Matthew
Love Your Enemy (Part 2)
Matthew 5:43-48
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We've been studying the responsibility that we have, as believers, to love our enemies. There are powerful illustrations of that, obviously, in the Scripture, the chief one being our Lord who prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him. You have Stephen, in Acts 7, who prays the same thing for those who are stoning him. But I think outside the Scripture, one of the most powerful illustrations of loving one's enemies comes from a woman named Corrie ten Boom. In her book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom writes these words:

> It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, a former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbrück. He was the first of our jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, (my sister) Betsie's pain-blanched face.
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> He came up to me, as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein." He said, "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!" His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had taught so often the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive Him. I tried to smile; I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I prayed a silent prayer, "Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness." As I took His hand the most incredible thing happened...Into my

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heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. When Jesus tells us to "Love our enemies," He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

Last week, we began to study Jesus' command to "Love our enemies," the sixth illustration of how the righteousness of His disciples far surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. Let's read this paragraph again, Matthew, chapter 5, beginning in verse 43. These are the words of our Lord.

> "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Jesus here tells us that we must love our enemies, not just our friends, not just those who love us. In fact, Jesus calls us to love every person in our lives, regardless of how they treat us or how they respond to us.

Now, Jesus begins this paragraph, in teaching this truth, by really pointing out two ways this theme develops. He develops the theme negatively in verse 43, and then positively in the verses that follow. Last time, we considered Jesus' pointing out the negative. Verse 43, we called it "The Pharisees' Distortion of the Law of Love." They took the passage from Leviticus 19:18, and they warped it. You see it in verse 43, "YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID you shall love

your neighbor and hate your enemy." They taught that loving our neighbor means we are to love only the righteous, and based on their warped interpretation of several Old Testament passages, they said we are to hate everybody else. Love the righteous, hate everybody else; that was their distortion of the law of love.

Now the rest of this paragraph then, verses 44 to 47, contains "Jesus' Exposition of the Law of Love." Jesus sets out to explain to us what the Old Testament, what God Himself really wanted from us. First of all, we looked at "The Mandate of Our Love." Verse 44, "but I say to you, love." It is an imperative; it's a command for us to love.

Then He explains, as we noted last time, "The Magnitude of Our Love." Not only are we to love those who love us, we are to love even our enemies!" Verse 44, "But I say to you, love your enemies." The Greek word, as I pointed out, means 'the ones who are being hostile toward us.' So anybody, for any reason, that's being hostile toward you; you're to love them. But how exactly are we to love them?

Thirdly, we noted Jesus' explanation of "The Manifestations of Our Love" for our enemies. We are to love them "By praying for them," Verse 44. Luke 6, we're to love them "By blessing them with our words." And then, both here in Matthew and in Luke, we're to "Do good to them." In other words, we are called to love our enemies with our prayers, with our words to them and about them, and to love them with our actions.

Now that brings us this morning, we've looked at all of that, but that brings us this morning to verses 45 to 47, and what we'll call "The Motivation for Our Love," the motivation for our love. Jesus here points out two distinct motives for why we should love our enemies. Let's look at them together.

First of all, we should love our enemies “Because It Is Like Our New Father,” it's like our new Father. Verse 45, He says, “Love your enemies...so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” He doesn't mean, by the way, that by loving our enemies, we become God's children. In other words, loving enemies is not how you earn your way into God's family. That's not the idea. The Scriptures clearly teach that if we have believed in Jesus, if we've repented, believed in Him, then God is already our Father. We don't enter into a relationship with Him by any kind of obedience, including loving our enemies. It's by grace that we are saved, Ephesians 2. He has adopted us as His sons and His daughters by His grace alone. So, what Jesus means, instead here, is that we must love our enemies because God is now our Father and that's what He is like. That's His point. You see, in Scripture, God's love always comes first and ours is always a response. 1 John 4:19, “We love, (Why?) because He first loved us.”

