

September 10, 2023

## Difficult conversations with Jesus

### Part 2 – Love your enemies.

Matthew 5:38-48

Of all the teachings of Jesus, this is one of the hardest to obey. How do we love our enemies? Perhaps Matthew made a mistake when he wrote down the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount?

However, deep down we know that these words of Jesus align with the truth and the heart of the Gospel. Jesus did say these words and meant them to be the authoritative word of God for every generation, including ours.

So, what did Jesus mean and how do we apply these truths to our life today?

We must understand that this instruction from Jesus is not a way for us to get God's approval, we are not saved because we are able to love our enemies (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

These teachings of Jesus are not meant to be rules for actions, rather they are instructions for behavior. These aren't a list of specific responses to specific scenarios, rather they are principles for a way of life.

Turning the other cheek and going the second mile doesn't mean resigning yourself to the evil plans of others. That is not what Jesus is teaching here.

In order to understand this teaching, we have to ask; who is my enemy?

The legal expert came to Jesus in Luke 10 and asked the telling question, "who is my neighbor?" To which Jesus responds by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The Jews hated the Samaritans and to the hearers, when Jesus told this parable, he was saying, "love your enemies, even the Samaritans, for they are your brothers."

In Matthew 5:43, Jesus quoted the teachings of the Pharisees and Scribes, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*"

But you will not find this statement in the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Bible containing the law of Moses, in fact you will find the opposite (see Exodus 23:3-4).

The religious leaders had twisted the word of God for centuries and taught their fellow Israelites to hate any foreigner. There were many devout Jews and pharisees who firmly believed that they were honoring God by hating all Gentiles.

But before we judge the first century Jews too harshly, we don't have to look very far to see that we are guilty of the same sin. Throughout modern history and particularly in the advent of the mass news media, we are constantly told who to hate, and we do it pretty well as a culture.

As human beings, we don't think much of hating someone we have never met. It is a side effect of the fall in the garden of Eden.

But when we see people as created in the image of God, fellow image bearers of our heavenly Father, people that Jesus died for, we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit begin to love them.

The challenge comes when our rights are violated, when we are the victim of persecution or crime, we want swift justice, we want to see our rights upheld.

But what is the greatest act of injustice that the world has ever seen? Without a doubt, the greatest act of injustice was when the Son of God was nailed to a Roman cross. The sinless creator of the universe was persecuted and killed by his creation.

And in the height of the injustice, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34.

That is the standard. So how do we love our enemies like Jesus loved those who were nailing him to the cross?

Do we pray for those who spitefully use us?

Do we ask God to have mercy on them and not to punish them?

Do we ask God to save their souls, to open their eyes to the Gospel message before it is too late?

Because that is the mind of Christ (see Romans 5:8).

We must note that there is a difference between loving someone and liking them. Jesus said, “love your enemies”, he didn’t say, “like your enemies”.

People who hurt us and treat us unfairly are probably people that we don’t like. But we are called to love them, praying for them, praying that God may work in their lives and we find that we begin to like them, because we see in them the renewed character of Christ.

Loving your enemies is a display of spiritual maturity and it is the same language the we see in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

How do we do this? Here are three points to pray through.

**1: Loving your enemy does not display how good you are, rather it displays Who’s you are.**

By loving our enemies, we show that we are a child of God. As His children we don’t have to fear being cheated or “short changed”.

John Piper wrote, *“the intimate knowledge and tender, sovereign care of our omnipotent, all-wise, heavenly Father frees us for the radical kind of risks and losses that enemy-love demands.”*

**2: In loving our enemies, there is great reward.**

In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus taught about the rewards of enduring persecution.

The sustaining joy that carries us through persecution and slander from others is not the temporal gain we get out of enduring suffering, rather it is the certain knowledge that we will be receiving a reward in the age to come. Do we live with an eternal perspective?

**3: Give what you have received.**

We can love, because we have been loved by God (see Luke 6:36).

Sometimes we need to be reminded of what it took for us to be reconciled with God. Before we became followers of Jesus, we were God’s enemies (See Romans 5:10).

We did nothing to save ourselves. The mercy that we are called on to show others is nothing compared to the mercy that we have already received.

Will you take the courageous step to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?