

Matthew 5: 43-48

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[0 : 00] To bring it to our attention together. So read with me. Matthew chapter 5, starting in verse 43.!

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? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Let's pray. Lord, you have spoken. May we hear your voice today.

Lord, let us be conformed to the likeness of your Son, Jesus Christ. For our maturity and for our joy and for the world's good and for your glory.

[1 : 28] We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. I'd like you to meet Stuart. He works at a large engineering firm, like many people here today.

Stuart loves the Lord, and he mostly likes his job. He cares about his coworkers, and so he takes a genuine interest in their lives and also wants to share his faith with them, because that's the most loving thing you can do to someone or for someone.

In fact, he even grabbed a pamphlet on the proclaim table back there called Throw a Boomerang about how he can more naturally start spiritual conversations with his friends and his coworkers.

Now, when he strikes up those conversations, some of his coworkers are interested, and some aren't. But Stuart's boss, he's not disinterested. In fact, he likes to mock Stuart for his faith.

How can you be an engineer and a Christian? You know, men of science don't believe in that superstition stuff. Doesn't science disprove your faith, he says. In fact, he brings up faith more than Stuart does in order to mock him.

[2 : 42] And Stuart fears that this is more than just mockery, but his boss once hinted that this issue might affect his career as well.

Stuart has an enemy. I'd also like you to meet Jennifer. Like many of you here today, she is a stay-at-home parent.

Her young son is a treasure. He's cute. He's affectionate. He's learning about the world around him. And today, Jennifer has some typical mom plans. Coffee at the mall, play place, a visit to the library, lunch, nap time, and then a walk.

Jennifer's son, on the other hand, has some typical child plans. Mom says we're headed out the door. When she comes with pants and shoes, the plan is to run away, flop on the ground, kick, bite, scream, I hate you.

It is my mission to exert myself and thwart her. And so Jennifer's son has, for the moment, made himself her enemy.

[3 : 56] See, there is enmity everywhere. There are critics, there are gossips, there are loud opponents and quiet ones. Why?

Sometimes it's people who don't like us or our faith. Sometimes it's people who have conflicting goals. Sometimes it's just confusing.

And we don't know why we're in a conflict. And sometimes our enemy is only an enemy for a season, a spouse or a longtime friend that we find ourselves in a conflict with.

Or maybe it's a long-term animosity. But enmity in all its forms is everywhere. You can avoid it only by cutting everyone out of your life.

It's the only way. And so Jesus' words here touch you and everyone you know. It begins in verse 43 saying, You have heard it said.

[5 : 04] You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Now the very best Bible study tool that you and I own are those little cross-references that are scattered all over the page of most of our

Bibles.

They show you related verses, things on a similar theme, or in this case where the biblical writers are quoting another passage.

And here, if your Bible has cross-references, you'll see that Jesus is referring to Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18. Way back when the Lord rescued Hebrew slaves from Egypt and formed the nation of Israel, he established laws for them to live according to his principles.

And this is one of those laws. Leviticus 19 verse 18 says, 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. Here's why cross-references are so helpful. Do you notice a difference between what Jesus says and what the Lord said in Leviticus 19?

[6 : 25] Something's missing and something's added. Jesus is showing us that the religious leaders of his day were adding and subtracting to God's word, and that's really bad news.

First, they removed, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, which lowers the bar considerably, doesn't it? If we ignore the as yourself part, we can stop caring for others as soon as we've shown some love.

And second, they added something new. Hate your enemy. You won't find that in Leviticus 19 because God never said it.

But people were saying it. When we talk about the Jewish people in Jesus' day, the Pharisees and the Sadducees are the ones we hear the most about.

They get all the air time because the third major group, the Essenes, removed themselves from society. They were kind of hermits out in the desert. This is the community that wrote and maintained the Dead Sea Scrolls, if you've ever heard of those, which have our oldest copies of the Bible.

[7 : 46] They also had, as basically a monastic order, had a large amount of community rules. In those community rules, they called themselves the Sons of Light.

And they called everyone else, including other believing Jews, the Sons of Darkness. Everyone that was not in their tribe there was a son of darkness.

And here is what they said in their community rule. Love all the Sons of Light and hate all the Sons of Darkness.

We see two things going on here. First, our natural tendency is to add and subtract, right, from God's law when it suits us.

