

# *Who Do You Say That I Am?*

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository  
Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew**

36- The Kingdom of Heaven and Its Citizens- Part 16  
The Rights of Man and  
the Supremacy of Jesus Christ- Part 2

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Church November 13, 2022

**Matthew 5:38-48**

**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 an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.**

**40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.**

**41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.**

**42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to 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 causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**

**46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?**

**47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?**

**48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;  
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen*

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**Beginning Note:** This *perfect* Sermon- that we call, the “*Sermon on the Mount*” is the *first* of five major Sections of Divine Teaching that Matthew wrote in his Gospel Record- which represent the five Books of Moses in the Old Testament (the *Pentateuch*). And that is because, in addition to Matthew wanting the Jews to see Jesus as being the long-awaited “*Mashich*” (*Messiah*); and the promised “*Immanuel*” (*God with us*). He also wants them to also see Jesus as

being the “2<sup>nd</sup> Moses”- Who will bring God’s people out from “*spiritual Bondage*” (*Sin*) and lead them into the “*Promised Land*” (*the Kingdom of Heaven*).

So, what this Sermon is illustrating is the Attributes and the Characteristics of the *new* people- that God is raising up; who will inherit this *new* Kingdom of Heaven; which is sovereignly ruled and governed by the *new* King- Jesus Christ- as He ushers in the *New Covenant*.

So, this Sermon is what this “*new chosen people*” look like- AFTER Jesus has “paid for” ALL of their Sins; AFTER God the Father has imputed to them the Righteousness of Jesus Christ (Justification); and as they are actively and continuously “*killing*” the remaining Sin that is in their Flesh (Sanctification).

And so, this part of the “*Sermon on the Mount*” has to do with:

### **Jesus illustrating His full Deity- by revealing the deepest meaning of the Law of God**

So, this part of the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5:21-48**) contains six different Sections of infallible Teaching from Jesus Himself. And today we are going to explore what Jesus meant when He taught the people in verses 38-48- about the *full*; *complete*; and *deepest* Meaning of Man’s Rights when pitted against the Supremacy of Jesus Christ.

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Now last time, we saw how that there were two competing Philosophies that *dominated* 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine:

1. The Jewish “*Law of Rights*”
2. The Roman “*Law of Retaliation*” (Lex Talionis)

Now please remember that, back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, the former historic Nation of Israel (that we read about in the Old Testament) had become a wholly owned “Province” of the Roman Empire called, “*Palestine*”. And Palestine was brutally and violently governed by subjugation by the Roman Government, which stationed soldiers all throughout the Country. And those soldiers had a “*Standing Order*” from their Superiors (both Military and Civil) to kill any Jew, who raised his hand against a Soldier of the Roman Empire. And that Order was called in Latin, the “*Lex Talionis*” or the “*Law of Retribution*.” And the net Result of this Standing Order was that it gave the Roman soldiers the Liberty to abuse and persecute and molest and torment and torture and afflict the Jews in just about any way they chose.

Meanwhile, the Jews were operating in a Man-made Philosophy that had developed over the Centuries- *especially* during the years they were occupied by a foreign Government called, the “*Law of Rights*”- which was a “catch-all” Ruling that included the “Right” of “*Self- Defense*”. So, you can see that when both of these “Rights” were exercised- the Result was the systematic Annihilation of the Jewish people. And that was true- NOT because the “*Law of*

*Retaliation*” was a *superior* Law- but because the Romans had the “bigger gun”. The Jews simply could not compete against the “firepower” of the Roman Army. And so, when the Jews would exercise their supposed “Right” to defend themselves against the almost daily Assault perpetrated by the Romans- the Romans exercised the “*Lex Talionis*” and would just slaughter them.

And so, the ONLY way that the Jews could operate and live- side-by-side with their occupying foes- was to just absorb the Abuse with little or no complaint. But, like *everyone* who is abused- they may not have said anything out loud- but they were literally seething with Hate on the inside.

So, what you had by the time Jesus was beginning His Ministry and preaching this perfect Sermon on the Mount- was a pagan, occupying Force that was brutal, violent, and unmerciful against the Jews- that was at odds with a people, who had a rich and strong History of being favored by God (to the Exclusion of ALL of the other Nations of the world)- who despised and hated the Gentile dogs, who ruled over them. So, the Romans looked for any Excuse to brutalize the Jews and the Jews looked for any Excuse to torment and disobey and rebel against the Romans.

