringing correction, showing that there's a fault in the way that people understand the Word of God, raising the standard, completely raising the standard.

Love your enemies. And he says, he says why they should love their enemies. Now here's the clincher. This is staggering.

You should love your enemies so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. In other words, when you love your enemies, you're being given opportunity to represent your Father in heaven whose kindness is indiscriminate.

Indiscriminate kindness. Now listen, folk, we're going to get opportunity by the truckload in days to come, the direction that things are going in Western society.

[8 : 34] We're going to get truckloads of opportunity to love our enemies. All these victim groups that are all over the place, online, on social media, all these hashtag people who say, me too, I'm a victim.

You know, I've got the same problem you have. I'm downtrodden like you are. I'm oppressed like you are. These horrible people are doing all these things to me. There are victim groups by the truckload and they're becoming increasingly violent.

They're becoming increasingly intolerant. Although many of them talk about tolerance all the time, but they're only tolerant of those who agree with them. So, folks, bad things are happening in our society and lots of people already see you and me as the enemy.

They see all Christians, all Bible believers as the enemy. Now, let me ask, hands up if you think you're being persecuted right now.

Put your hand in the air if you think you're being persecuted right now. No? Okay. Well, I've got bad news for you. You already are.

[9 : 51] Let me ask you this. If you're having a conversation with somebody in the lift, you're going up in the lift and there's just you and this friend and you're talking about Jesus and then suddenly a crowd of other people come in on the next floor, do you suddenly stop your conversation about Jesus?

Or do you just keep chatting the way you were? Or do you go silent? Are you afraid to talk about Jesus in certain places? Are you afraid to discuss your faith with your workmates?

Are you afraid to talk about Jesus at school? Well, because if the answer to these questions is yes, you are being persecuted.

You're not free to open your mouth. And yet, we live in what we call a free society, but many people are afraid to open their mouths because they might meet with hostility about their faith in Jesus.

love your enemies. Is that relevant to us today? Yes, I think it is. I think it's very relevant to us today because we all have enemies.

[11 : 01] There are persecutors everywhere. So, what are we going to do about that? Are we going to become paranoid? Are we going to become people who see demons behind every lamppost?

I don't think so. The hope that you have if you're a Christian, the hope that I have because I'm a Christian, is that we shall see the face of our God.

We'll see Him face to face and He has guaranteed that because of the price He paid to rescue us. There are two things at stake in this.

love your enemies so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. What sort of Father is He? He's a Father of universal kindness, indiscriminate kindness.

The people who were kind this morning and good living people this morning, they looked out their window and they saw the sunrise. the gangsters and the terrorists, they saw the sunrise this morning too.

[12 : 19] The people who were really nice and good to know, they enjoyed rain on their crops or rain to maybe help clean the streets.

But the nasty people, they enjoyed the rain as well and the benefits that it brings.

An American friend of mine was in our house one day, he was phoning home to his wife and he said, oh it's lovely here, he says, it's so green, beautiful, but it rains all the time.

She said, that's why it's beautiful. Beautiful. Beautiful. But this father's love, this father's kindness is indiscriminate.

He shows it to everyone. Theologians call that common grace. Grace that's enjoyed by everyone, irrespective. So there are two things at stake here in this loving the enemies.

[13 : 28] On the one hand, there's father's reputation, his reputation as an indiscriminately kind God. And we must not misrepresent our father. When children go completely off the rails and become out and out rebels and they make life miserable for everybody, they're misrepresenting their parents, we hope.

We hope they're misrepresenting their parents. God's children have frequently misrepresented them throughout history. God has got the name of being the body when in actual fact he is pure and good and never does anything wrong.

He has no darkness in him. So we must not misrepresent our father. And the second thing is at stake apart from father's reputation in loving the enemy is our own identity.

you're to be sons of your father in heaven, daughters of your father in heaven. Jesus just said sons because there probably weren't any women in that crowd at the time.

He was addressing his own disciples. Your identity is at stake in whether or not you love the enemy.

[14 : 59] So how do you get to be like the father? Answer, you aim at getting to be like the son. If you're like the son you'll be like the father.

Because the son, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God. He's the exact representation of his being. So our aim as disciples is to be like Jesus in order that we may be like our father in heaven.

To be like Jesus, to be like our rabbi. You know, when Jesus was teaching, people frequently called him rabbi. Because in that first century culture, he was clearly a teacher.

And people, even one of the Sanhedrin said, we know that you're a teacher sent from God. And so Jesus was regarded as a rabbi. And if you understand something of the culture in the first century, then you know that the disciples' aim was to become a carbon copy of his rabbi.

That's what was in people's heads. Now, most people chose their rabbis. They would listen to somebody that they thought was a good teacher or had some good ideas or helped them to understand the scriptures.

