

Summer on the Mount, Matthew 5:38-48: Love Redefined, 7/28/19

Matthew 5:38-48

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

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 children 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 own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We have already looked at several hard-to-live teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount so far: forgiving those who have done you wrong, committing to sexual purity whatever it takes, covenantal marriage... but I think these words of Jesus about radical love are the most difficult of them all. The temptation is to put this passage in the super-Christian box (For the Apostle Paul, Mother Theresa, and Missionaries). But Jesus was not speaking to super Christians, he was speaking to the average follower- Fisherman and the tax collector- And he is speaking to you us today- the accountant, the teenager, the stay-at-home mom, the teacher, the retired engineer from DuPont. Other tendency is to write this off as utopianism, so impractical in our world today that no one can be expected to live this way. I will argue though that living this way is the very essence of what Christianity was supposed to look like and it has the power to change the world. We will see three things: **1) The Path of Radical Love 2) The Practice of Radical Love 3) The Purpose of Radical Love**

1) The Path of Radical Love

The path is marked out by the same contrast we have seen in previous weeks- the external righteousness of the pharisees, "You've heard it said" and the redefined kingdom ethic of Jesus, "But I tell you." We see this twice- once in verse 38 and again in verse 43. Let's take a look at each so we can better understand what radical love really looks like in action.

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

Here Jesus quotes a portion of the OT Law from Exodus 21. Now at first blush that may seem harsh and gruesome. But this portion of the law was intended for judges in Israel's legal court. And the intention was to move retribution out of the personal sphere, where it can easily spin out of control, into the judicial sphere, where justice could be served. If I killed your cow, you

would want to my burn farm down...and if there is no law of the land, no justice, because of the sinfulness of our hearts, it would turn into "Lord of the flies" pretty quickly. So retributive justice was designed to curb criminal sin in their society, but also to curb personal paybacks.

But Jesus gives Christians a new way to live- not by demanding retributive justice, but rather in our personal life, in our attitude and actions toward others we take an attitude of proactive, powerfully loving non-resistance and non-retaliation. We show love in the face of hate, injustice, anger, insult and racism. Jesus gives us four examples of this.

#1 When someone insults you. "slap in the face, turn other cheek", v.39. When someone insults you or your cause, your people, your beliefs, do you try to save face or guard your honor? Do you stew over the perfect comeback? Do you engage in a fight? Do you "clapback"? This has gone into overdrive in today's social media world. Because we can say things over a screen that we wouldn't dare say in person...there are lots of keyboard warriors out there. We see this in schools with Cyber-bullying. But the radical, non-retaliation of Jesus' love ethic, refuses. This isn't always non-action, but it is non-retaliation.

#2 When someone takes your possessions. "Sues for shirt, give them your coat", v.40. What is the principle here? Possessions are not sacred, but radical love is. It's an attitude that says, "I don't need it, God will provide."

#3 When someone inconveniences you. "If someone forces you to walk a mile, walk two miles" v.41. In Jesus' day in Palestine under Roman occupation, any Roman soldier could at any time conscript a Jewish person to carry supplies or bags for one mile. This was not only inconveniencing but humiliating. But in Jesus' radical ethic of love we are willing to go a second mile. "This is our saying, go the extra mile" comes from by the way. Are you willing to be inconvenienced, even if it isn't fair? Even if you feel like it violates your rights?

#4 When someone asks for money "Give to the one who asks" v.42. Probably, Jesus had in mind anyone from beggars in the street to your neighbor. Open-handed love. Saying, I am willing to give up what I have in service to others.

Just when you thought this was too extreme, Jesus is going to take it to an even farther. 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.

The first half of this saying came right from Leviticus 19:18, love your neighbor. But what about "hate your enemy?" Well, you won't find that in the Old Testament, but was the teaching of the pharisees. We have writings from the Qumran caves that taught to love the children of light (Jews) and hate the children of darkness (gentile). The pharisees taught that love of neighbor was restricted to your own people. And therefore, in contrast, to hate the enemy (everyone else). Which they would have good reason to do. Whether it was the Romans who oppressed them or the Samaritans who often betrayed them. This is why in Luke 10, the teacher of the law asked Jesus who is my neighbor? Because he sought to justify himself because he had no

problem loving his Jewish neighbor. But Jesus redefined neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan to include even those who are your natural enemies. Love? Maybe avoid or tolerate, or don't respond...but love? Jesus' ethic radically redefines the lengths at which love ought to extend. Instead of hate, we love. Instead of retaliation, we pray. Instead of treating them like enemies, we treat them like neighbors.

