

Sermon Guide: The Sermon on the Mount:

Non-Retaliation and Love | Mark Anderson | May 12, 2024

Summary and key Takeaways:

In this message, Mark Anderson explores the challenging teachings of Jesus on loving our enemies, as presented in Matthew 5:38-48. With Divine Authority, Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets proclaim that we must: not resist an evil person, give to anyone who asks, love our enemies, and be perfect, as our Father in Heaven is perfect in His love for both faithful and faithless people..

While these exceedingly kind and gracious responses might be interpreted as weakness, they are in fact demonstrating a strength that can take control of an unjust situation. We give the enemy even more than they are asking for, and in this way overcome evil with good.

Jesus' teaching here would have been shocking to His original hearers ... and it should strike us as humanly impossible as well. Jesus is not actually telling us what to do in these situations (He is expecting us to use discernment!), but He is instead inviting us to step into a superhuman way of loving that becomes possible when we receive and live in His Love for us.

We all know in our heads that God loves us, but feeling this in our hearts is another thing ... because a) we know our inner darkness b) hard things have happened to us and c) our unanswered prayers. Once we really perceive that we are loved by God the way Jesus knew He was, it will change every dimension of our life. If this is difficult for you, begin by seeing that God loves you as you value some of the things He cares about, e.g. peace, justice, care for the poor, the environment, etc.

Jesus is NOT saying that we should seek out evil and suffering, stay in abusive or harmful situations, never defend ourselves, or give indiscriminately to anyone who asks. Jesus IS saying that if we are assuming that God is far from us, or that we are unworthy or unwanted, we need to think again, and repent! "The Kingdom of Heaven is here," means that we are not only beloved, but invited to be a part of what Jesus is doing.

Following Jesus is both about abundant life and laying down our lives in suffering. While we might long for our lives to be a steady upward stream of blessing, His example shows us to expect blessing, followed by adversity, suffering, sacrifice, even death, followed by a resurrection to eternal life. This "checkmark" pattern is the way of the Kingdom.

Jesus wants to share His Peace and Joy with us ... and in this passage, He is sharing His Love with us: a love that allows us to love both the people we like, and the people whom we don't like ... or even wish to harm.

Each day,
faithful followers of Jesus
will find themselves
doing impossibly loving things.

Exercise 1:

Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of how deeply you are loved by God:

- your sins have been forgiven
- you are seen, known, valued, and celebrated
- you are blessed and provided for
- your eternal future is secure with Him

In this Beloved space, ask:

"Is there something (money, time, emotional energy, some item, etc.) you are asking me to give/sacrifice for someone in need?"

Exercise 2:

Think of someone you really like, deeply care about.

Feel the warmth of your relationship with them.

PRAY a blessing of well-being over them.

Think of someone you only vaguely know.

Notice the absence of strong feelings towards them.

PRAY a blessing of well-being over them.

Think of someone you don't like, want to change, make disappear, or even harm.

Feel your fear, condemnation, or hatred towards them ... and offer these to Jesus.

Reminded of His Love for you, PRAY a blessing of forgiveness and well-being over them.

Bible Reading:

1. Matthew 5:38-48
2. Luke 4:30, 6:35, 12:11.

Discussion Questions

1. In Matthew 5:38-39, what does Jesus suggest as a response to someone who slaps you on the right cheek?
2. How does Jesus expand the concept of love towards neighbors and enemies in Matthew 5:43-48?
3. What does it mean to "turn the other cheek" in practical terms, based on the cultural context of Jesus' time?
4. How does the command to love enemies and pray for persecutors challenge the typical human response to conflict?

Going Deeper

1. Reflect on a recent situation where you felt wronged or insulted. How could you have applied Jesus' teaching to turn the other cheek in that scenario?
2. Identify someone you consider difficult to love. What is one specific action you can take this week to show them kindness or understanding?
3. Think of a person who has hurt you in the past. How can you pray for them this week, asking for blessings and well-being in their life?
4. Consider a community or group you find challenging to appreciate or understand. What steps can you take to engage with them positively, reflecting Jesus' command to love indiscriminately?