We want to skirt around and drop the pieces of God's words we find inconvenient. Like the as-yourself part of love your neighbor.

[8 : 44] That is to say, we ignore God. And we add our own comfortable spin to God's words, like hate your enemy.

We pretend like our preferences are equally valuable as God's. So adding or subtracting to God's word, ignoring God, or elevating our own preferences, that's playing God.

That's why every man, woman, and child sits justly under his wrath. And so the first thing that we see here is we play God by adding and subtracting to his word.

And the second thing we see here is that, well, we do in fact hate our enemies. That's what people were adding and what we add to God's word, isn't it? That's just natural, right?

We hate our enemies. If they hate us, the natural reaction is they hate them right back. Now, that hostility might look different in different circumstances and if you and your opponent have different personalities, but it's always there.

[9 : 58] It might look like a shouting and scheming or physical blows, but it also might look like, well, we talked about it in verses 21 to 22, right? Hostility, anger, can take lots of form.

Mine is cold. Yours might be hot, but mine tends to be a cold shoulder rather than an angry outburst. Now, what might Stuart and Jennifer do if they're operating out of a hate-your-enemy mindset?

Stuart, whose boss is hostile to him and his faith, well, Stuart might be hostile right back. If Stuart is not the confrontational kind, his hostility could look like avoiding his boss or speaking ill of him behind his back.

It could look like undermining his boss, going around him and over his head or keeping him out of the loop so that he looks bad or gossiping. If Stuart happens to be the confrontational sort, returning hostility could look like arguments and angry emails.

He could look for opportunities to point out his boss's shortcomings. He could even bring up conversations about church in order to provoke an argument.

[11:18] How ironic. What about Jennifer? What would it look like for her, whose child has made himself her enemy for the moment, to return his hostility with some of her own?

If Jennifer is the confrontational sort, she could return his yelling with her own yelling. If he's saying, I hate you, Mom, she could scream right back, No, I hate you, you ungrateful little brat.

If she isn't the confrontational sort, she could walk away. Resenting her child, pour herself a mimosa while she stares out the window, dreaming of the day he leaves for preschool.

Hating our enemies, being hostile right back to hostile people. Whether that looks like avoidance or open fighting, that is our natural reaction. That is what we do.

That's how the world works. Plus, it feels good, doesn't it? Charles Spurgeon said, there is some pleasure in knocking a fellow down who insults you.

[12:31] And so we pretend that God approves. We tell ourselves he's pleased with our hostility. That's justice after all, right? And just like the Essenes at the Qumran community, we put words into God's mouth.

Hate your enemies. That looks like either ignoring him or pretending that he shares our hate. But God never said hate your enemies.

We say that. And completely opposed to our natural tendency, here's God's heart. God said, in Exodus chapter 23, the same time period that he spoke Leviticus, God said, in Exodus 23, verses 4 and 5, 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. If that's what the Lord has always wanted, hate your enemies and won't fly.

And that's why Jesus says in verse 44, 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 Son rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

[14:13] Friends, whether your enemy is a boss who mocks your faith or a child saying, I hate you or a selfish and inconsiderate spouse or someone at church judging you for your past or someone on Facebook who hates you because of your political views, Jesus says your natural tendency is to return that person's hostility.

That's what your heart wants. And people all around you will expect it. The teachers of his day were saying, hate your enemy. And our culture's victim mentality says, make sure you announce their wrongdoing to the world loud and often.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. What does that look like?

To love and pray for our enemies. I'll start with prayer. It should go without saying, but maybe I should say it anyway, that this doesn't look like prayer calling down fire on our enemies.

It doesn't look like praying, Lord, make them lose. Make them feel the pain I'm feeling. That is not the kind of prayer that Jesus is advocating here.

[15:42] That's the opposite of the gospel where God doesn't make us suffer for what we've done. That's how we shouldn't pray. So how should we pray for our enemies?

Well, pray that God would extinguish anger. in both of your hearts. Pray for wisdom to resolve your dispute.

Pray that he would give you an expanded vision of the possibilities, a creativity, as it were, of how we can solve our enmity.

And when you pray for your enemies, one of the most important things to pray for is this, Lord, please help me not to be an enemy to them. Which leads us to ask, what does it look like not only to pray for our enemies, but to love them, to not be an enemy, as Jesus here commands?