[Blank Slide] But Wait! How many times throughout this sermon so far did you say, "Yeah but..." Does Jesus think there is a place for justice, for self-defense, for the law to reign? Is there a time to defend against abuse- absolutely- Jesus made a bull-whip and drove out the money changers who were abusing the poor! We use wisdom in determining the time and place for application. One author- "Jesus is calling us to avoid violence, absorb injustice, and live in light of what the kingdom is like in spite of what the world is like now. The point Jesus is making is that in the kingdom of heaven, self-interest does not rule, and even our legal rights and legitimate expectations do not rule. Love rules. And before you say this can't work. This is pie-in-the-sky utopianism, this is how Jesus lived and changed the world. This is how the great missionaries Adoniram Judson lived, Elizabeth Elliot, and MLK Jr. lived... As MLK Jr. said and more importantly lived- "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." and changed the world. And this is why I am here today- Story of grandmom, and pop-pop. This ought to be our default, before we ask, what are my rights, what is in my own self-interest? What makes me feel justified and strong? Our default as Christians is "What is the radically loving, Jesus thing to do?"

2) The Practice of Radical Love So what does Radical Love look like to live out today?

#1 We must understand that we were enemies too. Our tendency is to look at the world like a marvel movie. Good and evil. Now this is half right, except the problem is that we like to make ourselves the hero and our enemies the villains. But the Bible says God is the hero and we all have been the villains. **Romans 5:10, *If while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more will we be saved by his life?*** Must start with deep introspection and humility, and gospel perspective. The only difference between me and a murderer or rapist is that the seeds of hate and lust were not watered to same extent and under the same conditions. You and I are capable of the same thing. So, we can't separate the world into the good guys and the bad guys. Until then, we will be spinning our wheels.

#2 We must name our enemies. If you don't admit there are people you do not like or who don't like you, you will bury your head and never live this out. Who are the individuals or people groups that have hurt you or your neighbors? Who are your philosophical or political enemies? Who do you exclude, denounce, avoid, talk ill about, malign on social media, vilify, or secretly hope something bad happens to them? Who makes your blood-boil? Ex-spouse, Ex-friend, bully? Boss? Rival? Maybe it is a group- Muslims? LGBT+ community? Republicans? Democrats? These are the ones Jesus calls you to love.

#3 We must turn our enemies into our neighbors. How do we do that?

Don't Retaliate, Seek to Restore. It might be through practicing the four examples Jesus gave earlier. Through seeking reconciliation. Blessed are the peacemakers. Seeking to understand

before you are understood...you may find that you have more in common than you thought, or that you didn't know as much as you thought. Story of Victoria the Uber driver.

Don't Avoid, Practice Hospitality. Jesus here talks about love in terms of greeting, which in that day was not a passing "hello" it was practicing hospitality. Allowing them into your world. Maybe turning an enemy into a friend means having them over to your house for dinner.

Don't Slander, Pray For Blessing. I've discovered it's awfully hard to hate someone that you pray for all the time. Somebody that really bothers you or hurt you, somebody that has been a thorn in your flesh, somebody that really has been irritant. My challenge to you is as soon you get that thought, ask that God will bless them. Ask that God would change them. Someone cuts you off. Pray that God would bless them. Prayer for your enemies is one of the deepest forms of love, because it means that you have to really want something good happen to them. It may be for their conversion. It may be for their repentance. It may be that they would be awakened to the enmity in their hearts. It may be that they will be stopped in their downward spiral of sin. But the prayer Jesus has in mind here is always for their good. This is what Jesus did as he hung on the cross: *Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.*

3) The Purpose of Radical Love

⁴⁵ that you may be children 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...⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We have a saying, "Like father, like son." "Chip off the old block", "Apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Typically, when we say this we are commenting about a personality trait or a tendency that kids have to imitate the dads...sometimes in an embarrassing way. As a dad, we want our kids to represent our parenting and our family name well because in some way, whether fair or unfair, it is a reflection on us!

I think this is what Jesus has in mind. Since we are now children of God, birthed into his family through the gospel of Jesus, we bear the image of God in our world. God's radical love is designed to be demonstrated in our world. So that people see his patience, his hospitality, his love. This is what it means to be a light on a hill. And this is also what Jesus has in mind when he calls us to "be perfect like our heaven father is perfect." Now we think, perfect? I'm far from perfect. In this context probably means to become mature or to fulfill a purpose that it was made to fulfill. When we show radical love, we are being like our Father, fulfilling our purpose and displaying maturity in our walk with the Lord. So, here's the deal, do you really want to be a mature Christian? How many want to be a mature Christian? Okay, if you really want to be mature, the question is how do you become mature? What marks a mature believer? How do you know if you're mature? How do you know when you've reached the mark? "Because I memorized a hundred Bible verses," that's not the answer. "When I get to be a deacon or teacher?," that's not the right answer. The answer is- you've reached the mark when you love your enemies. When you love like this, not just your friends, not just your family, not the people who smile and say, "You're just so wonderful." But when you love like this, man, you've

arrived. We will never arrive...But Jesus has. Jesus didn't payback evil. Overcame it with love. He turned not only his cheek, but stretched out his arms on a cross. He didn't only carry a burden one mile, he carried all our sin and shame up that hill to Calvary. He held nothing back.