But unlike the Romans- the Jews had been promised by Almighty God that He would send to them- a “*Messiah*” (Hebrew, *Mashich*)- a Deliverer; a Rescuer- a Jew, from the Tribe of Judah, whom God would raise up- who would lead the Jewish people back to their former Glory they had enjoyed under the beloved King, David.

And because the Jews were actually being persecuted and tormented and afflicted and even imprisoned and killed- the current Problems they faced at that time- was the *highlight* of all their Prayers and Teaching and Preaching.

And this is simply human Nature. We tend to think that God is *primarily* concerned about what *we* are *primarily* concerned about. And so, our Vision of God becomes very Narrow and Self-centered. We forget that God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time. And so, God has already determined the End from the Beginning. And that means that what is happening with us today- is merely one small part of an infinitely larger Mosaic of God moving to bring Glory to Himself and everlasting Joy to His people.

The Holy Bible teaches that God takes all of the Prayers and all of the Hopes and all of the Dreams of all of His people who have already died; and He sovereignly “*works them together*” with all of the Prayers and Hopes and Dreams of all of His people who are alive; and then combines that with all of the Prayers and Hopes and Dreams of all of His people- who have yet to be born. And then God “super-imposes” His Own Divine “Will”- His “Decree” over on top of all of those Prayers and Hopes and Dreams- and He moves. So, God pushes and He

pulls. He raises up and casts down. He establishes and brings to naught. He upholds and tears down. He causes and allows a hundred million variables together. And God moves- *in such a way*- that His Will is *never* violated; and the one single Decree that He made before He created the Universe- is *never* frustrated!

But we only see and know about just a little about what God is doing. The rest is silent and hidden from us. And so, we MUST take all of this- by Faith. We MUST trust that, while it is true that we do not know what Tomorrow holds- we know Who holds Tomorrow and we know Who holds our hand!

But it would literally take a super-computer- not to accomplish God's Will- but to simply keep up with all of the variables that God is dealing with at any given time in the exercise of His Will! And we need to remember that God never forgets; He never gets nervous; and the one, true, and living God, who is the Owner and Creator of the entire Universe- never ever loses!

Now I pray that as you heard me say all of this- that you were literally stunned at the Realization of all that God is doing 24 hours every day and 7 days every week! And that stunned Realization is called, "*Worship*". Because you see, unless we are amazed at God; unless we wonder after Him; unless we are bowled over; stunned; and rendered speechless at Who God is and What God does- we really haven't worshipped Him in the manner He deserves.

So, we worship God- precisely because we have been blessed to come to know that God is *better* than we are. That He is *stronger*; and *wiser*; and *higher*; and *more powerful*; and *wiser*; and *more beautiful*; and *more important*; and *more glorious* than *anything* that exists in all of the Universe! We worship God because He is too high for us; too amazing; and way past our ability to comprehend! And so, we stand amazed; and we are in awe of God; and we can relate to what God told Job in **Job 21:5**:

**Look at me, and be astonished, And put your hand over your mouth.**

... and this is one of the things that is terribly wrong with the modern Church. For the most part- God's people are no longer *astonished* at God. A completely perfect Being; Who has never sinned; Who cannot lie; an invisible; immortal God- Who is completely Invincible; and yet is Kind and Merciful- no longer impresses them. And so, they are astonished at special effects at movies; and they wonder after Apps on their smart phones; and they admire Technology; and they fear Terrorists with bombs- but the people of the modern Church no longer wonder after God. They no longer admire God. They do not fear God. And they tremble NOT for God. And so, their Worship of the one, true, and

living God- has become a Broadway Musical- complete with smoke machines and colored lights- but it is Thin; and Shallow; and Surface and increasingly Silly.

The Jews of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century could not understand why God was allowing pagan unbelievers to dominate His Own people. *“When will it stop? When will You make an End of it? Why don’t you come and deliver us?”*

And in the midst of all this Agony and Suffering and Confusion- they fabricated a false View of *“Last Things”* (Eschatology) that God never said; and that could not be found in Scripture. And so, because they hated the Romans- they wrongly *assumed* that God did too. And because they wanted the Roman soldiers to die- they wrongly *assumed* that God did too. And because they weren’t the least bit interested in God forgiving and saving the Romans- they wrongly *assumed* that God didn’t care about them either.

