

Set Sail Ministries

“Anchored in the Cross. Sailing by the Breath of the Spirit.”

Sermon Title: “Love Your Enemies”

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Text: Matthew 5:43-48 (parallel to Luke 6:27-36)

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Location: Aurora Alliance Church, Aurora, Colorado

Main Idea: The ultimate example of God’s love working in us is when we show His love to our enemies.

Homiletical Idea: We must choose to live by the power of the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish the true purposes of God in our lives

Purpose of Sermon: By showing God’s love to our enemies, we show ourselves to be mature children of God. This sermon should help people to see if they belong to God, if they are living in the power of the Holy Spirit and then encourage them to do so, if they are not currently.

INTRODUCTION

Pastor Jonas is out of town today, he’s actually performed 2 weddings back in Georgia this weekend, and I am excited to have another opportunity to dig into God’s word with you this morning. We are going to be in Matthew chapter 5 again today. If you have a Bible with you, you may want to turn to that passage; if you would like to use one of the Bibles in the pew in front of you, we’ll be on page 733.

Unfortunately this morning I don’t have any satellite photos to show you like I did last time. Depending on your personality type you may be either happy or sad about that! Follow along as I read starting in verse 43.

Matthew 5:43-48 ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

For the past several weeks, we’ve been in the midst of a journey through Matthew chapter 5 that Jonas entitled, “Raising the Bar.” Our study of the Sermon on the Mount started with some thoughts on our relationship with God. Then we moved into some topics that discussed our relationship with others. We talked about Jesus’ teaching that the law said, “Do not murder”, but He raised the bar by saying, “I tell you, don’t even be angry with your brother.” He was attempting to teach his disciples that there was more to obeying God that just strictly following the law.

Today, we are going to finish this series and find that once again, Jesus has raised the bar to a much higher level. Here’s what we are going to do. First we are going to look at this passage verse by verse and see what we can learn from it. Then we are going to look at how we can be transformed in order to do the things that God asks us to do.

I. Exposition

- Read text: verse 43, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*

A. Distinguish between the law and tradition

The first thing we need to do is distinguish between the law and Jewish tradition.

1. The law stated: "love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) That is the part that God gave to Moses to be included in the Jewish law. But the Jews made 2 big mistakes with their interpretation of this law.

a. First, they limited the people that they considered their neighbor. They saw their neighbors kind of like many of us do today: the people living right next door to them, and their family and a few close friends. But originally the Hebrew word was much broader than that. God's intent with the word neighbor was basically anyone that we came into contact with.

b. Secondly, they made an assumption about something that God never said. They figured, "If we are supposed to love our neighbor, then God must want us to hate our enemy." But let me be clear, God has never told us to hate our enemy. Never. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that. That was strictly a tradition that the Jews added to God's word.

c. In fact, there were a few laws requiring you to do good to your enemy in certain situations. In Exodus 23 we read, *"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it."* God is basically saying, it doesn't matter if it is your neighbor or your enemy, if you see someone that needs help, help them.

2. Now, it shouldn't really surprise us that Israel made this assumption. It's human nature to hate your enemies. We do the same thing today. It's not considered natural or even normal to show love to someone who hates you.

QUOTE: "The behavior of human nature is to react, strike back, hate, and wish hurt on our enemies. At best human nature treats an enemy with a cold shoulder and keeps its distance."

3. But Jesus is saying, "Look you misinterpreted the law and then you added something to God's word that He never intended and what you added is actually the exact opposite of His heart."

Transition: So God said, "Love your neighbor" and the Jews added "Hate your enemy", but that's not what God intended. So what did God intend? Let's read on and see what Jesus has to say.

B. God's intent

Read text: verse 44, Jesus says, *"But I tell you: Love your enemies..."*

1. Who exactly are we to love. God desires that we not only love our neighbor but that we love our enemies as well. Hmm. I wonder does God realize what He is asking me to do? Does He really want me to love my actual enemies? I know, I bet all He really wants is for me to love the guy who cuts me off in traffic rather than try to cut him off at the next stop light. Now certainly, we should show God's love in that situation, but God means what he says and I think he has something a little deeper in mind. Again, let's keep reading and see exactly who who are supposed to love.

Read text: verse 44, Jesus says, "*But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...*"

2. Jesus makes a definite connection between someone who persecutes us and an enemy. Now wait a minute. Persecute? What does He mean by that? When I think of persecution I think of pastors in China who have been put in jail and tortured for years simply because they preached the gospel.

I just read a news report online this week. Listen to this:

In an Indonesian court under threat of violence from Islamic radicals, three women were found guilty yesterday of violating the country's Child Protection Act by "Christianizing" Muslims.