Now Jesus' statement here in verse 45 is profound in a couple of ways. First of all, I want you to notice how He describes God's interaction with His creation. He describes it as very personal and as intimate. Notice what Jesus says, it's “His sun” and He “causes it to rise.” And notice, it doesn't just rain, He “sends the rain.” Beloved, don't miss this. Don't let your culture rob you of what the Scripture clearly teaches. In our world, evolutionary theory dominates everything and so most people, when they think of creation, think solely in terms of natural laws and processes. Now those exist, obviously. God created and uses the systems and the processes that we call laws. For example, God created the hydrological cycle, the reality that the heat and rays of the sun evaporate water from the bodies of water on our planet, that water is distilled into the clouds, the trade winds bring those clouds across the land, they dump their rain to water the earth. God created that process, and it's not that He acts directly without any other causes to make that happen. He uses that process He put in place. But while He uses what theologians call

"secondary causes," at the same time, Scripture teaches that God is always the primary, ultimate cause for these laws. He didn't create the natural laws, in other words, and then step away and become distant and uninvolved in this world. Our God is not the God of the deist. Yes, natural laws exist because He created them, but what does the New Testament tell us? "And in Him all things hold together," because of Jesus Christ. So, He is very much involved with overseeing, shepherding, sustaining, directing His creation. He's intimately involved. He caused the sun to rise this morning. He sends the rain when we experience it here in North Texas.

Now Jesus uses God's intimate involvement with the sun and the rain to illustrate His main point. Look again at verse 45, "for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous." Clearly, Jesus lays out two sets of contrasts. The first contrast, you have the evil and the good. The second contrast, the righteous and the unrighteous. So in both of these contrasts, there are two groups. Let's call the first group "God's friends," those who by faith have become His people. They've been changed. They know Him. They are now good and righteous in their character and in their works; not perfectly, but they are marked by, now, goodness and righteousness. That's God's friends.

God's enemies, on the other hand, are those who have not repented and believed in Him and His Son. And therefore, Jesus says, they are still evil and still unrighteous, and their lives are marked by sin. Now let me stop here and just say those are the only two categories. This morning, you fit into one of those categories. Jesus says you are either God's friend because you have repented and believed in His Son, or you are His enemy. You don't have another category you can belong to. You are in one of those two categories. The question you have to ask yourself, honestly, is, "Which one do you fall into?" Remarkably, Jesus says, "God causes His sun to rise...and He sends rain" on both His friends and His enemies. I've often thought what a

strange world it would be if that wasn't like God. Imagine driving through your neighborhood and you drive past this one yard and the grass is all green and lush and growing and the trees look really healthy, and you come to the next yard and it's like a desert. You know, the sand is blowing across the yard, there's no grass, there are no trees, everything is dead and shriveled up. Well, that's not who God is. That's what Jesus says here. That's not like God. Regardless of their character and behavior, God loves every person and He acts on that love. He causes His sun to rise and sends rain on both His friends and His enemies. In other words, Jesus is saying, "God's love for mankind is universal." That's Jesus' main point. The extremes, in verse 45, include every human being. God loves every person who has ever lived. God loves every one of the 8-billion people alive and on this planet, today. God loves every person in the U.S., every 370-plus-million of them. He loves every person in this city. He loves every person in this room. He loves you!

Now I say that because some who come, rightly, to embrace God's sovereignty in all things, including salvation, insist that God does not love but only hates the non-elect. That is not what Scripture teaches. Now let me unfold this for you. It is certainly true that God hates the sinner. Scripture, again and again, makes that clear. Psalm 5, verse 5, speaking to God, "You hate all who do iniquity." Psalm 11 verse 5, "The one who loves violence His soul hates." And there are many other passages that could be multiplied that say the same thing. God hates the sinner. Now, some try to dodge the statements of such verses by saying, "Well, let's not put it that way, Tom. Let's say it differently. Let's say that God loves the sinner but hates the sin. He loves the person. He only hates his sin." Well, that may sound clever, but that's not what the Scriptures say. The Scriptures say God hates the sinner. What Scripture teaches is that God also loves the sinner at the same time. In other words, Scripture teaches that God's love and hate are not

mutually exclusive but exist simultaneously. His love and His hate are directed toward different aspects of the same person. You say, “Wait a minute, is it possible to both love and hate at the same time?” The answer to that is, “Yes, it is.” One theologian gives a very helpful illustration from American history. You will remember the story of George Washington and his dear friend, Benedict Arnold. They were closest of friends. So when Washington learned of Arnold's treason, he describes that in a moment of time he experienced this confluence, this mix of emotion. On the one hand, he still loved him as his friend; on the other hand, he hated him as a traitor and the treason that he had committed against his country. In the same heart, toward the same person, there was both love and hate. That's true at a human level.

In the same way, God's love and hate are not mutually exclusive but are directed at different aspects of the person. So here's how, biblically, we can explain it. God loves the sinner as His creature made in His image, and at the same time, God hates the sinner as a corrupt rebel who is in rebellion against His rightful authority. So, biblically then, God hates all sinners and also, as Jesus says in Matthew 5, God loves all sinners, even His enemies. His love for man is as universal as the sun and the rain. Even in other places, Scripture is clear, equally clear, that God universally loves all people. Here are a couple of examples. Mark, chapter 10, verse 21, Jesus has an encounter with the rich young ruler, you remember, who having heard the Gospel from Jesus, refuses it and walks away. There's no evidence he ever came to faith in Christ, but it says in Mark 10:21, “Jesus felt a love for him (the rich young ruler).” And then there's John 3:16, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Now, if you are rightly convinced of the sovereignty of God in salvation, you might want to say, “Well, that doesn't mean He loves everybody.” Well, I think you would agree that John Calvin was not soft on God's sovereignty and salvation, but Calvin

writes of John 3:16 this, he says, “Two points are distinctly stated here, namely that faith in Christ brings life, and that the Father loves the human race and wishes they should not perish.” Titus, chapter 3, verse 4, speaks of Jesus' coming as the time “when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared.” William Hendrickson, the Presbyterian commentator, who also embraces, as we do, the sovereignty of God and salvation from beginning to end, he says this:

> Just as a human father, in addition to uniquely loving his own sons and daughters, has room in his heart for his neighbor's children, yes, even for all the children in the world, so also the Father in heaven, in addition to sustaining a unique relationship toward those, who by His grace are His very own, also loves mankind in general.

God loves the world. He loves every human being.

Now, that raises the question, “How does God's love for mankind express itself?” And the answer is in what theologians call “Common Grace,” common grace. Now, don't misunderstand the word ‘common,’ it doesn't mean ‘ordinary;’ it means it is ‘common to all people, it's shared toward all.’ By common grace, we mean it is not saving grace, but instead it is God's undeserved temporal goodness to sinners. It's the grace by which God gives to all men common expressions of His goodness and His benevolence in this life. Think about it like this, God would be perfectly just the first moment a sinner sins, to strike him dead and end his rebellion. That would be perfectly just, but God doesn't do that. What does God do instead? He continually does good to all men, even those who hate Him and rebel against Him. This is what Paul argues in Acts 14, turn over there with me. Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas are in Lystra, and

you remember the pagans there start worshiping them as gods because of the healing that takes place, and Paul's response comes in Acts 14:15. He says:

> "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet (Notice verse 17.) He did not leave Himself without witness, (What was God's witness to pagan peoples?) in that, He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

God demonstrates His common grace to all people, even those who don't know Him. He is good to them. He fills their lives with good things as a demonstration of who He is. So God loves all people, but listen carefully, this is crucial, He does not love all the same way or with the same intensity. God loves those He has chosen to save with a special love. Listen to Ephesians 1, verses 4 and 5:

> God the Father...chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world (In other words, it wasn't based on anything in us.), that we would be holy and blameless before Him. (Here it is.) In love, He predestined us. (He predetermined our destiny in His love and what was it?) to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.

That is a whole different kind of love than doing good and giving people food and gladness. He predestined us to adoption as His sons and His daughters. 1 John 3:1, the Apostle John was struck with the greatness of the love He has shown His own when he writes, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us (And what does that love look like?), that we would be

called the children of God." This is a special kind of love, an elevated intensity of God's love, a different kind of love. John 13:1, you remember Jesus is anticipating the cross, and He's about to go into what we call "The Upper Room Discourse" on that Thursday night before His crucifixion, and John the Apostle records this, John 13:1, "Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father," that His death was imminent; listen to this, "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." The Greek word comes from the word '*telos*,' it means not just to the chronological end, to the end of His life, it means instead 'completely, comprehensively, perfectly, to the maximum, to the n^{th} degree,' He loved His own. You see, God loves His own with an electing, saving, adopting, eternal, infinite love. His love for unbelievers, as we'll see, that love will eventually end in judgment, but His love for His own will never end. It is from everlasting to everlasting.

Now, go back to Matthew 5, Jesus says that God loves all mankind, including His enemies. And His point here, in Matthew 5, is that our new Father loves His enemies. And if we have become His children, then we're going to reflect His character. We will love our enemies just like our new Father does, "Like Father, like son, like Father, like daughter." Turn over to Luke, chapter 6, here is Luke's record of this same truth. Luke 6, verse 35, Jesus says, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be (in other words, you will show yourselves to be) sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*." He loves His enemies. He demonstrates that love to His enemies. If you're His new child, you need to do the same. That's why we're to love our enemies. It's not so we can make that enemy a friend. I mean, that could happen, but it may never happen, it doesn't matter. It's not to manipulate them. It's not to make them feel guilty and somehow like us. No, Lloyd-Jones is right when he says we must love them for one reason only:

“In this way, we display to them the love of God.” Our love for them is just another expression of God's love for them. So the first reason that you and I are to love, the motivation for our love, has to be because it's like our new Father.

But there's a second compelling reason for our loving of our enemies, and it's “Because It's Like Our New Nature.” Verses 46 and 47, look at verse 46, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” Jesus chooses one group as an illustration, the tax collectors. Now, in first century Palestine, tax collectors were at the very bottom of the social ladder. Here is how the system worked. The Roman system of tax farming worked like this. When they took over a province, Rome auctioned the right to collect taxes in that province to a wealthy investor who outbid everyone else and who contracted with Rome to raise a set revenue from that province. Now those franchise owners, then, sublet their rights to chief tax collectors. In other words, they divided up that province that they could collect taxes from into smaller areas, and over each of those areas, they set a chief tax collector. That's what Zacchaeus was, by the way, he's identified that way in the city of Jericho in the Scriptures. The chief tax collectors in turn hired actual tax collectors, the guys who actually got the money from people. Now these collectors were expected to charge enough money, from the people they got taxes from, to pay Rome what had been agreed upon, to reimburse the investor, to cover costs, and to make a profit. And once that contracted amount that they had promised Rome would be collected was met, any additional monies over that were simply profit for the franchise and its owner. So you can only imagine that this was a system rife with abuse. At every level, everybody's trying to get a little more because it goes in their pockets. As a result of all of this, tax collectors, the guys on the front lines, they were commonly known as extortionists, as thugs, and as lowlifes. Because they were Jewish but working with the Romans,

they were considered traitors; because they were always dishonest, they were so expected to be dishonest they couldn't even testify in court–everybody knew they were going to lie. Because they worked with Gentiles, they were considered unclean, and they weren't even allowed to enter a synagogue and certainly not the temple–tax collectors.

Now think about who's writing this Gospel. This is a very personal illustration for Matthew because as we are going to see in chapter 9, prior to his conversion, he was a tax collector in Capernaum. In verse 46, Jesus intentionally chose tax collectors as an example–an example of what? The worst sinners. That's the point of the illustration. He says, “Listen, if you love only those who love you, you're no better than a tax collector. You're no better than the worst sinner you know because even they love those who love them (He said.), so don't expect to be rewarded for that.” In Luke 6.32, He says, “Even sinners love those who love them.” Jesus affirms that sinners love other people.

By the way, that raises a theological question for me, “Why do sinners love other people?” There are two reasons. Number one, partly because of the residual image of God, and secondly, partly, because their love is self-serving. Broadus writes, “In loving his friends, a man may, in a certain sense, be loving only himself, a kind of expanded selfishness.” In other words, people of our world by and large love for what they get. That's why they will say, “I love you,” and a little while later they will say, “I don't.” Why? Because I stopped getting what I wanted–a self-serving kind of love.

Now, Jesus' point here is that unbelievers only love those who love them. They only love when there's a reciprocal love, when there's something in it for them. And that is completely antithetical to divine love. Think about Romans 5:8-10, right? “While we were His enemies,

Christ died for us. God demonstrated His love in that Christ died for us," (Summary paraphrase). As Jesus' followers, we must not only love those who love us, unbelievers do that; we must manifest the changed heart that only the Spirit can work in us by loving in a way that is contrary to normal human love. Like our Father, we must love everyone, even our enemies!

Now in verse 46, you will notice Jesus implies that, when we do, God notices and we are going to receive a reward. He says, "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" He implies a reward, but according to Luke, Jesus states it explicitly. Luke 6:35, "Love your enemies...and your reward will be great." God notices! Jesus continues in verse 47 in our text, He says, "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*?" Now the word 'brothers,' as you know, can refer to human siblings, but it can also, as it does here, include those who belong to our group, those who belong to the same group that we do. The word for 'greet' here, by the way, is not like a token 'Hello.' It's not a kind of a normal greeting where you just say "Hi" to somebody. You might say that to your enemy. No, the leading Greek lexicon defines this word 'greet' as 'to spend time in warm exchange.' Tyndale, in his translation in the Geneva Bible, both translate this as, "If you are friendly to your brothers only," that's the idea. Jesus says, "If we only engage in warm exchange, friendly exchange with those who are like us, those in our group, those who love us, then we are doing no more than unbelievers do," (Paraphrase).

Verse 47, "Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" In the New Testament, as you know, Gentiles refer to those who aren't Jewish. First century Jews regarded Gentiles as unclean, even as dogs. To have contact with a Gentile rendered you unclean, unable to participate in temple or synagogue worship. So a Jewish person, literally, according to Acts, chapter 11, wouldn't even have a meal with a Gentile. But Jesus' point is, "Okay, think about the Gentiles. You think of

them as terrible sinners. But even Gentiles are friendly to those in their group." His point is that if you only engage in warm, personal interchange and relationship with those like you, you are no better than idolatrous pagans, because they do that. But don't miss the larger point He's making here. He's saying, "If you only love like that, then there is no evidence that the Spirit has changed your heart. You're loving just like all the unbelievers around you love." Galatians 5:22, when the Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, He produces fruit. What's the first fruit He produces? "The fruit of the Spirit is love–love for God, love for others, love for those who aren't like us, love for those who hate us, love for our enemies! John Stott writes, "All human love is contaminated to some degree by the impurities of self-interest. We Christians are called to love our enemies, in which love there is no self-interest. And this is impossible without the supernatural grace of God." In other words, loving our enemies shows that we've been changed because we're not just loving like the people around us; we're loving in a way that can only be defined as divine and supernatural.

Now, it's an incredible lesson from our Lord. When I look at this paragraph, there are "Three Crucial Applications" that just clearly flow from it for all of us here today. Let me draw them out for you. Number one, "For unbelievers, this passage is a call to repent and believe." If you're here this morning, and you know in your heart that you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, maybe you have come with a friend, maybe you are a spouse or a child of those who attend our church, you know you're not a believer, listen, here's the good news for you. No matter what you are, or no matter what you have done, God loves you! Jesus says, "God loves His enemies." You are His enemy; He loves you. And all of the good things that you enjoy in your life, think about the good things in your life that are not sinful, all of the good things that enrich and fill

your life, those are an expression of God's common grace to you, of His love to you. He loves you and He's proven it by all of the good things He's filled your life with.

But God has shown His common grace and love to you for a reason. Turn over to Romans, chapter 2, maybe you have missed the reason. Why do you enjoy all the good things that you enjoy, even though you are God's enemy? Romans 2:4, Paul says, "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience (Don't you understand that the kindness of God to you is intended to?) leads you to repentance? "Listen, God has filled your life with good to show you that He is good and ultimately to lead you to repent of your sin and to put your faith in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son so that your sins can be forgiven, so that you can have a relationship with Him. He's filled your life with good as a testimony to who He is. But if you spurn God's goodness, if you refuse to learn that lesson, then He goes on to say what will happen to you in verse 5, "because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, WHO WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS." Listen, don't be fooled. God is being good to you; He has filled your life with good, and that is an expression of His love. But that doesn't mean everything is good between you and Him. You are, by your refusal to accept the offer of His Son, you are, He says, "stockpiling judgment for the day of judgment," you are only making it worse. I plead with you, learn the lesson of His goodness. It is intended to lead you to repentance. Let that happen even today.

Second lesson, "For <u>professing</u> believers (You're here and you say, "Yes, Tom, I know Jesus."), this passage is a test to weigh the genuineness of your faith." Because in Matthew 5, Jesus makes loving our enemies evidence of a redeemed heart. In other words, true Christians act like their Father–they love their enemies! Do you? Can you honestly say that those who hate you,

who have harmed you, who have done things to you that are sinful and are wrong, and God will hold them accountable for those things, but can you honestly say that "You love them, you pray for them, you bless them with your words, you do them good?" Can you say that? If not, if you only love those who do good to you and who love you, but you hate and refuse to love those who are your enemies, then you're acting like every other unbeliever. You're not a Christian.

Now this doesn't mean we do this perfectly. We struggle like Corrie ten Boom did in the story I shared with you this morning. We struggle with this; but where's your heart? What is your desire? What marks your life? Loving your enemies or holding grudges and hating them? It's a test.

Number three, "For true believers, this paragraph is a call to obey," it is a call to obey. Listen, Christian, God loves you with a special, saving, adopting, eternal love. He adopted you! That's not pretend. That's real. He's your Father. He's your Father more than your human father is! And as your Father, He demands that you love your enemies just like He does. It's not enough to love those in your group, those who love you. The worst unbelievers normally love those who are like them and who love them. We're called to love like our Father loves, to love all people regardless of what they are or how they treat us.

Now, Jesus finishes this paragraph, and I really think the whole section in chapter 5, with an amazing statement. Look at the last verse, verse 48. "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Now some argue that this refers to moral perfection. In other words, they say Jesus is teaching here that believers can arrive at perfection in this life. That's clearly not what Jesus intended. It runs contrary to so much of the New Testament, but even here in this passage, the beatitudes are clear that Christians are beggars in spirit who are constantly

throughout life hungering and thirsting for righteousness. In the Lord's Prayer, we're going to come to in chapter 6, He teaches us to pray daily, “Father, forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” So Jesus doesn't teach that we reach moral perfection in this life.

So what does he mean here when he says, “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect?” Well the Greek word for ‘perfect’ means ‘to arrive at a goal or an end, to bring something to its full completion.’ When it talks about people, it often refers ‘to full maturity.’ It's often used of full physical maturity in this life, those who become mature adults. In this context, it's referring to moral maturity, a spiritually mature state where our characters reflect, although imperfectly, the character of our Father. Jesus calls His disciples to arrive at the end or the goal for which God made us, and that is to reflect our Father's character. Ephesians 5 says, “Be imitators of your Father.”

Christian, Jesus' point here is so important, and that is you should never be satisfied with half-hearted or halfway obedience. You should never look at your life and go, “Well, you know, I'm not as bad as I could be, so I'm good with that.” No, that's not the standard! The standard is your Father, the One who loved you and gave His Son for you, that's the standard to pursue. Although you will never arrive at it in this life, you should constantly strive to imitate your Father's perfection. One commentator, Frantz, says this, he says:

> You are to live on a level above that of ordinary, decent people (above them). You are to draw your standards of conduct, not from what everyone else is doing, but from your heavenly Father. We are to pursue perfection in our moral character the way God is perfect in His.

And Christian, here's the good news, someday, by His grace, you will arrive at perfection. Romans, chapter 8, verse 29, “Those whom He (God) foreknew (those He set His love upon in eternity past), He also predestined (He predetermined their destiny.) *to become* conformed to the image of His Son.” And it's going to happen, because He goes on to say those “He also justified” eventually end up what? “glorified.” It's going to happen. 1 John, chapter 3, verse 1:

> See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. (But;) We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

Listen, Christian, the day is coming when you will see the glory of Jesus Christ, and you will share the glory of His moral character perfectly. Until then, look at verse 48 again, here's the goal to strive for, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for this incredible lesson from our Lord. Thank You for what it tells us about You, that You are a God who loves all those You have made in Your image. Help us to love them all, to love our enemies as You do.

But Father, we also are grateful that it tells us in the rest of Scripture that You have this special love for Your own, a special saving, electing, adopting love, an eternal love that never changes, from everlasting to everlasting. Father, help us to live in response to that. And Father, we want so much to reflect Your character. We want to be like You. We want to imitate You. Forgive us for being content with behaving like the people around us. Lord, help us to love our enemies as well as our friends, just like You do.

And Father, I pray for those here this morning who are Your enemies that You have shown Your love toward. Lord, don't let them take that for granted. Help them to see that that's intended to lead them to repentance, and that one day, if they don't respond to Your goodness and the love You've shown them, they are storing up Your wrath for themselves, and at the judgment, it will not go well, but they will receive exactly what they have earned. Lord, may this be the day when they repent, cry out for the forgiveness that Jesus purchased through His life, death, and resurrection. We pray in His great name. Amen!