And so, they were eagerly and passionately looking for the Messiah to come and rescue them. But ONLY according to the dictates of their own hearts. They were sincerely praying that God would raise up the Messiah to deliver them. But ONLY according to their own false and Man-made Eschatology. And during the *“400 Years of Silence”* (in between **Malachi** and **Matthew**)- many “false Messiahs” rose up- who were completely in agreement with the Jew’s false View of *“Last Things”*- but who were completely “out of sync” with God and His Word.

And so, they all failed. All of them failed- *miserably*. They rose up; they got everybody excited; they gathered together a small army of people willing to fight to the death against the despised Romans; and they were all defeated. None of them brought about the *“Great Deliverance”* that the Jews were looking for. And so, one-by-one- each one of these false Messiahs were captured and executed; their followers were scattered; and more and more Disillusionment and Discouragement set in upon the Jews.

And so, when Jesus showed up and the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist and He rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees- they were hopeful. *“Maybe this guy will be the Messiah! Maybe this is Him! Maybe this is the One!”* And when John saw the Spirit of God descend on Jesus and remain- their Hopes rose up even higher. *“Surely this must be the Messiah!”* And when God Almighty spoke out of Heaven, **“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” (Matthew 3:17)**- they were ecstatic! *“This has got to be Him!”*

But then what was that 40 day Fast all about? *“I mean the Messiah will come to destroy the pagan Romans and give us our Country back, right? I mean- He is already right with God by simply being born Jewish. So, why does He need to fast for 40 days and then tell everybody that God the Spirit led Him to do that?”*

*“But okay- we don’t need to be picky about it. He’s a little weird- but weird might be okay as long as He gathers an Army to fight and win against the Gentile dogs.”*

So, when Jesus sat down on the Mountain and began to teach them- the Jews were very, very interested. This would be the Messiah's inaugural Sermon. *"So, this Sermon will be a blueprint for how Jesus expects to fight and win against the Romans. So, we really need to pay close attention to what He says here- because this is when this 'Messiah wanna-be' is going to put forth His Strategy about how He is going to do all of this. This is where Jesus will act as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Moses and will assert Himself as the Messiah and will give us His Strategy about how the Jews will come out on top!"*

And so, as I told you- this Sermon is going to give the Attributes of the *new* people of God; who will inherit the *new* Kingdom of Heaven; from the *new* Moses; who will bring in the *new* Covenant.

And at first, as Jesus begins to preach the first perfect Sermon- they began to hear strange things. Jesus was acting with an Authority that they weren't used to. It was as though Jesus actually wrote the Original Ten Commandments- and He is now explaining what Obedience to those Commandments looks like. So, He isn't really saying anything completely new- but He's explaining it in much greater detail- even revealing what kind of Heart this new people of God must have- that goes way beyond the outward physical Acts themselves.

And from **Matthew 5:3**- all the way down to **5:36**- this Sermon went like that. Jesus spoke about what God through Moses had already given the people. And then Jesus would talk about what kind Obedience to those Commandments actually looked like. But the further He went- the Jews were getting increasingly nervous. *"What does any of this have to do with raising up an army and destroying the evil Romans? I mean look, sure we agree that we all need to be nice people and love God and all of that- but we've got real Problems here. We are losing our Country! I mean these people don't care one whit for anything that God gave us. So, unless we start rising up and fighting Fire with Fire- using every tactic and strategy that the evil Romans are using- and unless we take back our Country- we're not going to have a Country. I mean the Roman soldiers are brutalizing our Men and molesting our Women and Jesus is sitting here talking about Adultery and linking that to Divorce and Remarriage! When is He going to get to the real Issue- the ONLY Issue- about just how we are going to utterly vanquish them and reclaim what God gave us?"*

But then Jesus came to verses 38-47. And this is when the Jews became speechless. NOT because they were amazed at the Innocence; and the Beauty; and the Honesty and Purity; and the pristine Perfection of what Jesus was saying here. No, they were amazed that any Jew worth his salt could be talking about how to get along with the despised Romans instead of killing them! They were flabbergasted that this Man, Who they had hoped would end up being the Messiah could utter such Foolishness; such Absurdity; and such Ridiculousness- that God

wants His own people to NOT resist these evil Monsters; these pagans who mock God; these tyrants who murder Jews over a coat! Seriously?