The three women who had operated a Sunday School program out of one of their homes were sentenced to three years in prison.

The women began accepting Muslim children only after receiving permission from the children's parents or guardians, but Indonesia's Child Protection Act of 2002 prohibits the enticement of minors to convert to another religion.

The three women, described by friends as "ordinary housewives," were relieved that they had not been given the maximum five-year prison sentence, however, they were devastated at the prospect of being separated from their children, who range from 6 to 19 years of age, for the next 3 years.

Now I realize that there are other forms of persecution, but I'm going to step out on a limb here and say that most likely none of us in this room have ever really been persecuted for our faith. At least not like that. We tend to think that if we ask someone if they want to come to church with us on Sunday, and they say, "No, I don't think so, but thanks for asking", we think that is persecution.

3. So some of you are thinking that you are off the hook because you have never experiences persecution like that. Not so fast. When Luke recorded this teaching in his gospel, he included an extra phrase that Matthew didn't record. He writes, "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*" (Luke 6:27-28). Our enemies are not just those who persecute us, but those who hate us, who curse us, who mistreat us, and I think everyone of else has had someone hate us or mistreat us in some way...and yet these are the ones we are to love.

4. Now this is a pretty hefty requirement. And yet, this is God's requirement to be a part of His Kingdom. Jesus continues with, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven*" I didn't make the rules, I'm just telling you what God wrote.

C. How are we to love?

I hate to say that it gets worse from here, but this is definitely going to raise the bar much higher as we look at exactly how we should love our enemies?

1. We should love like God loves His enemies.

Our first example should be that we love our enemies like God loves His enemies.

Read text: continuing on in verse 45, "*He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*"

a. At first glance, you might wonder what this passage has to do with God's love. I mean, doesn't the sun shine on everybody anyway? I want to share a Bible story that I was reminded of by one of the commentaries that I read.

b. We need to realize that God really is in control of the earth and the entire universe. If He chooses for the sun not to shine somewhere, He is able to make that happen. Think back with me in the Old Testament when the Israelites were in Egypt and God was bringing the various plagues on the Egyptians. One of those plagues was a plague of darkness. In Exodus 10 we read, "*So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.*" (Exodus 10:22-23)

c. Now I don't know how God did that, but the point is the fact that He did, anything is possible for God. And so He could do it today. He could allow the righteous to see and everyone else to be blind. But He doesn't, He allows the sun to shine on everyone.

And I think it is important to point out the reason why. The Bible tells us the God is, "*patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*" (2 Peter 3:9) And, "*From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.*"²⁷ "*God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from each one of us.*" (Acts 17:26-27)

d. Ultimately, God loves his enemies so that they will realize His love for them and turn to Him and come back to Him through His son Jesus.

e. I think it is also worth noting that every single one of us at one point in our lives was an enemy of God. Romans 5:10 says, "*...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...*" And I would also add that even after we have entered into a relationship with God, if we chose to live a life that is unrighteous (and we do have that choice), we are acting as enemies of God. So we should be grateful for God's love to His enemies.

2. And how does God love? Agape

We just saw an example of 1 way that God shows His love by bringing the sun and rain to everyone, but I wanted to really dig in and understand God's love even more, so I did some study on this Greek word for love.

a. In English, we have only 1 word for love. That word is...“love”! But in the Greek language there are actually 4 different words used for love. Some of you may have heard these before.

1. The 1st is “eros”. That’s the passionate love between a husband and wife, and that word is actually not used in the Bible.
2. The 2nd is “storge”. That’s the love of a parent for a child
3. The 3rd is “phileo”. That’s a “feeling of precious affection toward those who are very near and very dear to one’s heart.”
4. Finally, there is “agapé”. Agape love is the highest form of love and it is only found in the Bible; it’s not found in secular Greek

literature. It is a love that gives and cares for another. It is a sacrificial love that someone chooses to give to another, no matter how the person may respond or treat you in return.

And of all these four choices of words for love, guess which one Jesus words to tell us how to love our enemies? Yep, it’s “agape”. The sacrificial love. We are to love our enemies in the very same way that God loves us: sacrificially; giving, caring for them, without expecting anything in return.

D. Our love is to be more than what the world offers

We must be different than the world. We should act better than the world because of our relationship with Jesus. As we read on in verse 46, these are simple statements, but let them sink in.

1. Read text: verse 46, *“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”* Not to get sidetracked here, but basically the Jews thought that the other Jews that collected taxes for the Romans who the lowest of the low, and obviously, the pagans weren’t Jews at all. And Jesus is saying, “Hey, everybody loves the people that love them back. Everybody is nice to their friends.” And we need to ask ourselves the question, “Am I really showing God’s love if all I do is love my friends or my family well?”

