

Matthew 5:43-48

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, opening your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. If you're a visitor today, we're going through! The Gospel of Matthew. We want the Bible to set the agenda for what we teach, and so we're just taking a section after each section. Matthew chapter 5 and verses 43 to 48. There's a story of a guy speaking at a temperance meeting, you know, one of those meetings trying to convince people of the evil of drink. He's got two glasses, one with water in it and one with alcohol in it. He takes a worm, he drops a worm into the water, nothing happens.

And then he takes another worm and he drops it into the alcohol and the worm shrivels up and dies. At that point, he asks the audience, what do you infer from this? What do you get from this?

Somebody put their hand up and said, if you have worms, you shouldn't drink alcohol.

Oh, this is it. No, sorry. The point is this, it was a completely wrong inference, wasn't it? They'd drawn the wrong conclusion. And there were some people in Jesus' time that were like that. They looked at the Old Testament, and they looked at passages like Leviticus chapter 19 where it said, you shall love your neighbour. And they said, yes, we're all for loving our neighbour. You should love your neighbour, you should love your fellow Israelite. But you can hate your enemy. The command is love your neighbour, but it doesn't say anything about enemies. And Jesus says, no, no, no, what I'm saying to you is the purpose of that command was love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. And I think it's important that we realise what we've seen all the way through Matthew chapter 5, that Jesus is not correcting the Old Testament. But he is correcting how the Old Testament had been taught and distorted.

It was the Old Testament, actually, that Jesus is affirming here from the third book of the Bible, Leviticus 19. That said, you shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbour, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

And some people said, well, Leviticus 19 and 17 did mean that, but it just really meant our neighbours.

[2 : 3 6] It meant the people around us. It means your fellow Israelite. And that was right, but you go to the end of Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 33 and 34 and it tells us that when a refugee, when a sojourner, when somebody from outside of Israel joins with you in your land, you shall do him no wrong. You shall treat the stranger who comes in among you and you shall love him as yourself.

For you once, people of Israel, you once were refugees. There was a time when you were strangers in the land of Egypt. And so the Lord was saying through Moses that you not only love the Israelites, but you love the foreigner.

You love the foreigner who lives among you. And that is the Old Testament teaching. It was the Old Testament teaching in Exodus chapter 23, the second book of the Bible, that said when you meet an enemy's ox or donkey that's gone astray, you don't say, well, I don't care about that, he's my enemy. I don't care whose ox, I don't care whose donkey it is, let it go. No, actually, you bring it back to your enemy. And when you see your enemy's donkey that's collapsed under a heavy load, you don't just go by and say, well, I don't care about that, I couldn't care less. He may be your enemy, but the Bible says you get that donkey back on its feet. And you take it back. Proverbs 25, from the Wisdom Parish, of the Bible, says if your enemy is hungry, then feed him. And if your enemy is thirsty, then give him a drink.

And that's what Jesus is reaffirming here. He's saying love your neighbour. And not hate your enemy, but love your enemy as well. And he's reaffirming what the Old Testament law was taught. Rather than its distorted teaching, which said, well, you can love certain people, but it's fine to hate others. And so our concern here is to understand what is Jesus saying. And Jesus is saying, listen to me very clearly, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. And when you do that,

you show that you are like your Father in Heaven. You show that you are like the God you trusted in. And if you show your likeness to your Father in Heaven, you will be different from the world and the culture around you. And if you're not different from the culture around you, then you're not going to show likeness to your Father in Heaven.

So I want to see three things as we look at this. That will encourage us to obey this command. First is consider the authority of God's Son. Consider the authority of God's Son. Just look with me at verse 43 and verse 44.

Jesus says, you hear that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I, I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

[5 : 42] Notice that when Jesus lays this command on us, that he commands you, doesn't he? It's really interesting. He commands you to love. Love your enemy. Sometimes you hear the idea, don't you, that you can't force love. You can't command people to love. And the idea is as if love grabs you. And love has been defined, doesn't it, as an itchy feeling around your heart that cannot be scratched. It's something that just happens. You can't control it. I'm not against that. Maybe emotional or affection or an attractive element about it, which is certainly there. But Jesus is assuming his need. That love doesn't come from a mushy heart, but from an act of will. And he commands you as followers of the Lord Jesus to love your enemies. And that is a command. The Bible assumes you notice that in Deuteronomy chapter 6, that when you've got the great confession of Israel's faith that the Lord is our God and the Lord alone, and the very next words are, and you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole life and everything you've got. He commands you to love this God that you confess. And love is a command. And Jesus commands us here to love our enemies. And he gives us some help here. He shows us the shape of that love. He doesn't just leave it hanging. He says, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. He says there's a very particular way that you can express your love towards your enemies, and that is by praying for them. So he doesn't just leave it general. But he tells you, where do you begin to obey this command? Pray for those who persecute you. And you might say to me this morning, that is totally fake. I don't feel like I love them. I think the Lord, if he hears me starting praying, will think that's just totally funny. But wait a moment. What is prayer? If prayer is that you realise this morning that you come into the