[16 : 16] And they would fasten themselves onto this rabbi and they would become his disciples. They would become his followers. And I'll just mute this, right.

So they would become his followers. And their aim was to become carbon copies of their rabbi. If he lived a particular way, they would live the same way. If he forgave, they would forgive.

If he cursed, they would curse. And everything he did, they sought to do. And by the way, that explains entirely why Peter got out of the boat.

He saw his rabbi walking on the water and he said, Lord, if that's really you, tell me to come to you. Because my rabbi is doing this, so he expects me to do the same.

That was, it might sound impetuous, it might sound daft, but he was so completely convinced that he was supposed to do whatever his rabbi did, that he said, Lord, if it's you, tell me to get out of the boat.

[17 : 22] And he did. Now, we all know that Peter began to drown because he saw, he heard the wind and he saw the waves and he began to lose faith and he went down.

And we all know that bit, but we're not good at remembering that this man actually stepped out of the boat. And many of us would have done that. There were 11 other disciples in the boat, they didn't do that.

So, praise the Lord for this rabbi who wants us to copy him. Because to the extent that we copy him who loves his enemies, we will be like our Father in heaven.

When he was loving his enemies, as he did from his birth right through, when he was loving his enemies, he was the perfect representation of the Father whose kindness is indiscriminate and universal.

Hello? Is that, is that wonderful? That's the standard Jesus is presenting to us. So, he says, if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?

[18 : 34] Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, now listen to this phrase, if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

What more are you doing than others? You see, if you love your neighbor but hate your enemy, that's the same as everybody else is doing. But if you love your neighbor and love your enemy, you're doing more than others.

You're being exactly like your Father in heaven, who is kind to his enemies. Brothers and sisters, Romans 5, Romans 5 says that while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God.

When you came to God, you didn't come as his best pal. God, when you came to Jesus, you didn't come as someone whose lifestyle was fully approved in heaven.

He didn't look upon you and say, a triple A for that man. I can't think of anything to do to improve him. That's not what God saw when he saw you. He saw an enemy.

[19 : 53] And he reconciled us to himself while we were still enemies. Now, let's prove that.

I wonder how much we meditate on the cross. How much do we think about Calvary? Do we look at Calvary and see the love of God?

Yes, indeed we do, don't we? What an amazing love we see on Calvary, that God would send his son, the one who is utterly sinless, that the righteous would die for the unrighteous to bring us to God.

What an amazing picture of love Calvary is. But Calvary offers another picture to us that we're not so keen to look at.

Calvary offers us a picture of our own sin. Calvary says to us, this is how the living God, the holy God of the universe, the God who is utterly pure, this is how he looks upon your sin.

[21 : 06] Calvary is a demonstration of God's hatred and wrath against human sin. Calvary is an indictment of us before it is a blessing to us.

Now I'm sure we're not so comfortable with that picture, are we? That's a squirming picture. That's a picture that makes us tremble. And if you go to the book of Revelation, you'll see things that would just about scare the wits out of you.

Because Revelation talks extensively about the wrath to come. And Paul said that Jesus saves us from the wrath to come. Let's be very clear what Jesus has actually done for us.

He has saved us from the wrath to come. Why? Because what happened to him on Calvary was that he absorbed the wrath of God against our sin.

He absorbed it in himself. He took the full weight of the father's wrath upon himself. Brothers and sisters, if you want to help a family member or a colleague at work or somebody at school, if you want to help them to get to know the father, please don't let them bypass the cross.

[22 : 30] Don't start by telling them Jesus loves you. Because that's not the gospel. The gospel is that we're all on the wrong side of God.

We're all God's enemies. And there is no possibility of getting to God except through the cross, except through the sacrifice of Jesus.

it's the only way. Jesus says that we have to do more than other people do.

We can't be selective in our love. We can't be selective in our kindness. And we can't withhold love from the enemy. That's not an option. If we do that, we will not have God's sympathy.

We will not have God's blessing to withhold love from our enemies. But I tell you this, we will have hell's blessing to withhold love from our enemies. That will suit the devil just fine.

[23 : 35] So please, dear friends, let's think carefully about this. Hell will help us to love our enemies. It will put an arm around our shoulder and comfort us and tell us that we're right to feel offended.

We're right to feel angry. We're right to be looking for justice. blessed. Hell will give us all the comfort that we could ask for. But we won't have God's sympathy to love our enemies because we are to be like our Father in heaven.

So what is this then? What has Jesus done? Has he just placed a standard in front of us that is utterly impossible? Is that what he's done? Has he raised the bar so high that none of us could ever get over it?

I mean, how are we supposed to love our enemies? How is a man whose village has just been ransacked by terrorists and his wife and his children kidnapped, how is he supposed to love his enemies?

Well, here's Jesus' answer. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. You have to decide, are you going to allow your enemies to bring out the worst in you or the very best in you?

[24 : 52] What are they going to be, are your enemies going to control your emotions? Are they going to control your passions? Are they going to control your desires? Are they going to bring out the worst in you or are they going to bring out the very best in you and are you going to pour the energy of your anger and your frustration and your hurt and your pain, are you going to pour all that into prayer for the very people who have just destroyed your life.

Jesus says we should be pouring our energy into prayer. Now, I'm pretty sure you can all think today, I can think of a dozen people that I'm not in good sorts with.

So what are we going to do? Nothing? Or are we going to obey the Savior's word? Are we going to start praying for these people who have hurt us? Because I tell you, if you consistently, day after day, pray for someone who is your enemy, they won't be your enemy for very long.

They might think of themselves as your enemy, but you won't think of them as the enemy more. You know why? Because the thing you'll be concerned about more than anything is their eternal soul.

That's why we pray for our enemies. If people persecute us because of our faith in Jesus, we need to pray for them because they're in danger of the fire of hell.

[26 : 25] And we need to pray for them. No matter what they do to us. What more are you doing, says Jesus, than the rest of society?

What more are you doing? And that is what he means by be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. He's saying, don't dilute love.

Don't dilute righteousness. Don't be selective in your love. Be utterly indiscriminate in your love.

And if someone hurts you, then hurt the devil by praying for their immortal soul. Because if they're bound for hell, they need somebody to be praying for them.

And why not you? Why not me? Okay, we'll wind this up just now. Now, Luke says in his gospel, in his version of the Sermon on the Mount, he finishes with a slightly different wording from Matthew.

[27 : 41] Matthew says, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Let your love be the same as the Father's love. Don't let it be the weak, watery, selective, if I'm in the right mood kind of love that the world has.

Let it be the indiscriminate, unquestioning love of the Father for the man whose immortal soul is in danger. But Luke finishes with a slightly different note.

He says, be merciful, even as your heavenly Father is merciful. And why should we be merciful?

Answer, because the only reason we're here today is because every single one of us has received mercy from God. Calvary is God's mercy. Grace is God giving us what we could not possibly deserve.

And His mercy is God giving us, withholding from us what we richly deserve. And that's Calvary. Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful.

[28 : 49] Napoleon, the emperor, he was accosted once by a woman who came to plead for the life of her son. He had committed a crime twice and it merited the death penalty for a further offence.

And she came to plead for her son. And he says, the emperor said to her, he said, your son has committed this offence twice and now justice demands the death penalty.

Oh, she says, I'm not demanding justice. I'm not asking for justice. She says, he does deserve to die. She says, I'm pleading for mercy. And Napoleon said to her, he doesn't deserve it.

She said, well, if he did deserve it, it wouldn't be mercy. It wouldn't be mercy. So there's Napoleon's mercy. And there was once a famous mayor of New York.

He was quite a character. His name was LaGuardia. They've actually named an airport after him. LaGuardia, when he was the mayor of New York, he turned up at a court hearing one night.

[29 : 55] It was the end of the court proceedings for the day and he dismissed the judge who was on the bench and he took the bench himself because he himself was a lawyer. So he took the bench and the last case to be heard was of an old lady who was up before him because she had stolen bread to feed her grandchildren.

And he said to the old lady, he says, the law requires that I punish you. He said, so it's \$10 or 10 days in prison. And as he said it, he took \$10 out of his wallet and threw it into his hat.

And then he passed the hat around the court. He says, I'm fining every single one of you here today. I'm fining you each 50 cents for living in a city where a grandmother has to steal to feed her grandchildren.

And so they all had to put 50 cents into the hat. So the old lady who left the courtroom with her fine paid by the judge and with \$47.50 to her name that she didn't have before she came in.

And then there's Shakespeare's mercy. He understood it. He really got it. Listen to what he said. He put these words in the mouth of Portia at the trial with Shiloh.

[31 : 20] The quality of mercy is not strained. The quality, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath that is twice blessed.

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes. Mercy is bidirectional. If you give it, you receive it.

Blessed are the merciful, said Jesus at the beginning of the sermon on the night. For they shall obtain mercy. They shall receive mercy. The merciful receive mercy.

Brothers and sisters, we are called upon by the living God to love as he loves, to be merciful as he is merciful. to be children of our Father in heaven.

For people to look at us and say, how did they get to be so different from the rest of us? I want to be that person. You want to be that person? Put your hand up if you want to be that person.

[32 : 22] Like our Father in heaven. Praise be to his name. Amen.