2. I want to read you a paragraph from Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible.

“To do good to them who do good to us, is a common piece of humanity; but Christianity is something more than humanity. It is a serious question, that we should frequently ask ourselves, *“What do we do more than others? What excellent thing do we do? We know more than others; we talk more of the things of God than others. But God has done more for us, and therefore rightly expects more from us than from others. In this way especially we must do more than others, that while every one will render *good for good*, we must render *good for evil*; and this will show that we live by a higher principle, than the other men act by. Others *greet their brothers*, they embrace those of their own party, and way, and opinion; but we must not so confine our respect, but *love our enemies*, otherwise *what reward have we?* We cannot expect the reward of Christians, if we rise no higher than the virtue of pagans.”*

3. But you say, Jeffrey, if I love my enemies, people are going to think I am different, maybe even weird. Yep. That's right. We are called to be different.

Listen, this Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus is talking about that He is calling us to be a part of, is entirely different than the world. It is completely "other". It's not just a bigger and better version of the world. He is not calling us to do a little more than the world, or pray a little more than the non-Christians, or go to church a few more times than the Atheists do. He is calling us to be set apart and to be radically different than the world.

4. One last note on this part. And I am going to tell you by way example. We just had a hurricane in the Gulf Coast last week. There are many ways that any of us could get involved. We could give to the Red Cross or other relief organizations and that would be good. If we lived in that part of the country or if we went down there, we could give our time to help those in crises and that would be even better. But hear me, if we go and have contact with some of these people and all we do is meet their physical needs, and we don't take the time to meet their spiritual needs by telling them how they can get back in right relationship with God through Jesus, then we have given them the good at the expense of the best.

Now it may be that meeting their physical needs gives us an opportunity to meet their spiritual needs, and if so that is great. But God desires for us to love our neighbors and our enemies and if we don't tell them about Jesus, then we have not loved them as God loves them.

E. Why does God want us to love like this?

I want to sum up this section by simply saying, when we show love to our enemies, it is unmistakable proof that we truly know and love God. Because without a doubt, no one loves their enemy if they don't first know the love of God.

In 1 John we read, "...let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:7-8)

God says we should forgive others because He has forgiven us. We should love others, even our enemies, because He first loved us.

F. The highest bar of all

If all of this was not enough, Jesus finishes this part of his teaching with verse 48, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*"

1. And my first thought when I read that is: How in the world am I supposed to do that? And lest you think there is any wiggle room in that word 'perfect', trust me, there's not: I looked it up. In the Greek (tell'-e-os), the word is not referring to a process of maturing or becoming perfect, it's actually talking about a finished product, a completed maturity, actually being perfect, not lacking any moral quality.

2. It was at this point in my study that I realized something. That there is no possible way that I in my flesh can ever do that. As we've been going through this study, we talked about, Jesus saying, you've heard it said, do not murder, but I tell you, do not be angry, and I thought well, I can do that for a little while...an hour or 2.

Divorce / Lust

Oaths / yes be yes

Eye for an eye / turn the other cheek

But when we got to loving your enemy, and then be perfect as God is perfect, I had to honestly say, “There is nothing in me that can do those things.” Not even for an our, much less as a lifestyle. In fact there is nothing in any of us that can do these things. That can meet what God requires.

II. The solution

And some of you are probably thinking, “Well, thanks a lot Jeffrey, you’ve just spent 20 minutes telling us what God requires and convinced us we can’t do it. Do you have anything positive to say?” [Pause] Yes, yes, yes, wholeheartedly yes.

QUOTE: “We can’t do it in our own strength, because never intended for us to do it in our own strength. But I am telling you it can be done in God’s strength.”

A. Models to follow. Remember when Jesus was on the cross facing his enemies? What did he say? “Father, forgive them.” In the face of death, Jesus offered God’s love to His enemies. And He did it by allowing the power of God to flow through Him.

Remember Stephen? When he was being stoned to death by the Pharisees, who were definitely enemies to him at that point, what did he say? “God, forgive them.” Again, facing death, he chose to operate, not from his own strength, but from God’s strength in order to offer love to his enemies.

The Apostle Paul, when he was defending himself in front of Caesar in Rome, everyone deserted him. All his friends and supporters left him. But then he was able to write, “*May it not be held against them.*” (2 Timothy 4:16)

These are examples of people that got to know Jesus and then chose to live their lives filled with the Holy Spirit and as a result they walked in the power of God. And they were able to love their enemies with God’s love as a result.

And they are a model for us to follow. I’ll remind you again at the verse that we mentioned briefly when we discussed Jesus’ baptism with water and the Holy Spirit: Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:18 “...*do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit*”. Again in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Paul says, “*Do not quench the Spirit.*” In other words, don’t get in the way of the moving of the Holy Spirit in your life. Like it or not, we have a choice in our lives. Will we live our life in such a way that we allow the Spirit to display God’s power in us? Or will we choose to quench the Spirit and then try to do on our own what only God’s power can accomplish?