King of Kings presence, and when you're about to pray and you realise that the one thing that there needs to be above all else when you come to pray before a God who sees everything is there needs to be complete and total honesty, doesn't there? With your Heavenly Father.

And part of praying is that you realise you can't deceive him at all. And so if you enter into prayer that way and you bring this difficulty even to him, you know how I feel about him, Lord. Then why can't you even make a beginning? Why can't you struggle with that in prayer?

Why can't you say, Lord, I don't even know if I can do this, but on the command of the Lord Jesus, I need to pray for this person who is my enemy. And I'm seeking to be obedient, but I find his heart. And I don't want to be a phony father, and I don't want to be a fake.

But we bring that struggle to him. And we begin there, we start there. And that's something very specific that you can do, isn't it? That it's sometimes actually when you're trying to do something and you're acknowledging before God, I don't want to be a fake, I don't want to be a phony. But when you throw yourself into something and you seek to love someone and do something towards that end, sometimes you begin to just actually care for them.

[9 : 40] You maybe don't find them easy. But you begin to find that your heart is slightly changed towards them. And you'll notice in this verse, I don't need to tell you, that the object of the love that Jesus commands is your enemies. Who is the enemy? What kind of enemy? Well, you'll see in the next phrase, Jesus assumes that the enemy is somebody who will persecute you. Pray for those who persecute you. The particular enemy that Jesus is talking about here is not just somebody you might happen to envy. So we've got animosity to them, and jealousy and so on. But it's an enemy who actually inflicts some sort of wrong on you, or injury on you. And they do that because you are a disciple of Jesus. Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. And they inflict some kind of wrong or some kind of injury. They express some kind of hatred or dislike or animosity towards you. Because you belong to Jesus. And you see that Jesus assumes, doesn't he, that his people will always be a suffering people. More or less. That if you live in the way that he's outlined in

Matthew chapter 5, the world will notice, and some in the world will not like that. And they will even hate you for his sake. And we are to love those enemies. We are to love and pray for those who persecute us. And when the bottom line comes, and the obligation to love that Jesus gives, and there is no escape from it, is there verse 44, I say to you, but I say to you, Jesus says, love your enemies. And you cannot escape from that authority. You cannot turn that down.

We would like to, don't we? I have a way of doing that in my own life, like you do. Well, we might say, I'd like to think Jesus is giving really good advice here. That if you can get yourself to this level, if you can do this kind of thing, it would be really great. But he's not giving good advice. He's giving a command. And we might like to think, oh, it's for the kind of spiritual high achievers. It's for the more gifted. It's for the more mature that Jesus is talking about here. It's for those that maybe have an aptitude for that kind of thing. The Christian all-stars. But Jesus doesn't have a gifted program. Jesus doesn't have high achievers. Jesus doesn't have all-stars. He's talking to all his disciples. And he says, I say to you, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. And so we are left with no option this morning. We are not left with an option. Jesus says, you will do this. You will do it.

And we do it simply because he commands us to do it. R.C. Sproul, who has just recently died, he's a great preacher, tells us when he was in seminary being trained to be a minister, there's quite a famous man called John Gerstner, who's quite a formidable figure. He was, R.C. Sproul was in John Gerstner's class. And by all accounts, Gerstner was very stern. And Gerstner raises this question. He says, here is the issue.

He says, if predestination is true, why bother with evangelism? If it's true that according to Ephesians 1, that God really has chosen a people before the foundation of the world, if he's chosen a people to bring to his son before the foundation of the world that he will bring to effect in time, then why should we be bothered? And why should we be worried?

[13:26] And why should we be concerned about us telling people about the Lord Jesus, if God is going to do it anyway? Why should we care about winning people to Christ, if God has already chosen people before the foundation of the world? And so that was the question. He went around the class, and he got the answers. It beats me. I don't know, and so on. And finally, he came to R.C. Sproul, and he asked R.C. Sproul. Sproul was sweating. He was totally intimidated.