So, the Thing that cast the greatest degree of Doubt into the minds of the average Jew of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century as to whether Jesus was the Messiah or not- was what Jesus is teaching right here in this Passage. If Jesus was the Messiah- in their mind- He MUST hate the Romans. And if Jesus teaches that we MUST love our Enemies- then He simply CANNOT be the Messiah! So, comparing the Actions and the Teaching of the sinless incarnate God- against a false and Man-made View of

“Last Things” was what *eliminated* Jesus as being able to be the Messiah in the minds of most of those Jews.

Now at the End of last week’s Sermon- I issued a Challenge to all of you. And I asked several Questions, like:

- Was Jesus promoting “Pacifism” here?
- Are we sinning when we defend ourselves?
- What does God expect from 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians?

... and today- we might be able to see if we are looking at this correctly.

So, let's step back for a moment and let something Jesus said at the End of His Life wave as a Banner over this Commandment to “love our Enemies.”

One of the last things Jesus said after He died and rose from the Dead and *before* He ascended to Heaven was this:

### **Matthew 28:18b-20**

**18 ... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**

**19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,**

**20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

Now believe it or not- understanding what Jesus said here- is key to understanding what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:38-47**- about loving our Enemies.

Here, Jesus commands ALL Believers to go *everywhere* on the face of the earth and turn ordinary lost sinners into what He called, “*Disciples*.” And that includes bringing them to Faith and Trust in Jesus- which is accomplished through the Miracle of the New Birth- that is brought about through the faithful and full preaching of the Gospel. And then Jesus wants us to help bring these people to an “*Allegiance to Jesus Christ*” that is expressed in the waters of Baptism. But then this “*Great Commission*” goes even further when Jesus said this in verse 20:

**teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...**

... and the Authority by which Jesus sends us; and empowers us; and promises us the Victory- is expressed in two Statements:

1. **All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (v. 18b)**
2. **lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (v. 20b)**

... and this is important because there are many Teachers in the modern church, who deny the "ALL" in both the Command (**Teaching them to observe ALL that I commanded you**) and in the Promise (**ALL Authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth**).

Some say that the Commandments of Jesus in the "*Sermon on the Mount*" (**Matthew 5–7**) are not for this Age. These people say that the Commandments that Jesus gives here are like the Old Testament Law coming *before* the Cross- and should NOT be part of the normative Teaching of the Church in this Age. And the main Motive in them saying this- is their Fear that Law of God will be mixed in with the Grace of God and we will contaminate the Gospel of free Grace by the Teachings of Jesus that made Love to be a "Condition" for finally entering the Kingdom of Heaven. And their Assumption is that *wherever* you have Conditions- *any Conditions*- you don't have Grace. And *wherever* you have Grace- you simply CANNOT have any Conditions. And the net Effect of this- is that they have developed a very elaborate Justification for NOT taking the "Sermon on the Mount" seriously.

Another group of Teachers goes in the exact opposite Direction and denies the "ALL" of **Matthew 28:20** by affirming only the "ethical/moral" Commandments of Jesus and leaving out- the crucial things Jesus said and did that *prevent* His Commandments from becoming nothing more than humanly engineered Ethics/Morality.

This Group prizes the Sermon on the Mount, but really does run the risk of cutting it off from the Gospel of Salvation by Grace through Faith ALONE.

So, one Group tries to "protect" the Gospel of Salvation by Grace through Faith ALONE by putting the ethical/moral Teachings of Jesus into a special Category that doesn't apply to us today. While the other Group tries to "rescue" the ethical/moral Teachings of Jesus even though they don't think the other Words and Deeds of Jesus about Salvation and Faith and Grace are essential.

But I think **Matthew 28:20** steers us between BOTH of these wrong but well-intentioned Views and says we should observe ALL that Jesus commanded us- AND we should do this as long as this Age lasts- NOT just for



some distant “future time” or “past time”- precisely because ALL Authority belongs to Jesus- and He will be with us to the End of the Age.

So, when I read the “*Sermon on the Mount*”, I take it to refer to me; and my family; and this church; as well as all of the lost sinners of the world- that Jesus wants us to disciple. And so, until I see otherwise from God’s Word, I take the Position that the Sermon on the Mount does NOT contradict the Way of Salvation by Grace through Faith ALONE that Jesus and His Apostles taught.