B. Be transformed. If we ever hope to live the real Christian life that God calls us to, we have to enter into a relationship with Jesus and then choose to live a life filled with the Holy Spirit. Because we have to realize that we can only love as we allow God to love through us. It’s not us doing the loving, it’s God.

Romans 5:5 says, “...*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*” There is a reason why the very first fruit of the spirit that is listed in Galatians is “love”. Love is a work of God, not us.

So how do we get God to work in us like this? I want to show you another verse that God has really impacted me with recently. You can either turn there or else jot down the reference and look it up later. It’s Romans 12:2. Many of you may already know the verse. “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*”

Now I have read this verse a number of times in my life and definitely it has had an impact on me. But I have tended to see it as something I have to do. Don't be conformed to the world, do be transformed. But listen, I looked up the Greek word that is used for transformed and do you know what it is? It's Metamorpho'o. It's where we get our word "metamorphosis". And the classic example of metamorphosis is when we see a caterpillar become a butterfly. Think about that. A butterfly is completely different in form from a caterpillar. A butterfly doesn't look like a caterpillar, it doesn't move like a caterpillar, it doesn't do anything like a caterpillar and yet it is the same creature.

QUOTE: A butterfly is not just a bigger, better worm. It has been transformed into something entirely different. And men and women, that is how we are supposed to live our Christian life. We are supposed to live a life transformed in such a radical way as a caterpillar is to a butterfly

C. Our part

Now here's the interesting part. Just like we can't love our enemies without God working in us, we can't bring about this change in ourselves. It is still a work of God. It is something that only God can do. We can't muster up enough energy and just transform ourselves, we must allow the Holy Spirit to work in us to accomplish this.

So, is there anything we can do? There is. James 4:6 says "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Now I don't know about you, but I definitely do not want to be in a position of God opposing me. I want to receive His grace and that means I must choose to have an attitude of humbleness. An attitude of humility. Not thinking too highly of myself.

I can't cause transformation to happen in my life, but I can choose to put myself in a position to allow God to work in my life.

Interestingly enough, as we go into Matthew chapter 6 over the next few weeks, we are going to see 3 ways that can keep us in an attitude of humility. I want to mention those to you briefly. They are: giving to those in need, praying and fasting.

1. It's interesting to me that Jesus talks about giving to the needy first. If I was going to order these 3 I might have put prayer first. But as I prayed about why giving was first, God showed me that it is because giving is the exact opposite of the selfish pride that so often characterizes my life and maybe your too. Loving our enemies is the ultimate act of self-less-ness. It's this selfish attitude that can keep us from being humble and allowing God to work in our hearts.

2. Second is prayer. We are going to spend a lot more time on this in the coming weeks, but I just want to highlight 1 thing. I think most of have the talking and asking part of prayer down pretty good. But I think that it is the listening part that we don't do very well. What is God saying to you in your prayer times? Are you hearing Him clearly? If not, I strongly encourage you to make listening a bigger part of your prayer time and in fact your whole life.

3. Third is fasting. Again we'll talk more about it in a few weeks, but fasting is not something that most churches talk about very much today. Very simply, fasting is giving up something, usually food, for a period of time in order to spend that time talking to and listening to God. It's a way to say to God, "God I want to be closer to you so much that I am willing to give up something that I really want, and in fact something that my body really needs for awhile in order to seek You more."

4. Giving to those in need, praying and fasting. If you have realized that you need more of God in your life, that you desperately need God's power working in you in order to obey what he calls us to do, then I urge you to make these 3 things a greater part of your life.

IV. CONCLUSION

We've covered a lot of territory this morning. We've seen God's command to love our enemies and we've seen exactly what that means: that we are to love those who hate us, and mistreat us and even persecute us, and we saw that we are to love them with the same love that God has for us and them: a sacrificial love that gives and expects nothing in return.

And then we saw that it is truly impossible for us to love like that unless we allow God's love to flow through us and allow the holy spirit to transform us in a radical way. But we saw that even there, we can't cause the transformation on our own, again, we must allow God to do the work. Finally we saw that giving, prayer and fasting can help us stay in an attitude of humility so that God will pour out his grace in us.

In all these things, I hope you have seen that it truly is all about God. It's not about us doing good, or being better people, it is all about God and His work in us. It is not about God helping us, it's about us getting out of the way so that God can do the work.

As you go out this week and you find yourself in a situation where you need to love your enemy, I encourage you not to focus on loving your enemy, but instead focus on allowing God to love through you.