And he kind of apologetically said in a stuttering manner, this is probably not what you want to hear, Mr. Gerstner. And it's not really a significant answer at all, but Jesus did command us to do it. Gerstner's eyes lit up. He shrugged his shoulders. And he said, yes, yes, yes, Mr. Sproul. The fact that Jesus, your saviour, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Lion of Jude and the Rose of Sharon, the Captain of your salvation, the Lord God, Omnipotent and Incarnate, should command your obedience. What a paltry reason for doing anything.

Sproul said, I've got the point. There are some things you do or you put yourself in the way of doing simply because Jesus commands you to do it. And he's the Lord. And anyone who says to you, but I, they are in charge. They are the Lord. And I think this is really important for you and I in our seeking to follow the Lord Jesus. What we don't have with Jesus, if I can say this, we don't have a schizophrenic with Jesus. That is both saviour and Lord in two packages. That's sometimes how it's been presented. Maybe you've heard this. Jesus can be your saviour and you can get all the benefits and all the goodies, but you don't have to know him as Lord unless you want to take that option. It's like, it's like buying a washing machine. You can buy a washing machine, but you don't have to take up the maintenance option.

You don't have to take up the year long guarantee. You can if you want to go down that route, but you don't have to. And sometimes the way the gospel is presented is you can know him as your saviour, but you don't really have to make him your Lord. The big problem with that is this. You don't make Jesus Lord of anything. Do you? He is Lord. He is Lord whether you submit to him or not. You don't make him Lord. I'm not saying that I don't have problems and you don't have problems in trying to submit and submit ourselves to his Lordship and his bossship of our lives. I know that's a huge struggle for me and for you, but Jesus is Lord and if you are his disciple, you don't make him that. It's not an extra option you can take.

And so when he commands, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. You must do it because of the authority of God's Son. And secondly, you've got another consideration and that is secondly the wideness of God's mercy. You love your enemies. You pray for them. You see it in verse 45, verse 48. And there Jesus says, you do this so that you may prove

yourself so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. Because he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good and he sends the rain on the just and on the unjust. Do you see what Jesus is saying? He's not saying that you do this in order to be or to become. He's not saying you love your enemies and you will be a son of the Father.

[17:10] That's not the case. But the word there is to prove to be. And what Jesus means is as you do this, you show yourself or you prove yourself to be sons or daughters of your Father in heaven.

How? Well, in that you reflect his likeness. And that's what he's like. And he gives you the reason. Look at the end of verse 45. He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good. And he sends rain on the just and on the unjust. And that last part is so important for you and I. It's really important that you get hold of this. It's what theologians sometimes call the common grace of God. It says that God is merciful and kind. And he shows his kindness not just to the disciples and followers of Jesus. Not only to those who are wanting to follow him and have been justified as righteous. But God shows kindness to the good and the evil.

He shows his goodness and his kindness and tokens of his love to those who are righteous and those who are unrighteous. To those who are Jesus' disciples and those who are not. To those who love God and those who reject God. To those who believe in God and those who deny his existence with the very breath he gives them. He shows them kindness and goodness. This verse isn't saying that God will never judge them. God will never judge those who hate him and so on or turn from him. But it does say that now, today, in their lives, those who can't stand God and don't want to live for him. And they're outside of the kingdom of God. God shows them kindness and love and kindness and mercy. And you and I are to be God-like in our embracing kindness and mercy. Even your enemies. Because God is kind to his enemies. God makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good.

God doesn't just put a cloud over the house or the farm of an unbeliever and put the sun shining brightly over the house or farm of believers. No, he makes the sun shine on both. And he makes the rain fall on the righteous farm and on the unrighteous farm. And he makes the rain fall on Christians and on atheists.

[19:39] Can you imagine where we'd be if the rain only fell on Christian farmers? We'd have Christian wheat, Christian barley. And we'd eat Christian cereals. And we'd have Christian lambs eating Christian grass.

It's ridiculous, isn't it? But God shows his mercy and his goodness on all. That's true in your life. Maybe you're a dear, a small, and you're not a follower of the Lord Jesus.

And you maybe have got issues with God, you say. I've got things I'd like to ask him. Well, God has got some things to ask you as well. God has been kind to you whether you admit it or not.