So, let's go back and look at the Command to “love our enemies” in its correct Context- both the “*nearby Context*” and the much larger Context of the Gospels. **Matthew 5:43&44** is the last of six Statements in the Sermon on the Mount that say something like:

**"You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you."**

Now the series of six Statements began in **5:21**. But just *before* that Series, in **5:20**- Jesus said,

**For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

... and right after He said that- Jesus gave us those six Statements.

So, those six Statements tell us what it looks like to possess a Righteousness that *surpasses* that of the unsaved Scribes and Pharisees.

So what Jesus is actually doing here- in these six Commandments- is showing this *new* people- how the Scribes and Pharisees *applied* the Old Testament Teachings as opposed to what He was calling them to do- by going much deeper and to be very different from those false Teachers.

So, by teaching that there *is* a Righteousness that totally surpasses the one that the Scribes and Pharisees were modeling- Jesus was saying, “*There is a Way of Life- an authentic, deep, unhyprocritical Way of Life- that you must live if you want to inherit this new Kingdom of Heaven!*”

But Jesus is NOT saying, “*I have an impossible Standard of Righteousness that you can never meet, and so stop trying to meet it, and just trust in My Righteousness.*” That's NOT what He is saying. He is saying, “*If you will come to Me; and trust in Me; and receive the Power of the Kingdom; and be cleansed on the inside by the Forgiveness and Love of God that I offer; and bank your Hope on all My Promises; and let my ransoming Death cover all your Failures and Imperfections and Sins; then you WILL be able to live this way (not perfectly, but honestly), and your Life WILL be the Light of the World that proves you are this new people of God- who WILL inherit this new Kingdom of Heaven.*”

In other words, Jesus is *assuming* that something very profound has happened to people who live the Way the Sermon on the Mount calls us to live. Let me try to show you why I think that, and what it is that has to happen to us so that we can live this way and surpass the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees- NOT to “earn” our Way to Heaven but to show that God has graciously and powerfully changed us and promised us Heaven.

Let’s look again at **Matthew 5:44&45**:

**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 causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**

Now over the Centuries since Jesus spoke these words- some have taken this to mean that you must FIRST become a person, who loves his enemies, BEFORE you can become a child of God. In other words, loving your enemies is what *qualifies* you to be a child of God. And, inevitably, thinking like that leads to working hard at loving their enemies so they may *earn* Salvation. So, we MUST categorically *reject* that mentality and ALL the Efforts that go with it.

What Jesus was actually saying is that, since we are fallen creatures- we have an *enormous* capacity to be deceived about ourselves. And so, we MUST have Signs that tell us that we are on the right Path. We simply cannot trust our own assessment about our spiritual Condition. And so, loving our Enemies is an unmistakable Sign that we have ALREADY experienced the Miracle of the New Birth and are part of this new Kingdom of Heaven.

Because we MUST agree that it doesn’t take the indwelling Power of God the Holy Spirit to hate those who have done wrong to us. *Anybody* can do that. In fact, hating our enemies is one of the most common things that lost people do. But Forgiveness! Ah, Forgiveness! That is quite a different thing. And the Reality is that we are *never* more like Jesus than when we genuinely forgive those who have hurt us and wronged us. And that DOES take a Power that is beyond human ability.

Now many in the modern Church try to get around this by saying, “*I don’t hate my enemies- I simply don’t want anything to do with them*”. But that is nothing more than what the Pharisees did when they were arguing with Jesus as to what constitutes a “*Neighbor*”.

You see, the Old Testament is filled with Commands to “*Love your Neighbor*”. And so, in order to get around that indisputable Command and go ahead and hate anyway- the lost and unsaved Pharisees argued that being a

“Neighbor” was to be very *narrowly* defined- to the point where it eliminated anyone they simply didn’t want to love.

And it was on the heels of that blatant Hypocrisy that Jesus gave us the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10)- which defines a “Neighbor” as,

*“Whoever crosses your Path that day”*

... so, if you see it- God expects you to do something about it. The person who crosses your Path that day- is the one God wants you to love- to the very *same* Extent that you love yourself.

So, the Hypocrisy that allows us to violate the Command to NOT hate any human being- lies in the definition of the word, “Hate”. You see, those who wish to find “loopholes” in God’s Word so that they may be excused from Obedience- always base their Rebellion on a very narrow (and sinful) definition of words.

