

“Enemies & The Good Life” Matthew 5:43-48 Shane Hatfield 6/5/22

Everyone please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5. It will be on the overhead, but it might be helpful for you to follow along on your device or in your Bible. The title of this morning’s sermon is “Enemies & The Good Life.” We’re continuing our study in the Sermon on the Mount, looking at the good life according to Jesus. When we looked at the beatitudes we looked at the character of the good life, and the last several weeks we’ve been looking at what we call the antitheses, these opposing ideas, and what we’ve been seeing is that Jesus is refining and reinterpreting the theology of the good life, and He’s showing us how we can have our hearts transformed and how we can experience God’s good life in all these different areas. In areas of anger, lust, divorce, and promises. Last week we looked at how we can experience the good life in situations where we want to retaliate, and we saw that Jesus said that the good life does not come through retaliation and revenge, but through submission and sacrifice.

Well, this morning’s text is going to build on that and Jesus is going to take it further, He’s going to drive the gospel deeper into our hearts and show us how to experience the good life in the midst of our enemies, and in the midst of profound evil that is done to us and around us. So, with that let’s turn to God’s word. Hear the word of the Lord from Matthew 5, starting in verse 43.

“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 and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be sons of your Father who is 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 do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48** You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

David tells us the word of God is sweeter than the honey on a honeycomb, and it’s more precious than gold, even much fine gold. Let’s turn our attention to it now.

I want to start out this morning by playing a word association game with you, okay? I’m going to say two words and I want you to see what immediately comes to mind. Evil. Rhetorical question, key word there. Second word: enemies or enemy. What came to mind when you thought about those words? An enemy is anyone or anything that blocks, impedes or ruins our version of the good life, or what God offers us. We all have enemies. When we think about enemies, we might think about people who perform unspeakable, horrible acts in society such as those we heard about this week at the school shooting in Texas and the hospital shooting in Tulsa. In those tragedies, those shooters were enemies of the life, liberty, joy, and peace that we strive for in our country. We might think about the tragic world wars that have destroyed untold millions of lives across the globe. We might think about the genocides or civil wars that have taken place over the years, like those in Rwanda, where just a few decades ago almost a million people were killed in only 100 days. Those tragic wars destroyed personal, civic progress, peace, and prosperity.

When we think about enemies, we might think about the people in our own lives, close to us, maybe friends or family members that have slandered, robbed, or abused us. We might

think about that kid at school who has ignored us or bullied us. We might think about a friend or business partner or spouse who has betrayed us. We might think about collective groups that oppose each other, something as silly as sports rivalries, or something more serious like competing businesses, or something powerful like political parties and politicians. We all think of evil and enemies, all around us.

The sad reality is evil and enemies are a part of our world. They are a product of the sin and brokenness in this world that we all experience. The question that we have to ask ourselves is, "Do we have the resources we need to handle the evil and the enemies around us?" Well, there was a man named W. H. Auden who lived during the time of World War II who had a fundamental change in his life when he realized he didn't have the resources he needed to handle the evil around him. W. H. Auden was not a Christian, he was a proud humanist when he walked into a movie theater in Germany during World War II and sat there with Nazi propaganda displayed on the screens, surrounded by friends and family members in his community. When they saw the Nazi propaganda about the Polish people, these people that he knew and loved, stood up and started chanting, "Kill the Poles." As he walked home that night, he realized that he did not have the resources in his atheistic, humanistic worldview to deal with the evil that he had just experienced. It was then that he decided to become a Christian, because only in the gospel could he find the resources he needed to deal with evil and enemies in this world.

This morning as we look at Jesus' teaching, what I want us to see is that through the gospel, through Jesus, through the good word in this good book, that we have the resources we need to experience the good life here, despite the evil and the enemies around us. We're going to look at three things here. We're going to see that Jesus teaches us *that* we love our enemies, *how* we love our enemies, and *why* we love our enemies.

