



Who Is My Neighbor?: “The Weakest Link”

(Matthew 5:43-48)

Pastor Mike Hofer, October 13, 2019

Today we continue our short series – *Who is my Neighbor?* by examining what Mike Hofer deems “the weakest link” in our expression of the kingdom of God: **Loving our Enemies!**

Mike reminded us that the words of Jesus are often HARD and call us “to do more” – more than religion, more than the status quo, more than keeping “the Law.”

We are drawn to Paul’s writings because he (rightly) accents grace, but we must not forget the high call of Jesus to “*hear these words of mine and put them into practice*” (Matthew 7:26 - the anchor to Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7). This sermon is Jesus’ Kingdom *manifesto*: how we are to be people of salt & light in the world, doing MORE than honoring rules, but rather living lives of radical integrity and love . . . from the HEART. Today’s message captures the pinnacle of this kingdom life . . . to Love our Enemies.

In Matthew 5:17-21, Jesus declares that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (complete it) in two ways: 1) To fulfill, in his sacrificial death for us, the righteous requirement of the law and 2) To affirm the deeper calling of the law (the HEART underneath) to live out the character of God. In his *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus is addressing many written laws (of the Torah), calling listeners to go beyond the “letter of the law” (the technical requirements) to radically LIVE the heart of the law. Jesus was not discrediting the law; he was calling people even deeper. He speaks to many matters: anger, adultery, divorce, slander, oaths, giving, praying, worry, and more. It is in this context that he addresses the kingdom posture towards “our enemies.”

Matthew 5:38-48 – No, not “an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth” but rather “Don’t resist him who is evil. When slapped turn the other cheek. When forced to carry a Roman soldier’s gear for a mile, go an EXTRA mile. Give. Lend. Don’t love your neighbor but hate your enemy - - LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. Pray for those who persecute you, that you might be children of your Father in heaven.”

- * We live in such a divided, conflictual world. Everyone draws lines, takes sides, fights for their cause, and *hates* those on the other side.
- * We will disagree, we will even dislike others, but to HATE (to intentionally despise and wish or pursue harm and destruction for another) is not the way of Jesus.
- * Jesus came to reveal love and grace, to secure our forgiveness, to die for our sins – “while we were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8) . . . while we were *enemies of God*.
- * And on the cross, Jesus even cried out to Father to “forgive them (*his crucifiers*) for they know

not what they do.”

- * “For God causes his sun to rise on the good and the evil; he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (vs 5:45)
- * God’s heart is for all to find his love and grace, for all to be saved. His mercy is extended to ALL, and so we are called to embody his love and mercy to all, even our enemies.
- * We can trust the evil of this world to the righteous justice of God.

Jesus’ 2 prescriptions here are clear:

- 1. Love your enemies.** (the word here is “agape” – unconditional, universal love). The same love word that is used in John 3:16 – “for God so ‘agaped’ the world that he gave...”
- 2. Pray for those who persecute you.**

Yes, this is radical; this is HARD!

The truth is – we *can’t* do this. Not in our natural selves, not in our own best efforts.

We can only *agape* our enemies by the indwelling grace and power of Holy Spirit. He can change and empower our hearts to love like Jesus-- if we are willing, asking, and surrendered.

- * What hate are you holding on to that you want to release to God?
- * Who do you need to ask Holy Spirit to empower you to love?
- * What (former) “enemy” can you begin to pray for?