So, they define “Hate” as containing Violence; or a desire to see someone actively suffer; or having contempt for them. And because they have NONE of those disgusting Feelings- they feel justified in saying, “*I don’t hate them*”. And this has gone on for so long that “*NOT actively wishing that Harm might come to another person*”- is now seen to be the equivalent of actually “loving them”. And so, today- because we don’t wish that the very Worst might come upon somebody- we are fooled into believing that we are loving them. And that is an incredible degree of Deception!

But the word that was translated as “**Hate**” in our English Bibles (*miseo*; Strong’s #3404) has to do with simply *not caring*; *Apathy*; and an *unconcerned Attitude*. So, “Hate” is NOT only that you actively wish that Harm might come to someone- but that you simply don’t care what comes to them. That you are as unconcerned about that person, who was made in the Image and Likeness of God- as you would be about lint in the dryer; or the cap from a soft drink; or dust.

Now you can “hate” the sinful Acts that they *do*- and you *should*. But God does NOT give any Allowance for any genuinely saved person to actually hate another human being. Which means we MUST ALWAYS care. So, serving God; loving Jesus; obeying the Bible- or being a Christian means that you hate the sinful Acts of evil men. But as you do that- you MUST love them. And you MUST pray and work hard for their Salvation.

But you MUST realize that the ONLY Reason why they do what they do- is because they are deceived. But, as you do that- then you remember that you used to be deceived, too. And then you remember that the ONLY Reason why you are NOT deceived today; the ONLY Reason you love Jesus; and the ONLY Reason why you are not going to spend all of Eternity in the Lake of Fire- is because God

mercifully and graciously opened your eyes; unstopped your ears; took out of you a hard heart of stone; and gave you a heart of Flesh. And that Knowledge humbles you and allows you to show Mercy and Love toward the worst of sinners.

So, the Grace that sovereignly saved you- is the Grace that will actively work in your heart to empower you to love your Enemies.

And that means that loving your enemies- is nothing more nor less than proving or verifying or confirming that you really are- what you say you are: A child of God and an heir of this new Kingdom of Heaven.

But by working hard to find a loophole in what God had spoken so that they would NOT have to love their enemies (or even their Neighbor) proved or verified or confirmed that the Scribes and Pharisees were Hypocrites of the highest order. It proved they were unsaved and were NOT sons of Abraham at all- but imposters, who would NEVER inherit the Kingdom.

So, one of the ways that you show or prove that you are a child of God- is by acting the way your heavenly Father acts. If you are His, then His Character is in you, and you will be inclined to do what He does. And we must agree that God loves His enemies- both the Evil and the Unrighteous. But how do we know that? Because God sends rain and sunshine on them instead of instant Damnation. Every single moment; of every day; of every year; that a blasphemous sinner is not burning in Hell- demonstrates a Love from God that is almost unimaginable.

So, the Sermon on the Mount and the Command to love our enemies are not isolated ethical Teachings. They both grow up out of a Foundation of Grace in the Life and Teaching of Jesus. This is where we get the Power to Love- from the fact that God loved us while we were poor and diseased and helpless and enemies, and Jesus gave Himself for us- while we were yet sinners.

And this is how the Christian Life starts. It doesn't start by us measuring up to God's Commandments. It starts by us realizing that we don't measure up. So, spiritually speaking- we are "Poor" (poverty-stricken) and as helpless as a child. And we are entirely "sin-sick" and in need of a Great Physician. And then we hear the Gospel News that Jesus **"came- NOT to be served- but to serve; and to give His Life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45)**

And we hear the "free Offer" that by trusting Jesus and in His finished Work- ALL of our Sins will be forgiven; and we will be made Righteous. And God will be our Father; and the Power of the Kingdom will come into our lives; and we will have the Help we need to live out the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said,

### **John 15:5**

**I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.**

So, we are grafted into the Vine “by Faith” in the all-satisfying Promises of the Lord Christ. And we abide there- “by Faith”- drawing on His Power and His Enabling. So, the Fruit we produce- like loving our enemies- is NOT produced in our own Strength, but by the Strength of the Vine. And that is why Jesus said,

**... apart from Me you can do nothing.**

Now I want us to think about who our enemies are, and what it means to love them, and how this is possible.

So, the *first* thing we need to understand is that Jesus is *responding* to a Misinterpretation of the Old Testament Commandment to love our Neighbor as we love ourselves (**Leviticus 19:18, 34**). Jesus said,

**You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'**

... and even if you don't have all the Software and you don't conjugate the verbs and diagram the sentences in the original Languages- if you use the NASB95- you will notice that “**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR**” is in all caps; while, “**and hate your enemy**” isn't. And that means that the “all caps Statement” is a direct Quote from the Old Testament while the second one isn't.