And that simply means that in our hearts and in our actions, we value their best interest.

[16:59] What might that look like? How might Stuart love and pray for a boss who doesn't like him and his faith? He can pray, Lord, help me not to return the hostility that he has given to me.

And he can act in his boss's best interest. You know, Stuart recently listened to his pastor's sermons about work and knows how not to work as a people pleaser.

And his boss can tell the difference. Stuart works diligently. His boss respects that. Christians should be the best employees. And he exudes the heart of the beatitude from verses 2 to 12, the

fruit of his new life in Christ.

Stuart's boss is a supervisor, but he's still a human being. Living out the fruit of the Spirit towards him is salt.

And love and light. And so both professionally and personally, Stuart serves his boss's best interests by living an active Christian faith.

[18 : 15] The Christian life blesses the people around us. And coincidentally, without even realizing it, Stuart's boss comes to respect him for it and even depend on him.

What might Jennifer's prayer look like for her rebellious son? it might look something like this.

Father, help me be a picture of your love for my son.

Help me discipline him without anger. Help me show him how his heart, not just his behavior, is the problem here. Help me show him that I want something good for him.

Help me show him through my words and through my manner that I love him. how might that look in her actions to act in her son's best interest?

When her son yells and defies her and momentarily plays the role of her enemy, how will she respond? She won't discipline simply by saying, you did a bad thing or you defied mommy.

[19 : 28] Instead, rather, she will discipline saying, what you just did showed me what's going on in your heart. I see selfishness and godlessness and hate.

I see danger. And it's my job as a parent to steer you in the instruction and the discipline of the Lord. one of those is in her best interest and one of those is in his best interest and he can tell the difference.

Isn't that what you want? Isn't that the kind of world you want to live in? Isn't that how you want people to respond to you when you're awful? But it's not the way of the world.

It's not the world that you and I are regularly building even as Christians, is it? But it is God's way because Jesus did this perfectly.

Jesus loved his enemies, us. Christianity isn't first and foremost about people following a particular set of principles.

[20 : 49] It's not about people subscribing to particular doctrines first and foremost. It's not about behaving the right way.

What is the problem that the good news of the gospel addresses? We don't need inspiration. We don't need fulfillment or motivation.

We're not in most gravest need of self-improvement. We haven't simply missed the mark.

Christianity is about Jesus praying for his enemies and loving them by dying for them for us.

In Romans chapter 5 starting in verse 6 the apostle Paul wrote this verse 6 for while we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

That's the first way he characterizes us. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners the second way he describes us.

[22 : 07] Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood how much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God 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. More than that we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation.

While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son. Enemies who ignore him.

Enemies who ignore his good just and loving law. Enemies who take their own selfishness and stuff it into his mouth as if that was his words.

We put hate your enemies into his mouth. Enemies who set themselves up as gods when they do that. Enemies who serve themselves as if we were somehow ultimate and our will was what mattered most.

[23 : 21] But the king laid down his life for such enemies. That is light in a dark world.

That looks nothing like the world we experience day by day nothing. And that's Jesus' point isn't it?

In verse 46 he makes that explicit he says 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? A few weeks back Jordan preached!

about salt and light and in it he said salt is a spice it adds a flavor that isn't already there so when in conflict if we act no different than everybody else we haven't added something new have we? We are not being salt that's not being light this is really applicable I think in our marriages one of my professors in seminary wrote a book called marriage matters I'm actually going to quote a section at significant length here for you because I think it's really helpful he takes this passage and applies it to our marriages because our natural tendency in marriage is to treat our spouse about the way they treat us right they're friendly to us we will be friendly right back they're inconsiderate to us we will be inconsiderate right back he says this another idea that seems to have gained traction in recent years is the idea of the love bank or the love tank your love bank is your reservoir of positive sentiment towards your spouse the basic idea is this couples fall in love and stay in love because on balance they make each other feel good every time you make your spouse feel good a deposit is made in his or her love bank and vice versa the bigger the balance in a person's love bank the more positive you feel about him or her when a spouse acts in a way that makes the other unhappy however a withdrawal is made a smaller balance in the account means less affection and less love in the marriage learning how to identify and meet each other's needs is the key to making deposits maintaining a positive balance and remaining in love right and that's the way the world talks about our marriages right that's how we think about relationships he continues and says true we tend to want to be in relationship with people who give us what we want especially when what we want feels very like something we need thousands of years ago