There are people that couldn't give a staff about Jesus Christ. And yet they're really well-adjusted people. They've got great families. God is good to them. Isn't the Father merciful to them?

You travel on the tomb each day. And you get to work safely. And you get home safely. The pagans and the Christians on the tomb, the same.

[20:50] Isn't the Lord good? He's good to the righteous and the unrighteous. Doesn't he give unbelieving atheists who are angry at him well-being jobs to support themselves and their families?

Isn't the Lord kind? Doesn't the Lord give health to unbelievers? Isn't he good? Christians and people who aren't Christians go through surgery and they recover.

Isn't God kind? We hear of someone who's a Christian brother or sister and their cancer went into remission. And we pray for them.

And we're really thankful for that. But don't you know that there are unbelievers whose cancer goes into remission too? Isn't God wonderful? That's the kind of God and Father we have, Jesus is saying.

And that is why you love your enemies and you pray for those who persecute you. Because the Lord your Father in heaven treats both believers and unbelievers with his common kindness and his common mercy.

[21:54] And we are called, every single one of his followers, to reflect that likeness. Because that's the way our Father is. Occasionally in our home, someone will say to me, you're just like your Father.

That isn't meant in a positive way at that point, alright? My dad's great. But when it's said like that, you're just like your Father, that's not normally said in a really positive aspect.

But there must be a sense where people look at Christians' lives and they say, you are just like your Father. The end of verse 45, again I think it's really helpful.

He doesn't say, do this, don't show love and kindness because it will make you feel better. It may make you feel better, it may well not. But he doesn't say do it for that reason.

He doesn't say love your enemies because it will reduce stress and blood pressure and tension. That may be what your doctor says, but that is what Jesus says. He says you do it because that is the way your Father is.

[23 : 03] The story I've told you before about the holy man who's kind of meditating under a tree by a river. And he happens to notice that the river's rising really rapidly. And he notices that the roots of this tree that kind of went out into the river, over the river itself.

There's a scorpion that's caught in the roots. And the river's rising, the scorpion is going to be destroyed. So the holy man decides that he will try and rescue it. And so he creeps onto the roots of the tree and he reaches down safely to try and free the scorpion.

And the scorpion tries to sting him. And an observer comes past at that point and says, don't you know that's a scorpion? It's the nature of a scorpion to sting.

And the man looked at him and said, well it may be a scorpion. And it may be the nature of a scorpion to sting. But it's my nature to save. And do I need to change my nature? Because a scorpion does not change his nature.

There's an element, isn't there, in the kindness and mercy of God towards the righteous and the righteous. Towards those that are in the kingdom and those who are out of it. And people notice. There was an emperor in the 300th, 300 AD called Julian the Apostate who wanted to bring back the old religions.

[24 : 17] And he wanted to eradicate Christianity. But even Julian the Apostate recognised how the Christians acted in ways that reflected their father in heaven. He said this. He said this atheism by which he met the Christian faith.

This atheism has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers. And through their care of the burial of the dead. He said. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar.

And that the godless Galileans, that is the Christians. Care not only for their own poor but for ours as well. While those who belong to us pagans look in vain for the help we should render them. You see.

What he saw was he saw that the Christians reflected the image and the likeness of their father. Who was merciful and kind. And that is what Jesus means in verse 48.

Where he says you should be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. That idea there is not kind of sinless perfection. I believe God is perfect in that sense of being without sin.

[25 : 16] But that is what Jesus means here. He means in the light of what he says in verse 45. This image of wholeness and completeness and comprehensiveness. And what Jesus is saying.

You must be complete in your mercy. As in what I talked about in verse 45. An all embracing mercy. That puts both the righteous and the righteous. Both your friends and your enemies.

And so there is a wholeness and a perfection. Just as your heavenly father shows his goodness over the righteous and unrighteous. And I think we have got a clue in how we are to do this.

Verse 45 and 48. Jesus refers to the disciples father as your father in heaven. Your heavenly father. How are you going to demonstrate this? Who is so different.

How on earth will we do this? Will we do it because we have experienced that mercy ourselves haven't we? We were. I was in the category of the unrighteous.

[26 : 13] I was in the category of the evil one. But when we put our trust in Christ. We are no longer an enemy of God. But he has brought us to the place through the Lord Jesus.

Where I can call God in heaven. My heavenly father. And in place of enmity and war and strife and anger. There is now peace and reconciliation.

And God is not some distant mechanic of the universe. For the Christian. But an intimate father. And you have experienced his mercy in the way.

