Opening Remarks

You and I are citizens of the kingdom of heaven here on earth. And as citizens of the kingdom of heaven our lives are to be living examples of the principles that Jesus taught in the Sermon On The Mount. Sometimes these principles can present quite a challenge as you are about to see in today’s message.

Please follow along in your Bibles as I read today’s scripture text from Matthew chapter five, verses 43-48.

Matthew 5:43-48 (NKJV)

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

45 that you may be sons of your Father 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.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.
The world teaches us to hate our enemies……to despise our enemy’s successes……and rejoice when our enemy fails or falls……and even to wish that evil or harm might come to our enemies.

As we are going to see in today’s message, Jesus’ teaching on how we should treat our enemies is the “polar opposite” of what the world teaches.

As He has done previously in this discourse, Jesus begins with……

I. The TRADITION of The Scribes and Pharisees Regarding ENEMIES (v.43)

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

1. If man set out to write scripture, this is exactly how he would write it……””You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” That sounds reasonable doesn’t it?

2. Part of the scribes and Pharisees’ teaching was scriptural, the other part wasn’t. “You shall love your neighbor” is a direct quote from Leviticus 19:18. But when you look at Leviticus 19:18 you discover the scribes and Pharisees actually changed that verse in two ways.

   (a) First of all they SUBTRACTED some words from the text. The original text says, “You shall love your neighbor “as yourself.” By subtracting those two words, the scribes and Pharisees completely altered the meaning of the Law.
Remember the scribes and Pharisees were all about “self.” They were **self-righteous, selfish, and self-absorbed.** So in essence they changed Leviticus 19:18 to mean, “I must love my neighbor, but I don’t have to love him as much as I love myself.”

(b) But not only did they subtract some words, they **ADDED** some words, “You shall love your neighbor and HATE your ENEMY.

You can search the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi and you will never find a single verse that commands us to hate our enemy.

3. The scribes and Pharisees had reached the “logical” conclusion that **if we are to love our neighbor,** then it only stands to reason that **we should “hate our enemy.”**

What a dangerous thing it is to **add to or subtract from** the word of God to suit our own needs and satisfy our own logic.

4. The term **“enemy”** was used very loosely in those days.

An **“enemy”** could be anyone with whom you disagreed or didn’t like, or anyone who was different, or anyone who was openly hostile towards you.

5. But for the most part, the Jews thought of “enemies” in the **national** sense more than **personal.**

*The Jews absolutely hated all **GENTILES**, or non-Jews.

*They also hated **SAMARITANS**, who were a “mixed breed” of Jew and some other nationality.

*And they hated **GOD - FEARERS** which were foreigners who worshiped the same Jehovah God they worshiped, but refused to be circumcised.
6. The ancient Roman writers Tacitus and Juvinal noted in their writings that the Jews’ hatred of all non-Jews was an essential part of the Jewish religion.

7. Dare I say it, the hatred of the Jews in Jesus’ day sounds eerily similar to the hatred of the modern-day Islamic religion towards all the “infidels” outside the Islamic faith.

TRANSITION

Well as we move from the TRADITION OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES to the TEACHING OF JESUS, we are going to see a radically different approach on how we should treat our enemies.

II. The TEACHING of JESUS Regarding ENEMIES (vs.44)

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

ILLUSTRATION

Jay Leno tells about the time he was sitting behind a car at a stop light when he noticed the guy’s bumper sticker which read, “Honk if you love Jesus.” Jay said, “I like that, so I gave the guy a toot on my horn.” He said, “Pretty soon the guy rolled down his window and stuck his head out and yelled, “The light is still red you moron!”

Now why does that strike us as funny? Could it be because it hits a little too close to home?

1. Jesus teaches us to “love our enemies.” That’s NOT natural, that’s supernatural. I mean the only way we could “love our enemies” would be to have Jesus Christ living within us wouldn’t it? EXACTLY!!!
2. It is interesting to note that Jesus doesn’t say, “If you have any enemies.” He is implying that we do have enemies!

Who are your enemies? I’m not asking you who you hate or who you dislike; I’m asking you who hates you or dislikes you? An ex-mate? A former friend? One of your children? A co-worker? A relative? A former church member? A neighbor down the road?

3. Now most of us would like to think we don’t have any enemies.

But the truth is, as Christians, we have lots of enemies. We may not know them by name! We may have never met them! But as Christians we have many enemies in this world!

4. Jesus describes these “enemies” for us in v.44.......

v. 44 Our enemies are those who CURSE Christians, those who HATE Christians, those who SPITEFULLY USE Christians, and those who PERSECUTE Christians.

5. Brothers and sisters, we don’t like to talk about this or even think about it, but we have lots of “enemies” in this world who would love nothing more than to wipe you and me off the face of this earth. We have “enemies” who plot against Christianity every single day.

- There are TERRORIST who hate us!
- There are POLITICIANS running this country who hate us!
- There are people in THE MEDIA who hate us!
There are organizations like THE A.C.L.U. and The Freedom From Religion Foundation who hate us.

HOLLYWOOD hates us!

There are lots of COLLEGE and UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS who hate us!

6. Just because we aren’t being physically persecuted like Christians in other parts of the world doesn’t mean we don’t have enemies. We have more enemies than you can shake a stick at!

7. That brings us back to Jesus’ command: “But I say to you, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES!” How do we do that? Jesus tells us three ways:

(A) First of all, Jesus commands us to BLESS our enemies. (v.44b)

v.44b “BLESS those who CURSE you.”

That word “bless” means “to speak WELL of someone.”

How do you speak well of an enemy? How do you bless that person who curses you? How do bless that person who is always criticizing and belittling you? How do you say something nice about the person who never says anything nice about you?