So, the *first* Statement that commands us to love our Neighbor is an inspired; inerrant; and infallible Statement that God the Holy Spirit moved on Moses to give us; while the *second* Statement is a false Teaching that came from the Scribes and Pharisees. So, the *first* Statement is true and the *second* Statement is false. So, the Logic that said, “*Since I am to love my Neighbor- it's okay to hate my Enemy*” is a *faulty* Logic that does NOT coincide with Divine Truth.

And so, after you read and study the “*Parable of the Good Samaritan*” in **Luke 10**- you realize that Jesus is NOT teaching, “*I have two Commands: one that you love your Neighbor; and one that you love your Enemy.*” Instead, Jesus says, “*I have one single Command: love your Neighbor- even if he is an Enemy.*”

But since Jesus defined “Neighbor” what is the definition of “Enemy”? What kind of Enemy does He have in mind? From the Context we can see that Jesus was referring to a wide range of Feelings from very severe Opposition from the Roman soldiers to even minor Snubbing from Family or Friends and Co-workers

The first clue as to how to define an “Enemy” is found in verse 44:

## **But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**

.. so, an “Enemy” is somebody who is persecuting you.

So, Jesus was talking about people who oppose a genuine Believer- ON THE BASIS OF HIM BEING A BELIEVER. And to “persecute” somebody has to do with pursuing you with harmful intentions. Now the primary Context back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century was the Roman soldiers. But the Context for American Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century might mean anyone from a hostile co-worker to even a family member, who despises those who love and follow Jesus.

Last week, I read an Article that said,

“ ... in some parts of the world- Christians are still being crucified- literally. Various news agencies report that Christians have been crucified in the Sudan- using six-inch-long nails. Over in other parts of Africa- Christian converts are routinely sentenced by Islamic Courts to be crucified. Widows and orphans of slain Christian men are routinely sold into Slavery for as little as \$15 per slave.”<sup>1</sup>

... and over in China, we see,

“There have been . . . reports of increased persecution, rising hostility, and government crackdowns on religion in response to the role the church played in the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. In Beijing, up to 60 Christian meeting points were forcibly closed by authorities between January and June 2022. Many arrests have been made with charges of distribution and of receiving Bibles.”<sup>2</sup>

So, what does Jesus say about these and a thousand more just like them?  
*“Love them. If they kill you, love them. If they take away your father, love them. If they destroy your home, love them. Love your enemies. Be that kind of person. Be so changed on the inside that it is really possible.”*

But Jesus also has in mind Situations much less dramatic than that. Verse 45b gives another pointer to the kind of hard Relationships in which we should love. It says,

**... He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**

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<sup>1</sup>*First Things*, November, 2022 p. 82

<sup>2</sup> David Barrett and Todd Johnson's *AD 2022 Global Monitor* (no. 28, p. 2)

...and the “evil” and the “unrighteous” are people who defy the Laws of God.

So, these are people who resist God’s Will. They do not submit to His Authority. Now most of these people would never admit that they are God's enemies. And they would resent being told that they are God's enemies. But Jesus mentions them to illustrate God's Love for His enemies. And our Love for our enemies. So, another way to understand who are our "Enemies" in this passage is that they are people who are repeatedly going against your Desire to glorify God. And they would probably never call themselves, “enemies”. And you may not call them, “enemies”. But they resist your Will to magnify Jesus. And they are contrary and antagonistic. So, in that sense, the “enemy” today might be a rebellious child. He might be an uncaring, non-listening, ill-tempered Husband. He might be a cantankerous neighbor that complains about everything you do to your yard. And Jesus says, "Love them. Love your enemies. Love them."

So, just like a “Neighbor” is whoever crosses your Path that day- an “Enemy” is the same. Love those who resist your will on that day. Love them.

One other Illustration of the Enemy is given in **Matthew 5:46&47**:

**46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"**

**47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"**

Here, the "Enemy" is anyone who doesn't love you. *"If you (just) love those who love you, you are not loving the way I just commanded."* And in verse 47 the "Enemy" is anyone who is not your brother. *"If you greet your brothers only, you are not loving the way I just commanded you."*

So, the point seems to be: *“Don't stop loving because the person does things that offends you, or dishonors you, or hurts your feelings, or angers you, or disappoints you, or frustrates you, or threatens you, or even kills you.”* “Love your Enemies" means to keep on loving them.