The first thing I want you to see is that Jesus teaches us *that* we love our enemies. Look back at verse 43. Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Now, the original Scripture text that this probably came out of was Leviticus 19, and it said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the LORD." So, you can see what the scribes and Pharisees did is they omitted, "As yourself," and they added the phrase, "Hate your enemy." Nowhere in the Old Testament does it teach us to hate our enemies. It actually teaches the exact opposite! Proverbs 25:21 reads, "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink." And Paul quotes that verse in Romans 12 when he's describing how to live the Christian life. You see, what the scribes and Pharisees were trying to do, is they were trying to limit the scope of the teaching of loving your neighbors to exclude our enemies! They even went so far as to define 'neighbor,' as someone who shares their race, and their religion, which would thereby exclude people that didn't share their race or their religion.

So, one of the questions of Jesus' day was, 'Who is my neighbor?' That might remind you of a time when Jesus was asked that very question. He was teaching and a lawyer stood up and a lawyer went to test Jesus, and he said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus looked at him, and said, "What does your law say?" And the lawyer said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus says, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you shall live!" And then the lawyer wanting to justify himself said, "Well, who is my neighbor?" And to answer that Jesus told a parable. He said that there was a man walking down

the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, and some robbers attacked him, beat him, and left him for dead at the side of the road. Well first, as he was laying there, a Levite walked by, who was a religious person, who should have taken care of this man, and he did not stop to help him. He kept walking. Next, a priest walked by, who also was a religious person, who should have helped this man, but instead of helping him, he just walked by. Then a Samaritan walked by, and the Samaritan had compassion on that man. He bandaged him, he cared for him, he put him on his donkey, he took him to an inn, and he paid for that man to stay at the inn so that he could recover. Jesus looked at the teacher and said, "Who was a neighbor to this man?" And the lawyer said, "The one who had compassion on him." And Jesus said, "You go and do likewise."

What was Jesus saying in that parable? Jesus was saying that our neighbor is anyone that we come across who is in need that we can help regardless of race, regardless of religion, regardless of class! He was saying your neighbor is *anyone* you can help, even your enemies. You see, Samaritans and Jews were enemies. Samaritans were half-blood Jews. They were a mixed race people. They did not worship according to the law that the Jews followed. They did not follow the Old Testament. They were racial and religious outsiders. And yet, this Samaritan is the hero of the story. He is the good guy. So, what Jesus is telling us here in this passage is that the scope of God's love is endless! It supersedes racial and religious boundaries. He tells us to love our enemies, regardless of race, class, political party, team, town, or anything else. Jesus teaches us to have a boundary-less love, that does not love based on those categories.

Now, some of the boundaries that we create for ourselves are superficial and sinful. Boundaries like race, that's a superficial, sinful boundary. Jesus is saying our love is to supersede boundaries of race. When we see those areas of sin in our lives, we need to confess those sins, repent, and seek relationships with people of different races. In other relationships and other boundaries, we may have legitimate theological and ideological differences with people, and Jesus says, even in those areas, the guiding principle of those relationships is to be love, not hatred. Love builds bridges, where hate builds boundaries. God's love is boundary-less, and He teaches us to have a boundary-less love in our lives as well.

What does that look like? On March 15, 1963 there was one of the most famous basketball games of all time. It was called The Game of Change. It was a game between the Ole Miss basketball team that was all white, and the Loyola basketball team that was integrated and had four African American starters. In the state of Mississippi, it was an unwritten rule that they would not allow their sports teams to play other integrated teams, so for the Ole Miss basketball team to go play this game, they actually had to devise an elaborate plan that involved them leaving in the middle of the night and setting up decoy players so that they could leave and drive to their NCAA tournament game and actually play this game. Now, they did it, they did whatever it took to get to the game. When they got to the game and they went up for the tip-off, there was a black man named Jerry Harkness who did the tip for Loyola, and there was a white man named Joe Dan Gold who did the tip for Ole Miss, and before they did the tip-off, Joe Dan Gold put out his hand and he shook Jerry Harkness' hand. His hand extended across a racial, sinful boundary to extend love to a man who was his enemy. It was the same thing for Jerry Harkness. He extended his hand across a boundary to show love for a man who was his enemy. They loved each other. Those two maintained a friendship, and when Joe Gold died, Harkness, the African American man, went to his funeral, walked up to his casket, and there was a picture of the two men shaking hands at midcourt that day, and he began to weep. The kind of love that

Jesus calls us to, is a love that extends across racial, ethnic, class, and any other type of boundary. Jesus teaches us that we love our enemies.

The second thing He teaches us is *how* we love our enemies. Look back at the text, verses 44-45 say, “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 sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” So, the first thing that Jesus tells us to do is to pray for our enemies. Now, that might not seem like a big deal on the surface, but that’s because we think too little of prayer and not too much. One of the most powerful, important things that we can do is to pray for our enemies. It is the highest goal that we can reach. Commentators throughout church history, as they looked at this passage, have said that praying for your enemies is the summit of love. John Chrysostom, who was a preacher in the early church called Goldenmouth, nobody’s ever called me Goldenmouth, that just shows you how I’m not John Chrysostom. As he was outlining this text, in all of the retaliation text and this text he outlined nine steps for loving your enemy, and he said praying for your enemy is the summit of self-control. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a Christian who lived during World War II and wrote prolifically about how to handle your enemies, said, “This is the supreme command: through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God.” When your ex-spouse sends you a threatening email, pray for them before you respond. When your sibling steals your toy, again, pray for them before you respond. When your coworker slanders you again, pray for them instead of retaliating. Prayer is the highest and first act of love that we can extend to our enemies.

Then after we pray, Jesus tells us to seek to love them in word and deed. The word, “love” here that’s used, is an action-oriented word, and Jesus brings that out in the parallel passage in Luke. In Luke 6:27 He says, “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” He says, actively seek to do good to your enemies in word and deed. He uses our heavenly Father as a pattern for this type of action-oriented love. Jesus says that the Father makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust. Theologians call this God’s common grace. This is grace that He extends to all people everywhere regardless of race, religion, class, or righteousness. He gives all people some measure of grace in this life through creation! He gives grace to people who are His enemies, who reject Him and rebel against Him and oppose Him! His grace is a grace that they’ve not earned, and they don’t deserve. It’s a grace that He freely chooses to give. It’s this grace that’s a pattern for us as we respond to our enemies.

I was talking to a friend recently who has gone through a divorce, and his wife divorced him for unjust and unbiblical reasons, and he was meeting with a counselor to process that divorce and to process what it looks like for him to forgive his spouse. His counselor gave him a definition of forgiveness that I want to share for you. Now unfortunately, it’s not going to be on the powerpoint, but I’m going to say it slowly, if you want to try to write some of it down, and I can send it out this week if you want to have it in its entirety. But it says this, “Forgiveness occurs when people rationally determine that they have been unfairly treated. They forgive when they willfully abandon resentment and related responses to which they have a right, and they endeavor to respond to the wrongdoer based on the principle of goodness which may include compassion, unconditional worth, generosity and love to which the wrongdoer, by nature

of the acts, has no right.' That's a long, wordy definition to say that forgiveness takes place when someone says, 'Yes, I have been wronged. I have been sinned against, but I am going to choose to forgive this person, to abandon my resentment, to which I have a right! Like, I actually have a right to be resentful, but I'm going to abandon that and instead I'm going to respond with goodness, compassion, dignity, and generosity to which they don't have a right, because they sinned against me.' Isn't that the same thing our heavenly Father does when He sends the rain to fall on the just and on the unjust, and the sun to rise on the evil and the good. God is giving a gracious gift that people do not deserve, they haven't earned, and which he doesn't have to give! We can love our enemies in the same way.

For my friend, it looked like greeting his ex-spouse with kindness and compassion when they exchanged kids, even if he didn't think that she deserved it. What does it look like for you? It could look like sharing your toy with your sibling, even when they've been unkind to you. It could look like complimenting that coworker or that girl at school, even though she's made fun of you. It could look like helping your neighbor, even though they've criticized your Christian beliefs. How can you forgive and extend a gracious gift to people without condoning their evil, without holding it against them, without retaliating. That's what our heavenly Father does to us, and it's what He calls us to do for others.

Now, this doesn't mean that we allow lawlessness and abuse. Part of loving people may actually be holding them accountable. One commentator said, "If someone has broken into my house at night and burgled me," that's how you know it's old, when they say burgled in English, "I catch the thief! It may be well my duty to sit him down and give him something to eat and drink, while at the same time telephoning the police." So, it doesn't mean we excuse lawlessness and abuse, and it doesn't mean that we compromise truth. We can still hold our Christian convictions and beliefs firmly and passionately, but also communicate the truth in love, and speak kindly to people, and treat them kindly.

There was a good example of this a few years ago, back in about 2012, Chick-fil-a was coming under heavy, heavy scrutiny for their Christian values and beliefs about the family, and marriage, and sexuality, and people were picketing their locations. You may remember some of that. While all that was going on, what people didn't realize was that behind the scenes, the founder and owner of Chick-fil-a, Dan Cathy, had reached out to a man named Shane Windmeyer. Shane Windmeyer was the executive director of Campus Pride, one of the groups that was leading these campaigns against Chick-fil-a. He was a publicly gay man, engaged in a homosexual marriage, but Dan Cathy reached out to him and they began talking on the phone. They began exchanging emails. They began meeting for coffee. They developed a friendship and a relationship over time. Shane said that in these conversations that Dan was genuine and kind, he sought to understand before being understood. Dan confessed that he was naive to the impact that Chick-fil-a had had on the gay community. He learned about Shane's life, and Shane began to learn about his life. Dan talked about his faith in Christ. He offered apologies for the hurt that people had done in the name of Chick-fil-a. But, Shane said he offered no apologies for his genuine Christian beliefs on marriage. Eventually, Dan invited Shane to watch the Chick-fil-a bowl, which is in the south, a display of great hospitality. He invited him as a friend and not as a publicity stunt. And in the end, Shane is the one who brought all this to the public, who wrote an entire article about it, and he said, "This is the reason why I'm calling for people to stop picketing and boycotting Chick-fil-a." It wasn't because of Dan Cathy's hate, it was because of his love.

He loved his enemy in word and deed. What does it look like for us, as a church, as a people, to firmly, passionately, hold to our Christian beliefs, and yet love people in word and deed? It can be done. That's what Jesus calls us to. But it won't come from us, it has to come from the work of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's the last thing that I want us to see, why do we love our enemies? We love our enemies because God first loved us when we were enemies. Romans 5:8 says, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It wasn't when we were good. It wasn't when we were right. It wasn't when we were just. It wasn't when we were God's friends that Jesus went to the cross for us, it was the exact opposite. It was when we were enemies that Jesus died for us. In the parable of the good Samaritan, we are not the Samaritan in the story, although we should be, who does deeds of kindness and compassion and love for others, we are the sinful Levite and the priest that leave the man in the ditch, and we are the man in the ditch! We are the enemy. Jesus is the good Samaritan, the one who comes and rescues us from the ditch and brings us not into the inn, but into the house of our Father and makes us sons and daughters of the King!

That is the gospel. Not that Jesus loved nice, pretty, hard-working, white, middle class people, but that Jesus loved His enemies to the point of death. That's why we love our enemies. We love our enemies because God loved us when we were enemies, and we love our enemies because through that, that's how we experience the blessing of being God's children! Verse 45, Jesus says, love your enemies "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven"! How crazy is that? As we love our enemies, we experience the love of our heavenly Father! We experience what it's like to be a child of God. We experience what it's like to have our hearts be renovated and ravished by the Lord of the universe who is the high and humble King, the lion and the lamb who would come and dwell with us and call us His children. As we do that, we experience God's love and we glorify God. Verses 46-47, He says, you know, if you only love your friends and your family, if you only love the people who love you, what reward do you have? The pagans, the tax collectors, they do that! Right? They love their friends! The Gentiles, right? They don't know Me! But they greet others! Right? He's saying that when we love our enemies, we glorify God more! We show that there's something radically different about us, and it was this teaching on loving our enemies that caused the church to grow and spread exponentially during the first few centuries.