That he has treated you. And that should leave its mark. So that we show that mercy to others. And that's why God says. Doesn't he? To his people. We are as sure as upon. For we ourselves.

We were once foolish. And we were led astray. Slaves to various passions and pleasures. We passed our days in malice and envy. We were hated by others. And we were hating one another.

But when the goodness and kindness of our loving saviour appeared.

[27 : 13] He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness. But because of his own mercy. And if we've received that mercy. We use it as a launching pad to show it to others. The third thing.

And the final thing is. Jesus lays before us. Not only the authority of God's son. And the wideness of God's mercy. But thirdly. The uniqueness of God's people. Look at verses 46 and 47.

He argues that. They must have the same likeness to their father. For if you love those who love you. What reward do you have? Do not even 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 thing? The inland revenue service in Jesus' day was crooked to the core. But he says even the crooks love those who are like them.

Someone scratches their back. And they're happy to scratch their back. So if you love those who love you. If you only show mercy to those who show it to you. How are you any different from the crooks?

[28 : 16] What is so great? If you greet your brothers or sisters only. How are you doing more than others? Don't even verse 47.

The pagans do the same thing. The Gentiles do the same thing. Jesus is saying, isn't he? There's certain camaraderie. There's care for one another. There's great friendship in the world. My five-a-side guys who I play with on a Tuesday night.

They're kind to each other. They show care for each other. There's nothing Christian about that. But he's saying to my followers. There ought to be something different. About a Christian.

There should actually be something extraordinary. There ought to be something that is. That is unexplainable. You see the Christian faith and the Christian life.

Isn't just a reflection of a polite society of 50 years ago. It's not just aping the best of British culture. It's not about being nice.

[29 : 13] Church life is not about smiling at one another. And keeping our criticisms to ourselves. No, there ought to be something different. Because God is different. Because in verse 45. The father sends his sunshine on the evil and the good.

If he is that way with his mercy. Then there ought to be a distinctiveness about you. The Christian life is not just a souped up version of kind of polite society.

You know, you've been on a plane. And I was on a plane yesterday. And now they show you the safety video, don't they? The BT. You've got all these kind of famous celebrities to do it. Have you seen it? It was funny the first time you see it.

It's unbearable after about five times. But it used to be that the air stewardess. Or air steward. They'd stand there, wouldn't they? And they'd go through it. And if it comes down. And put it on yourself.

Before you put it on your child. Buckle up. Those sorts of things. So dull, wasn't it? You just. Nobody's watching. Everybody's reading their newspaper on their phone at that point. But just occasionally you'd have a comedian as the pilot, wouldn't you?

[30 : 18] Who would tell jokes in the middle of it. Or who would wind up. I was on one month's where he got a standing ovation at the end of the flight. Because people were so thrilled with it. You know the boredom of the poor air steward or stewardess.

Got tedious. Got me over the same thing. And somebody took what was routine. And made it different from convention and distinct. And so you remember it, don't you?

And Jesus is saying the Christian life ought to be like that. There should be some distinctness. That is different from the rest of the world. And that's what Jesus is getting at all the way through chapter 5.

The Christian life is one that is extraordinary. It's not just abstaining from murder. But they care and they want to eradicate a sinful and justified anger. And all the things that give rise to that act.

It's not just about keeping a servant's commandment and not committing adultery. But actually that person wants to avoid lust. And live in a pure way. And it's not just about the outward act.

[31 : 24] It's about the state of my heart. And when we don't meet those standards. We mourn over our sin. And we're poor in spirit. And hear Jesus saying. In the way that we show kindness and consideration.

We must be different. Not just people of our own age who are like us. But to reach out to those who we consider our enemies.

To the neighbour who just is really difficult. To the work colleague who you just cannot stand. To the person who can't stand everything about what you stand for.

And we reach out to them. And we start to pray for them. And we seek a relationship with them.

Because we want to show them the kindness and mercy of our Heavenly Father. And so there's a uniqueness of God's people.

I find myself more and more when I speak to people about the Gospel. Saying. You try to use the best arguments. You try and convince them of the evidence. You want to show them the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 25] And you end up saying. Come and live with me. You end up saying. Come and be part of my church. It's not my church. Come and be part of this church. Because as they see the life of God.

In the soul of man. There's something extraordinary about it. Because we are under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we are meant to live after the likeness of our Father in Heaven. And we are meant to go beyond the practice of our culture. Let's pray.