

INI Hymns:

Sermon 24-08

3rd Sun. after Epiphany **Matthew 5:38-48**

1/21/23

“38 ‘You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

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.”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Love Your Enemies?

-I- Are you kidding? Who can do that? Who would even think of doing that or want to do that? That is the way our human nature reacts to what Jesus says. **Love Your Enemies? That’s Impossible!**

That’s the whole point. It is impossible for our sinful nature. Jesus came to save the lost, but the Jews didn’t think of themselves as being lost. They had gone the way of every false religion of the world, thinking that the key to being God’s child is keeping the commandments. So the Jews molded God’s law into outward actions that they could keep. God said in our OT reading, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” They added, “and hate your enemy.” As long as they thought they could earn God’s favour by keeping the law, they would never receive Jesus as their Savior. In fact that’s why the Priests and Pharisees hated Jesus and ultimately killed Him, because they didn’t want to admit that they weren’t good enough for God. So Jesus had to show them their need for a Savior.

As we read last week, Jesus began this Sermon on the Mount with some startling statements. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 5:3 It is not those who keep God’s commandments who are blessed and possess the kingdom of heaven. Rather it is those who see how miserably they fail to keep His commandments. Those who see that they have absolutely no spiritual goodness or worth that would make God love them or give them His kingdom. They are the ones who receive the kingdom. For being poor in spirit leads us to mourn over our own sins and unworthiness for they separate us from God. Therefore we also “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Vs.6

These are the attitudes of faith and salvation. But people in general do not have those attitudes, therefore Jesus goes on in the rest of this Sermon to produce those attitudes of being poor in spirit and hungering and thirsting for righteousness by showing us the full intent of the law. Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” We may be able to refrain from killing people, but Jesus shows that even our anger, bitterness or hatred in the heart is a sin.

Then the first part of our text indicates that any idea of revenge is also a sin against this commandment. That even includes saying anything that might hurt someones feelings, teasing or making fun of them to hurt them. God says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” Rom. 12:19 Let God take care of it. Suddenly a commandment that seems rather easy to keep, “You shall not kill,” convicts us all deeply. We break this command almost every day. Who can control their feelings and emotions when someone has hurt them?

The second half of our text today, takes this even one step farther, not only is anger and bitterness or resentment and speaking stinging words a sin, but we are also sinning against God’s 5th commandment if we don’t love our enemies.

The ESV which is printed on the back of the bulletin, doesn’t actually have everything Jesus says in verses 43-44. Let me read it to you in the NKJV “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ 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.” If we fail to do this, we are already sinning against this commandment. As James says, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” 4:17

We truly are sinners through and through. We can’t go a day without sinning. And this is only one commandment. It is **an Impossible Task** for our human nature. That is what Jesus is trying to show us so that we do become “Poor in spirit,” and mourn over our unworthiness and sin, and hunger and thirst for His righteousness. Then God will comfort us with His grace and fill us with the righteousness of Christ and give us the kingdom of heaven.

But there’s even more, something else wonderful happens.

-II- The Impossible Is Made Possible by Jesus.

The Holy Spirit transforms our life. He creates a new heart in us that wants to be like our Saviour. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:29 that God has predestined us “to be conformed to the image of his Son.” Our New Man is able to love our enemies. It still seems so hard to our flesh. When someone is really mean to us, the automatic reaction of our flesh is still to get angry or to strike back with our words if not also with our actions. And you may wonder, how is it possible to love your enemies. Jesus makes it possible,

but it is a growing process that involves several steps.

First of all remember that our anger and sharp words are a sin on our part. Confess your sinful reaction to God and be assured of His forgiveness.

Secondly, stop and consider just how much abuse God puts up with from us and how much suffering our sins caused Jesus, yet they still love us and forgive us and treat us with great kindness. God credits Jesus perfect love, even of His enemies, to us. Then God gives us the strength to also forgive others and show acts of kindness even to our enemies.

We also learn from our Saviour that loving our enemies is not an emotional reaction to the evil, but rather a decision that we are not going to let that evil overcome us and lead us into more sin. Loving your enemies is a choice you make to treat that person the way God has treated you. That is what Paul urges in Eph. 4:31-32 “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

In this way, Loving your enemies **Is Made Possible by Jesus**. Not that we will ever do it perfectly or that we will no longer sin in this are. We will. But it is possible and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can learn to do it more consistently.

When we do grow in this selfless love, some more amazing things begin to happen.

-III- Loving Your Enemies Is A Source of Many Blessings.

Your own life will become richer and happier in several ways. First of all forgiving your enemy from your heart frees you from anger and bitterness. Those things only make your own life miserable. When you forgive from your heart you are not letting yourself be overcome by evil. Secondly this type of forgiving love puts an end to fights and disputes and restores relationships. Think about what happens if you return biting words with more biting words. Then the other person comes back with even harsher words. Soon a little quarrel escalates into an all out fight and leads to evil actions and it gets worse and worse.

The other day when I was working out at the gym, they have TVs and one had a show called “Neighbourhood wars.” It’s unbelievable what people will do to their neighbour. And you can bet it all started with a thoughtless action or a careless word. It could have been ended with a kind word, but instead they got angry and it escalated to destroying each others property and smashing their cars. As Solomon says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Prov. 15:1

That not only happens with enemies, but it can happen with those you love. So many marriages go from bad to worse and finally end in divorce because thoughtless words or accusations are met with even more biting words until you are in a full blown fight. Then couples refuse to talk to each other and start doing little things to hurt the other. But if those initial thoughtless words are met with forgiving, patient love that speaks kindly in return and wants to find out what is really bothering the other person that brought out

such unkind words, then that quarrel comes to an end before it starts. Then love and peace is restored and grows deeper.

Returning evil with good is always a way to overcome evil. And it brings many blessings into your own life. Such forgiving love can work some even greater blessings. Let's think about what Jesus says next in our text. we are to love our enemies and do good to those who abuse us, "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." In other words you are becoming more like your Father. That in itself can only be a blessing, but think of how that affects others around you.

Jesus continues, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" Vs. 46-47.

Everybody loves those who love them. Even serial killers can be kind to those who are kind to them. If that is how you live your life, there is nothing noteworthy about that. But if you are kind to those who hate you and treat you badly, that is something truly noteworthy. People really take notice of such an incredible love. And it will have a truly wonderful result.

First of all people will be drawn to you. That kind of love attracts people. They want to have friends like that. People will see how you act and will want to treat you with kindness. It will almost always make your life so much more pleasant and enjoyable.

But more than that it will draw people to your Father. Jesus said earlier in this Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Matt. 5:16. It will lead people to want to know more about what makes you tick. They will want to know about your God. It will provide you with wonderful opportunities to tell others about what great things your Father has done for us and how He loves all people and how He saves us. That brings even greater joy if God uses you to bring another person to faith and salvation. That is something you can really rejoice about.

Yes, we are great sinners. We failed in these things, and that is just one commandment. Understanding that gives us even more reason to rejoice in God's grace and forgiveness, and it gives us greater reason to be kind to those who are mean and nasty. That is because we can understand where they are coming from? They are simply acting out of the same sinfulness in their heart that we have in ours. We can understand that sin and know that they need God's love and mercy just like we do to be able to break through that hard, cruel shell and bring joy and peace to their lives through Jesus Christ.

May God strengthen us to give that love to everyone.

Amen.