[26 : 43] Jesus commented on our tendency to be nice to people who are nice to us Jesus however doesn't consider this a worthy definition of love instead he said if you love those who love you what reward will you get are not even the tax collectors doing that and if you greet only your brothers what are you doing more than others do not even pagans do that in other words being nice to those who are nice to you is ordinary there is no particular virtue in it it's self interest cloaked in kindness and then he asked this question do you feel loved when you've had to earn it and then he quotes verses 43 to 45

I won't read them again here it's part of the passage where he says love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you and then he says God bestows his love on those who have neither deserved it nor earned it Jesus invites you to consider how God gives gifts of sun and rain to both the good those who deserve it and the evil those who don't deserve!

it God's unconditional love means that he can give us that kind of love for our spouses we aren't left to generate positive emotions for our spouses when they happen to be giving us what we want we can give them the love that we've received from God powerful unconditional love that doesn't change when disappointed or sinned against the Bible calls this grace spouses and any family member for that matter that show love only when they receive it the world already has plenty of that thank you very much and nobody would call that seasoned with salt but does it define your relationship does it define mine friends this is an impossible task this command to love your enemy isn't that impossible shouldn't that be like the first thing that strikes us how do we do any of this right we've set up for ourselves something that is so weighty how do we do this because

I don't think we want to live in a world I don't think we want to be the kinds of people who return evil for evil and so we might be tempted to do what happened at the very beginning of the passage and sort of modify God's word right we might be like well what we're really talking about here is just to hold back our vengeance right or to back up and bottle up our anger or to keep a lid on our words or maybe anything but love them we don't have that power I cannot reach into my own heart fiddle with the dials and now suddenly love my enemy this is an impossible task which is exactly why it is salt and light in the world because it doesn't exist anywhere else it can't Charles

Spurgeon said you feel the proposal to be too hard for flesh and blood to carry out and so indeed it is if however you are enabled to rise to so great a height you will astonish all around you and become a wonder unto many see what he said this is an impossible task and that's exactly why if Christians can live it out it will be a beacon of God's love and grace and power to the world but how do we do the impossible well before we get there he's going to raise the bar one more time because he doesn't stop there he goes to verse 48 and says you therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect what he is doing here is closing the section that began in verse 17 where he says do not think that

[32 : 11] I've come to abolish the law I've come to fulfill it and then he goes through the series of statements you have heard it said but I say to you and he gives the full expression of God's law not

to be skirted around not to be modified or tweaked but all these things and now he takes them and he says you must be perfect that's comprehensive right what that means is that all of these things that he has been talking about anger lust divorce our word how we treat our enemies all of these things are simply examples of a broader!

Touches every breath you breathe kind of perfection each of these examples if you harbor unjust anger against someone you're liable to hellfire if you even look with lustful intent at someone not your spouse you've committed adultery you don't get to hate your enemies these are all impossible and there's no way for us to live up to them but Jesus concludes this section saying you must be perfect which means everything everywhere going beyond these examples if the beatitudes at the beginning of chapter five crush us to the ground as we said earlier this is the boot grinding us into the dirt you have not you will not you cannot meet this standard and not only do we not meet this standard but in our natural state we're

God's enemies running away from this perverting it with things like hate your enemies we aren't trying as hard as we can to make a stingy God happy we are trying to dethrone him our lives are enemy action against him and the stakes are high hell fire high we must be perfect or we are lost which means we need a savior and in fact he is the same one speaking these words which condemn us he knows our helpless and hopeless estate he sees the depths of our fall better than we do and so he knows that the power to save ourselves cannot come from us so he graciously supplies it to us a way to be perfect a way to no longer be his enemies the only way to be perfect and perfectly reconciled the only way to be perfect like

Christ is to be united to Christ through faith this is an act of God's grace nothing that we deserve or can do or can earn I lay down my rebel arms cry for mercy and get to rest in his completed work for me that's the gospel that is the good news of Jesus Christ and then the most intriguing thing happens these laws laws about anger and lust and divorce and enemies that once crushed us become a delight to us reconciled to our savior they remind us of him and his character and his work for us and we begin to grow into the very perfection that once condemned us because if we've been born again our new heart desires

Christ and his righteousness and sits restless with our remaining sin it extends past our hearts to our minds when we've been saved entirely by God's grace we bring that knowledge to all of our life including our hard relationships C.S.