There was a church historian named Larry Hurtado and he wrote a book. He researched what made the early church grow, and he wrote a book about it. There were five things he said made the early church grow. First, they were multi-racial. The early church was multi-racial. Second, they helped the poor and the marginalized. Third, they were anti-abortion. Fourth, they had a radical sexual ethic that they practiced in the midst of a culture that was sexually immoral. And guess what number five was? They were non-retaliatory and committed to forgiveness. The early church grew exponentially because they loved their enemies when they were persecuted.

When we love our enemies, we will glorify God and when we love our enemies, we will bring peace to our lives and to this world. That's what Jesus is getting at here in verse 48 when He says, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus is not saying that we can be perfect in this life. Remember in the Beatitudes, what is the entryway into the kingdom? It is admitting that you are poor and needy and hungering and thirsting for righteousness! So, Jesus is not saying that we can reach some state of sinless perfection in this

life. He has also said that remember your righteousness needs to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, that doesn't mean that if the scribes have a 50% righteousness, then you just need to get to 75% righteousness, or a 76% or a 99%, as if that's even possible. Jesus is not saying there are degrees of righteousness in His kingdom. He is saying there is one righteousness that is given by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness is a gift. Perfection is a gift. That righteousness brings wholeness and completeness in our lives. This word here for 'perfect,' if you trace the concept through the Old Testament and the New Testament, it's a word and a concept that's similar to the word shalom, which we've talked about before in our church. Shalom is the Old Testament concept of peace, wholeness, completeness. What Jesus is saying is that when we love our enemies, we are becoming whole, complete people, just as our heavenly Father is whole and complete and peaceful, we're becoming those types of people. We're becoming more Godly and more God-like as we love our enemies. If God is perfect and He loves His enemies in His perfect love, then we're becoming more like Him as we love our enemies. We are experiencing a peace in our lives that He has, and that He created us for, and that peace has radical ramifications for how we treat our enemies, and how we live our lives.

I think there is no better display of that peace, and of that approach, than what happened in the Amish community about fifteen years ago. About fifteen years ago, an evil person walked into an Amish schoolhouse and injured and killed several students, and then killed himself. As the parents of those students were waiting to find out what was happening with their children, one of them went to the shooter's family's house, and he knocked on the door, and whenever the father of the shooter came out, he said, "We do not view you as enemies, we view you as parents who are grieving the loss of a child, just like us." And he put his hand on the man's shoulder and called him a friend. At the gunman's funeral, thirty Amish people attended and embraced the gunman's family. When the gunman's mother had cancer, an Amish girl went to her house and cleaned it for her. At Christmas a school bus came up filled with Amish children who sang Christmas carols to the gunman's family. This radical display of forgiveness was made possibly only by the love of Christ, and it brought healing to that community and to the gunman's mother. There was a young lady who was shot by the gunman, she was paralyzed, and handicapped, and every Thursday evening, the gunman's mother would go to that girl's house and she would help her bathe. She would hold her like her own child. On the way home after the first few times she did that, she just bawled. Later on, she realized it was only the forgiveness of the Amish community that allowed her to heal and allowed her to love this girl that her son had hated. It's that kind of healing, it's that kind of forgiveness, it's those types of resources that the gospel of Jesus Christ gives us. It's that kind of peace that we can experience in our own lives, and in this world.

Let's go to our heavenly Father now and let's pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit He would allow us to love our enemies the way that Christ has loved us. Please pray with me.