We do it out of the love of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

We do it, not because they deserve it, but because it is what Jesus commanded us to do.

ILLUSTRATION Many years ago I was sitting in a Church board meeting beside one of the deacons who had ruled that Church with an “iron fist” for many years. This man hated me and made no bones about it. Well during that meeting he started saying all kinds of cruel and hateful things to me and about me.
Now I have to be honest with you and tell you my Norwegian blood was boiling. And it was so hard to to resist the temptation to retaliate. But instead, I quietly got up out of my seat, and patted my enemy on the back and said, “I love you brother.” Then I walked out and left.

On my way home I thought of all kinds of things I could have said. Have you ever noticed that? You always think of the “good stuff” later? But in retrospect, I have always been thankful that the Holy Spirit put a “blessing” in my mouth to speak to my enemy that night.

**JESUS COMMANDS US TO BLESS OUR ENEMIES.**

(B) Secondly, Jesus commands us to do **GOOD** to our enemies. (v.44c)

v.44c “DO GOOD to those who HATE you.”

**ILLUSTRATION** One day during the Civil War a soldier was astonished when he heard General Robert E. Lee speak in complimentary terms about a fellow officer. He said, “General, do you know that the man you speak so highly of is one of your worst enemies, and that he misses no opportunity to slander you?”

General Lee responded, “Yes, I know, but I was asked for my opinion of him, not his of me.”

General Lee’s response is a classic example of “doing good to someone who hates you.” Its not an easy thing to do. In fact at times it may even seem impossible. But when someone does hates you or me, Jesus commands us to “search for the godly response.”

Kent Hughes once said, “To return evil for good is DEVILISH; to return good for good is HUMAN; and to return good for evil is DIVINE.”

**JESUS COMMANDS US TO BLESS OUR ENEMIES.**
**JESUS COMMANDS US TO DO GOOD TO OUR ENEMIES.**
(C) And thirdly, Jesus commands us to PRAY for our enemies. (v. 44d)

v. 44d “PRAY for those who SPITEFULLY USE YOU and PERSECUTE YOU.”

**ILLUSTRATION:** A little girl was misbehaving at the supper table one evening, and so her dad punished her by making her eat by herself in the corner of the dining room. The family paid no attention to the little pouting girl until they heard her PRAY, “Dear Lord, thank you for preparing a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

What does Jesus mean when He commands us to “pray for our enemies?” He’s not commanding us to “pray for their demise” or to “pray that the Lord will take them out of this world.” Nor is Jesus commanding us to pray that “our enemy gets what they deserve.”

Our prayer for our enemies should be “Father FORGIVE them.” That was Jesus’ prayer for His enemies as He was dying on the cross. That was Stephen’s prayer for his enemies as he was being stoned to death. “Father FORGIVE them.”

That prayer may not change our enemies, but that prayer will certainly change us!

Thirdly let’s consider........

**III. The TRUTH About LOVING Our ENEMIES (vs. 44-48)**

Jesus teaches us three truths about “loving our enemies” in this final paragraph of *Matthew chapter five.*
TRUTH #1: When we love our enemies we are IMITATING our heavenly FATHER. (vs.44,45)

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

45 that you may be sons of your Father 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.

God demonstrates His LOVE for His ENEMIES every day. He blesses His enemies with sunshine, though they don’t deserve it. He blesses His enemies with rain, though they don’t deserve it. He blesses His enemies with food and shelter and clothing, though they don’t deserve it.

And when you and I love our enemies, bless our enemies, do good to our enemies, and pray for our enemies it doesn’t mean we are these absolutely wonderful, awesome human beings, it means we are IMITATING OUR HEAVENLY FATHER!

TRUTH #2: When we love our enemies we DISTINGUISH ourselves from the rest of the WORLD. (vs. 46,47)

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

Loving our friends makes us just like everybody else in the world, but loving our enemies distinguishes us from the rest of the world.

Blessing our friends makes us just like everybody else in the world, but blessing our enemies distinguishes us from the rest of the world.

Doing good to our friends makes us just like everybody else in the world, but doing good to our enemies distinguishes us from the rest of the world.
Praying for our friends makes us just like all other religious people in the world, but praying for our enemies distinguishes us from the rest of the world.

**TRUTH #3:** When we love our enemies we come as close to **PERFECTION** as we will ever experience in this life (v.48)

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Jesus is not saying when we love our enemies we reach “moral perfection.” What He is saying is when we love our enemies we experience the **PERFECT LOVE** of God at work in us. When we love our enemies we experience the love of God at its **DEEPEST** level.

“For GOD demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners……WHILE WE WERE STILL GOD’S ENEMIES…. Christ died for us.”

**CONCLUSION**

Jesus Christ lived in the midst of His enemies every day! He lived in the midst of people who hated Him, despised Him, rejected Him, and yet **HE LOVED THEM……HE BLESSED THEM……HE DID GOOD TO THEM……HE PRAYED FOR THEM……HE FORGAVE THEM……HE DIED TO SAVE THEM.**

If this is how our Master treated His enemies, are we, His servants to treat our enemies any less?

We will never regret **LOVING AN ENEMY!**
We will never regret **BLESSING AN ENEMY!**
We will never regret **DOING GOOD TO AN ENEMY.**
We will never regret **PRAYING FOR AN ENEMY**

Brothers and sisters, if you and I are to truly **LIVE THE SALT LIFE, WE MUST ASK THE LORD TO FILL US WITH HIS AGAPE LOVE, THE KIND OF LOVE THAT REACHES BEYOND ALL BOUNDARIES, EVEN TO THOSE WHO ARE OUR ENEMIES.**