[36 : 59] Lewis put it like this I think it has very much to do with the gospel and very much to do with loving our enemies he says to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable and he means the inexcusable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you when he preached a sermon on this passage John Piper looked back to the end of the Beatitudes and says Jesus says that not only can you endure the mistreatment of the enemy but you can also rejoice in it and he's referring back to verses 11 and 12 blessed are you and others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven he says why can we also rejoice in it because our reward is so great which means that the command to love your enemy is a command to set your mind on things that are above not on things that are on the earth the command to love your enemy is a command to find your hope and your satisfaction in

God and his great reward not in the way people treat you the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life and so God transforms our heart's desires and he changes where our minds go when we are in conflict finding our hope and our satisfaction in God not in the way we're treated he does one more thing he goes one step further and the God who so loved his enemies makes his home with them with and in his people the Holy Spirit the third person of the triune God indwells his people which means as one writer puts it we have an endless supply of God's love by which the new heart can continually pour forth love God doesn't rescue us from sin and judgment just to leave us alone to live out our

Christian life Jesus purchased for us the right to have God dwell in and with us and so at every turn there is help and strength for you if you will ask him for it in prayer what does that mean for you practically tomorrow when your child tells you he hates you or your boss tells you your faith in the supernatural jeopardizes your career in the sciences what does that mean when you're criticized unfairly what does that mean when you encounter enmity of every kind when you are tempted to turn to bitterness or revenge or exacting a toll or whatever it looks like in your flavor of hostility when you want your enemy to suffer when you want to respond with hostility either the confrontational

kind or the non-confrontational kind recognize that your heart is looking for comfort those are comfort seeking responses remember

Spurgeon said there's some pleasure in knocking a fellow down who insults you but we go through life not needing to build for ourselves our own comfort we go through life walking with the comforter himself and that's not just a truth to remind ourselves of and it's not something that is far and distant from us this isn't just about a reward in heaven that is great it is about today it's not something that is abstract it is not something that is down the road I'm talking about a relationship that exists this very moment for God's people remember Romans 5 10 said while we were enemies we were past tense reconciled to

God by the death of his son that's past tense which means it has already happened we have already been reconciled to God and as a result we get to walk with him through every circumstance so don't reach for vengeance when you have an enemy reach out to God instead pour out your heart to him Lord I feel awful in this this conflict is sapping my strength and my resolve and my wisdom and my will I don't have it in myself to fix this or love this person and I can't do that in my own heart friends the Psalms are full of prayers like this they are our guide and our model and as we walk with God in this way communing with him through our trials he is faithful and kind to work in us to shape resentful hearts into caring ones and to strengthen us to act in love he produces the salt and the life light in us in this passage

[43 : 11] Jesus shows us what natural human interactions look like it's perfectly natural to punish someone who crosses you that's just the way of the world punish them with words punish them with silence punish them with gossip with office politics punish them with hot anger punish them with a cold shoulder that's natural but you and I are not called to do what is natural all natural is not the goal nature is kind of horrifying it's perfectly natural for the strong to eat the weak it's natural for rot and rust and decay to destroy it is natural for life to end in death but we are Christians something completely unnatural we believe in the supernatural we put our trust in these supernatural truths the living

God took on a human nature that's not natural friends that's supernatural he turned water into wine calmed the storm healed the sick none of that is natural he bore the guilt of our sin on his cross that's not natural he died and was buried which is natural but he rose from the grave to life incorruptible to rule and reign as the risen savior for all who trust him that's not natural christian the foundation of your very life your new life in christ is not natural it is a miracle of god you have been united to christ died your old self been raised spiritually with him from the grave indwelt by the holy spirit you have received his word you belong to a body of believers across generations and geography and races and centuries there is nothing natural here far be it from us to hate our enemies simply because that's what's natural your new life in christ is a miracle god did the impossible we are not condemned to live natural lives when god has broken through and poured out his supernatural grace love and power into our hearts let's pray