But now we have to ask, *“What is this Love?”* In verse 47, “loving your Enemy” means something as simple and gracious as greeting them:

**"If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"**

Greeting your “non-brothers” is one form of the Love Jesus has in mind here. And that may seem utterly insignificant in the context of Threatening and Killing. But Jesus means for this text to apply to all of Life.

So, whom do you greet when you leave this Church today? Only those who greet you? Only your close friends? Only those you know? Jesus says, "*Greet not only those you don't know. Greet those who are at odds with you.*" Of course, there may be more you should do if there is Tension between you. But you have no Warrant from Jesus to snub anybody. So, if you do snub somebody- you are acting out of your own carnal Flesh and NOT the Spirit of God- and you are sinning. So, "Love your Enemy" means something as simple as, "Greet them."

Second, verse 45 also illustrates what Love is:

**He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**

In this case, Love is very practical Efforts to meet a person's physical Needs. Sunshine and rain are the two things that every living thing needs in order to grow so that there will be food for human Life.

This is the kind of thing Paul had in mind when he quoted **Proverbs 25:21** in **Romans 12:20&21**:

**20 "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."**

**21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

So, "loving your Enemy" means practical Acts of Helpfulness in the ordinary things of Life. God gives His Enemies Sunshine and Rain. So, we should give our Enemies Food and Water.

Third, verse 44 gives one of the *deepest* meanings of Love for your Enemies. It says,

**...pray for those who persecute you**

Prayer for your Enemies is one of the *deepest* forms of Love, because it means that you have to really want something Good to happen to them. You might do nice things for your Enemy without any genuine Desire that things go Well with them. But Prayer for them is in the Presence of God, Who knows your heart; and Prayer is interceding with God on their Behalf.

Now it may be for their Conversion. It may be for their Repentance. It may be that they would be awakened to the Enmity in their own hearts. It may be that they will be stopped in their downward spiral of Sin, even if it takes Disease or



Calamity to do it. But the Prayer Jesus has in mind here is always for their ultimate Good.

This is what Jesus did as He hung on the Cross:

**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. (Luke 23:34)**

Now you might say, "But I'm not Jesus. So, we need to look at another sinful human being, who had been saved by Grace. And when we do that- we see how Stephen prayed- WHILE HE WAS BEING STONED!

**Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep. (The Acts 7:60)**

... these are real Examples of Obedience to Jesus' Command: "Love your Enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

My dear friends, Jesus is calling us not just to do Good things for our Enemy, like greeting them and helping supply their Needs; our Savior and King is also calling us to actually WANT their Best, and to express those Wants in Prayers when the Enemy is nowhere around. Our hearts should want their Salvation; and want their Presence in Heaven; and want their eternal Happiness. So, we pray like the Apostle Paul (in **Romans 10:1**) for the Jewish people, many of whom made Life very hard for Paul,

**Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.**

Now how can we do this? Where does Power to love like this come from? Just think how astonishing this is when it appears in the real world! Could anything show the Truth and Power and Reality of Jesus Christ more than this?

Let me just give you part of the Answer from **Matthew 5:11&12:**

**11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.**

**12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

Jesus says that not only can you endure the Mistreatment of the Enemy, but you can actually rejoice in it! Why? Because your Reward in Heaven is Great!

Which means that the Command to “Love your Enemy” is a Command to set your mind on Things that are Above, not on Things that are on the earth. The Command to “Love your Enemy” is a Command to find your Hope and your Satisfaction in God and His great Reward- and not in the way people treat you. And that is why David said,

### **Psalm 62:3**

#### **... Your lovingkindness is better than life**

Back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, the Jews were operating on a Man-centered philosophical Principle called, the “*Law of Rights*”. The Romans were operating on the “*Law of Retribution*” (*Lex Talionis*). But Jesus called His followers to operate on a higher and transcendent Principle called, the “*Law of Love*”. Now Jesus didn’t invent that Law- God had spoken about it from the very Beginning. But Jesus put legs under it; and He showed us what it really looked like in our every- day Life.

So, while it is true that loving your Enemy doesn't earn you the Reward of Heaven- treasuring the Reward of Heaven *empowers* you to love your Enemy.

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone

