

Love Your Enemies

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. You're going to need that passage in Matthew chapter 5 open in front of you. Wonderful songs and just a wonderful story from Inez that will fit so well with what we're thinking about this morning.

So we're going to get into verses 38 to 48 together. Let me try and get us under the skin of this and tell you two facts about chimpanzees.

Here's number one. They are incredibly aggressive. If you Google this, this is what you'll find. The chimpanzee community has one of the highest murder rates in the animal kingdom.

Google it and you'll find that studies show how rates of violence among chimpanzees is similar to those of societies of hunter-gatherers. In fact, St Andrews University had a report online called Why Chimps Go Ape, so you can knock yourself out after that.

After this, if you want. Incredibly violent, particularly towards those who aren't like them. Threat to them. Incredibly violent. But here's the other thing. Aggressive and yet incredibly affectionate.

[1 : 12] Particularly when it comes to looking after those in their own tribe. Incredibly affectionate. One of the first dates that Alex and I had, when we first started going out, I worked up here.

She worked down in Dorset near a place called Bournemouth. One of our first ever dates when I flew around to see her in Bournemouth, if you've ever been, is that we went to a place called Monkey World. And as I always laugh, because given what I've just told you, Monkey World is on the same sign as the Tank Museum, which is quite interesting.

But we're in Monkey World. And the thing about Monkey World is you can spend hours walking around this park watching all sorts of different types of monkeys and chimpanzees. And what are they doing?

You're watching them going swinging from rope to rope. You're witnessing them kind of chasing playfully after each other. You're witnessing them kind of picking the lice out of each other's hair. And we go crazy for it. We think it's the most cutest thing ever. Oh, would you not love to be a chimpanzee? But here's the thing. Incredibly aggressive and yet incredibly affectionate.

[2 : 14] Depends on who they come up against. And see, if I'm honest, we have that phrase in our culture, animal instincts. Here's what I know to be true in my own life, what I'm really, really natural at doing.

Is that I am really good at lashing out to those who are a threat to me. And I'm also really good at showing compassion and love to those who I like and who are just like me.

Does that sound familiar? These kind of instincts. We lash out and we love. This is what we do. And of course, in our day, big tech play into those twin instincts, don't they?

A generation ago, the mantra when it came to getting people's attention, the mantra was, want it to gather pacey, better make it racy. Now, a generation after, it is, if it engages, it engages.

Do I remember having this feeling? Do you remember that Charlie Kirk episode a little while ago? I remember finding myself in the days and weeks after just watching all these short videos on social media. And I'm building up this picture in my mind of the guy and what he's about and thinking he can do no wrong and all that kind of stuff.

[3 : 33] And then I look at my neighbor at the school who's posting on social media, who's coming to a completely different conclusion. The guy's done nothing. All this kind of stuff. And I'm thinking, how could it be so different?

And then it occurs to me what's going on. Is it the algorithms are just feeding the stuff? They're learning the stuff that you like to watch. We're learning your tastes. And we're just feeding you videos after video after video.

To get your attention. And that material that the algorithms put in front of our eyes is tailored to act like gasoline in an already lit fire of distrust and hate.

Isn't it? It's our world, isn't it? It's our instincts. It's lash out in love. And that's why there's so much inside of me, if I'm honest, that really doesn't like what Jesus says in these verses.

And yet I love him. And I know he loves me. And I know he's showing me here a better way. But I know I can't do this. I know this doesn't come naturally to me.

[4 : 45] And the promise here is that he's going to help me do it. So to stop this becoming simply an ethical lecture, come with me to verse 45. And let me try and frame what Jesus is saying here.

You know, the more I've got into this sermon over the past month, something I've maybe come to appreciate. Is that this isn't primarily a sermon about how Jesus wants his disciples to live.

Actually, it's primarily a sermon all about the character of God. You'll so often hear theologians today talk about the incommunicable attributes of God.

Now, hang on with me, okay? The incommunicable attributes of God. Meaning that there are things that is good for us. It's really healthy for us to realize that we are not because he alone is.

There are things that God calls his people not to be because he alone is those things. So for example, it's really healthy for us to know that we are not all knowing.

[5 : 53] And he is. Yeah? It's also really helpful for us to know that he is all-powerful and we are not. It's really healthy for us to rest in the fact that, no, I go to sleep.

I get tired. I get weary. But God doesn't. And so I can rest my head on the pillow of his sovereignty every night and go to sleep knowing that I do not need to carry the pressure of holding the world and my times and my decisions in my hand.

Because he's sovereign and good and he loves me. Really good that we embrace the fact that there are things that are true about God that he does not call us as his people to reflect. And yet, the flip side is that you'll also hear theologians talk about the communicable attributes of God.

It's a big word. Meaning that there are things that are true about God that he calls us to reflect.

There are truths about him that he calls his people to reflect to the watching world so that the watching world will know exactly what kind of God is.

God he is. And that's kind of the territory we're on today. Maybe think about it like this. Have a look at verse 45 again. You know what, if this helps, one of the fellow dads that I've got to know in the schoolyard over the last couple of years, his name is Darren.

[7 : 19] Two things you need to know about Darren. Number one is that he used to play for Hibs. Probably undersold him a little bit there. He's a bit of a Hibs legend. Because he was part of that 2016 Scottish Cup winning team.

Something that hasn't been done for a generation. And Hibs fans like to tell us it's a big deal. And we'll kind of let them have it. Okay. But he's part of this 2016 Hibs team. That's fact number one about him.

Number two fact about him though is that he's got three kids. And in particular he's got two younger boys. And the thing about those boys is that any time there is a, what we call in Scotland a muffy day.

Kind of wear what you want to school day. Any time there's a day like that in school. These two boys will be running around in Hibs strips. But not just any Hibs strips.

They're running around with their surname on the back. And they're running around with strips with his number on the back. And they're running around with his colors all over them.

[8 : 23] Right? And so you can see them. They're running around. They're wearing this with pride. And what's going on? They're saying it's daddy's name. And it's daddy's number.

And it's daddy's badge. It's daddy's team. Friends, that's what's going on at verse 45. Do you see it? Can I paraphrase it?

In a Shanks uninspired translation version. Here's what Jesus is saying today. And this frames the whole thing. Be like this. Because your dad's like this.

Or more than that. You can be like this. Because your father's like this. Do you see it? And for the first time in this book of Matthew.

Jesus uses the word father. To talk about how his disciples can relate to God. And this is telling us that we can know our father.

[9 : 23] We can trust him. And the rest of this sermon on the mount. That's going to be right at the heart of it. That we'll come back to in September. Just in case you're worried about stopping today.

But the central idea is that I can worship my father.

I can know him. And I can reflect him in the simple details of my life. And bring glory and honor to him. Be like this because your dad's like this. And so see what that with that frame in place.

As far as. And remember this is all about in the context. Engaging and loving our neighbor. Who remember in the disciples day. Would have been a neighbor who is likely persecuting them.

For following Jesus. Jesus is challenging two things. That the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Are peddling to the people. Remember we said this last week.

If people are going to the Pharisees and teachers of the law. And saying show us what it means to follow God. Show us the heart of the law. They're holding up a distorted picture. And Jesus has come to reveal.

[10:27] And restore the original. That's what's going on. But here's two things that they're teaching the people in this day. Jesus is going to challenge. Here's number one. This is verses 38 to 42.

He's challenging their blow for blow attitude. So have a look at verse 38. What are they teaching? This is really interesting. What are they teaching?

You have heard that it was said. Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Now that is a direct quote from the law. That you'll find in Exodus 21. Leviticus 24. And Deuteronomy 19.

So their quote is legit. But always a great question to ask is. What was its original purpose? What is it doing there? And what it was doing is.

In the context of when God had given that law to his people. Is giving power to the courts in Israel. And it's specifically giving them power to do two things.

[11:28] On the one hand. Make sure justice was done in the Israelite community. When someone was wronged. And on the other hand. What it's doing is capping the penalty.

Thereby discouraging people from going over the top. In terms of their retaliation. And their desire for justice and revenge. Taking matters into their own hands. So it's doing those two things.

Making sure justice is done. And it's capping. The level of retaliation. And it's a law specifically designed to protect who in the community.

Remember the kids talk? It's specifically designed to protect those who are vulnerable. And those who are likely to be exploited in the Israelite community. That's what it's doing.

But what seems to be happening in Jesus' day. Is that the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Were subtly encouraging people. To take matters into their own hands.

[12:27] When they've been wronged. And leading them to think. That technically you can still act like that. And still believe. And feel like you're keeping the law.

Remember we said. This is what they're doing. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They're dropping the bar. Why are they dropping the bar? Because they're trying to make it easier to obey. Now you can imagine.

With that going on in the community. What's going to happen to the community? What's going to happen if people are encouraged to. Seek out their own revenge.

Take matters into their own hands. What's going to happen to the community? What happens in our communities when that happens? It rips societies apart. You know the first wedding I ever did at Brunsfield.

Was the most controversial wedding I've ever done at Brunsfield. Because it was a Campbell girl. Marrying a McDonald boy. And jokes throughout the day.

[13:27] About the fact that this would never have happened 400 years ago. I mean if you look at the. The history of clan violence in the day. It is brutal. Jokes throughout the day. That this would never have happened.

And jokes about the violence and the tensions. And everything like that. But the thing is we were joking about that. But what is the reality in our world. When it comes to revenge.

Is that nations. And communities. And we will know this today. Families. Generations are ripped apart. By the desire for revenge.

Yeah. And what happens to that rage so often. Is it is just passed down from generation. To generation. To generation. And somebody asks.

Why don't we speak to Uncle Dave anymore. And we say. Well it's a long story. And it's amazing isn't it. When I was prepping for this. How many phrases we have in our culture.

[14 : 24] For this kind of thing. Which shows you that it's a real thing. Okay. Can I try them on for size. See if you can complete them. Revenge is a dish. Best served. Cold. Right.

I'm glad he finally got his just. Desserts. Sometimes in life. You've got to fight fire with. I'll teach her a lesson.

That she'll never. Forget. Do you see what I mean? The human heart is. Brutally ugly at times. And if Jesus' disciples are wondering.

How should we respond to the neighbor. That comes at us. With hostility. Jesus says here. Be people of surprising.

Mercy. Three quick examples of that. We'll race through these. And go to your growth groups this week. And tease this out. Let me just give you the big hitters here. Three examples of that in the text.

[15 : 21] You see the first one. Turn the other cheek. Now the harm. Let me just try and get it in this context. The harm that came from us. Slapping the cheek back in the day.

It wasn't so much physical. It was more the act of that was an insult. So this is about when somebody insults you. What do people expect you to do when they insult you?

What do they expect you to do back? Insult them back. But see when you don't react like that.

Surprising mercy. People stop in their tracks and they think.

What's that all about? Surprising mercy. Number two. We're going through these really quick. Give away your tunic. Surprising mercy.

So in Jesus' day for a Jewish man. Their coat. Their turek. Is a massive deal. It's a sign of honor. It's their dignity. So somebody is after you for a financial pledge.

[16 : 21] Maybe for a debt that you owe. Or something like that. A pledge. As a pledge you could give your shirt. They could demand your shirt off your back. But your coat was off limits.

Or if you did take the coat. You would need to give it back by sunset. Because the person likely needed it for warmth. So it's a huge deal. The coat back in the day.

But imagine the scenario. If somebody came after you financially. You offered them their shirt. And then you offered them your coat. Again. What?

Shocking mercy. Surprising mercy. Why are you? Why are you doing that? And then number three. And it's amazing how many of these phrases have made it into our culture's language today.

Isn't it? Here's number three. Go the extra mile. Which is a reference to a Roman law. That gave Roman soldiers the power. Power. To stop any citizen.

[17 : 25] On the street. And force them to carry their heavy military gear. Carry it up to one mile. But Jesus is saying. Imagine a scenario where you're forced to carry it one mile.

And then instead of stopping and dropping. You just keep on going. Again. Why would you do that? Why would you respond to such an unfair request like that? And I think in the context as well.

There's a bit of. If you're made to walk one mile. The Romans are in charge of you. But see. If you go another mile.

Who's in charge? You are. So shocking mercy. Do you see? Surprising mercy. Breaking the cycle of revenge.

And rage. Now can I just. Knowing you friends. Just. Think about two questions that might be in your mind just now. We'll just. Try and go towards them.

[18 : 26] Again. Talk about them in your growth group this week. Two questions that might be in your mind. Just try and have quick short answers. To these. Maybe you're thinking. Does this mean I need to be a walking doormat? Maybe.

Thinking particularly of those who are in really difficult situations. At work just now. Or at uni or something. And it's relationally difficult. And you're thinking. What are my options? What does this call me to do?

Just remember the context of God giving that law to his people. God giving it to his people. Not any Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 perfect world context. God is giving it to his people.

And then Genesis 3 onward context. Where it's. It's tricky. It's sin. It's all over this. It's relationally complex. I take it. If you're in a situation.

Where you're thinking. There's a course of action open to me. I take it. If there are rules and procedures in place. For justice to be done. Then it's not wrong for you to take them. If you think about it wisely.

[19 : 25] But I think where the cross section. Where this passage intersects. With maybe your thinking on that. Is in terms of what's going on in your heart. Is you seek that out.

It's your motivation in it. Is it a desire to lay down the law. And stand on your rights. And maybe out somebody. Or genuinely is it a desire. For the glory of Jesus.

And the good and the health. Maybe of your workplace. Or whatever it is. So that's why we do this in community. Isn't it? This is wisdom territory.

We help each other with this. And S was talking about how beautiful a thing it is. To be part of an intergenerational church family. There'll be people in this church family. Who will have walked through situations.

Like perhaps that you're facing. And if nothing else. What can we do for each other is pray. Jesus is saying here. Always check your motivation.

[20 : 21] I listen to a podcast called Knowing Faith. In the States. A lady called Jen Wilkin. And there's a guy called JT English. And Kyle Worley. Really good podcast.

If you're looking for something to listen to. They just pick subjects. And look at it from a Christian point of view. Listening to it recently. Here's what Jen Wilkin said. And I found this really helpful. She said. Godly obedience is more than just right actions.

Godly obedience is right action. Joined to right motive. It is doing the right thing. For the right reason. And that's something worth chewing on.

If we're thinking today. Does this call us to be walking doormats? Here's number two. And I think this is a slightly bigger one. Does this say when I've been sinned against and hurt.

That it doesn't matter? And I think you can say from this passage. And from particularly the one who's telling this. That it does matter. It matters so much.

[21 : 23] And where do we go? We run to the cross. Because. Not only does Jesus. The one giving up this sermon. Know what it is to turn the other cheek. And not retaliate against his enemies.

When he had every reason to. But the cross of Christ says to you and to me. That what happened to you. The sin against you and I. Is not trivial. It is serious.

It is so serious in fact. That it required the suffering and death of the son of God. To pay for it on the cross. So the cross says. As you come to this text.

When you have been wronged. It doesn't undermine it. Actually the cross underscores it. And it says it is serious. It is serious. And you hear Jesus from the cross telling us.

I know what it is to be humiliated. And I know what it is to be wronged. But would you trust me that there is. One day when I will return and make all things right.

[22 : 23] And see knowledge of him in that day. And we'll come back to this in a bit. Knowledge of him in that day means that we can leave. Ultimate. Justice. To God. Known that vengeance is his.

And he will repay. And won't the God of all the earth do right. This is Tim Keller. Really simply says this.

A God who substitutes himself for you. And suffers so that you may go free. Is a God you can trust. So firstly Jesus is challenging the blow for blow attitude.

And number two. He's challenging the we look out for our own mindset. Again come with me to verse 43. What are they teaching? They are teaching love your neighbor and hate your enemy. You see it? Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. And there's alarm bells going off all over the place with this one. Can I show you a couple of them? Love your neighbor.

[23 : 26] Doing well. But what's the convenient end of that sentence that they have conveniently left out when they quote Leviticus 19? Love your neighbor as who? As yourself.

Right? So they've missed it out. So that's red flag number one. But here's the red flag number two. Hate your enemies. Where did that come from?

And the idea of hate. I'd imagine where they might have got it from is God talks an awful lot in the Old Testament about how he will bring final justice upon his enemies. And perhaps they've grabbed that and taken it to this.

To their day. And this is what they're teaching to the people. But here's the question. Why so strong? What are they trying to do? When they introduce this language of neighbor and enemy. What are they trying to do? Well maybe think about it like this. Friends. What is our beef with insurance companies? Especially when you try and make a claim.

[24 : 27] What is the line that we hate hearing after you've been put on hold for 25 minutes? And you leave thinking I cannot get that on hold music out of my head for at least a week.

The line that they give you is that I am sorry to have kept you waiting. But we've actually established that your claim isn't covered under our policy.

It's infuriating isn't it? It's not covered. It doesn't. What you're claiming for doesn't come under the term. And what are these guys doing?

Remember they're making it easier to be. They're dropping the bar. They are trying to limit who qualifies as a neighbor. Because if I can establish that you are not my neighbor.

Well then that makes you according to this my enemy. And if you're my enemy then technically I can hate on you. And still feel like I'm obeying the command to love my neighbor.

[25 : 26] And then go on. Notice verse 46. Notice the three groups. So remember this is coming back to the chimpanzees right?

Aggression and affection. Notice the three groups. Tax collectors. Remember the guy that's written this book. Tax collector. Okay. Who do tax collectors find it really easy to love?

Tax collectors. Yeah. Jews. And I take it when Jesus says they're. Your own people. That's what he's talking about there. Who in the context do Jews find it really easy to hang out with and love?

Jews. Okay. And pagans. Who do pagans find it really easy to hang out with and love? Just go with the logic. Other pagans. Right. I'll tell you what is the easiest thing in the world.

Is to hang out with and love people just like me and you. In this context you see who Jesus has picked deliberately. Some are the scumbags of the earth.

[26 : 32] In the context. Right. Tax collector. Scum of the earth. Fellow Jews. Religious guys. Considered morally. Top of the earth.

But here's the thing. It doesn't matter if you're at the top or the bottom. The problem is the same. We just hang out with and love people just like us. And we think if you're not in our tribe.

If you're over here. Then you aren't my neighbor. You are my enemy. And Jesus is about to flip the definition. Do you see in wonderful contrast.

To something that comes so naturally to us. Do you see how. Jesus says to his disciples. Be those people marked by. Shocking. Grace. Surprising mercy.

Shocking grace. Verse 44. Love your enemies. And pray for those who persecute you. Wow. We find that. To be honest. We hear that. And we think that sounds.

[27 : 33] Not easy. But it doesn't sound that difficult. But see if you're a Christian in North Korea. Just now. And you're reading that. If you're a Christian in Sudan. Reading that. Anywhere in the world. Reading that.

Boy that's hard to hear isn't it. But why do that. Be like this. Because your dad's like this.

Right. Be like this. Because your dad's like this. Your father's like this. And this is going to get us to the character of God. See verse 45. What kind of God is he. What kind of God do we have.

We have a enemy loving God. And what Jesus is talking about here is. What theologians commonly call.

Common grace. Meaning that God is not selective. In who he is kind to. He allows the sun to shine. Which allows the maize crops to grow in the farm.

[28 : 35] So that down the line. The drug dealer can buy their cornflakes at Aldi. And eat them. He makes the rain fall. Meaning that there's water to drink. So that the atheist lecturer.

Can mock God in the debate. And stop at the interval. To have a glass of water. To quench his thirst. God is kind. He is merciful.

He is kind to his enemies. Now listen to what I'm not saying. Notwithstanding the truth. That there is a day when God will judge the living and the dead.

And one of heaven and hell. Will be the just and the eternal destination. For every single human being that has ever lived. Until the return of Christ.

God is so incredibly patient. And merciful.

[29 : 32] And kind. Towards those who do not want to know him. That's not exactly what Annes was saying in her story. I think about the.

Things I used to think about. And say about God. Before I came to know him. And God had every right. To just blow me out the water.

And yet I woke up. Even in those days. When I wanted nothing to do with him. And I had. A home to live in. And I had a family who loved me. I had water to drink.

I had clothes to wear. I had a school to go to. All of these things. Not by chance. All of these things. Because God is our enemy loving God.

Friends if you're here today. And you do not know him. Can I tell you the purpose of his patience. Is that you return to him in repentance and faith. And see how foolish I was.

[30 : 35] But how merciful Christ is. In pursuing me. His common grace to all people. And I'm so in tune to thinking about the fact.

That it's the weather cycles that make things go. Right? No, no, no. It's God who makes the things go. God who sends rain. God who sends sun. God who makes the grass grow.

God who gives us power in our lungs to breathe. The oxygen that we breathe to keep us alive. This is his common grace. But the wonderful news of the gospel is that he is a loving God.

An enemy loving God who goes so much further than just common grace. Here's a question for you. Who would you be willing to die for? Can I be honest with you?

Out with Alex and my kids. Perhaps my family. That list ain't long. Because naturally to me that list ain't long.

[31 : 47] But I tell you one person who I definitely would never die for. Is the person who wronged me horrifically and is completely unremorseful about it.

Why would you do that? And yet what is so incredible about grace. Is that that is exactly the extent to which the love of God would go.

The Bible says that while we were still his enemies. Enemies. Christ died for us. Not when we were kind of good.

Not when we were kind of finally getting our act together. Not when we were beginning to think oh maybe there's something in this. None of that. When we were his enemies Christ died for us.

When we were giving God the fingers. Christ died for us. When we wanted nothing to do with him. When Christ went to the cross to save me. And do you see how knowing that. When we were his enemies.

[32 : 50] Christ died for us. Do you see how that transforms how we view people in the world today. And the thing is. I know that I can't do this by myself.

Because I like to hang out with the people who are just like me. And I love to love the people just like me. I love to hate the people who are not like me. I need Christ to change my heart. And that's what he's offering to do today.

Friends. Friends. If a non-believer can both explain and easily replicate our ethics as a church. Then maybe it's suggesting that our lives together aren't otherworldly enough. Just quick fire questions before we close.

When was the last time you and I prayed for somebody who thought differently to us? In here. Out there. When was the last time we hung out with people who are not just like us?

[33 : 51] Maybe who are a different life stage to us. Who didn't just look and sound the same as us. When was the last time we responded to being wronged with grace and forgiveness?

Because when you think about it. Our church shouldn't make sense to the world. But this is what's going to transform our city, right?

And draw people's attention to the truth of Christ. When ordinary believers in ordinary places, in ordinary ways, choose the way of Christ.

Jesus is saying to believers in the world, act like this. Because your dad's like this. You know, just as we close, I remember when I first moved to Edinburgh.

Back in 2008. And going to a, at the time, 2008, some of you might not have been born. I don't know. 2008, went to a church down the road called Morningside Baptist Church.

[34 : 57] Started going along to an alpha course. I was a believer at the time, but I wanted to come along and just be inspired. And bring friends and things like that. And I sat next to a lady on my first night called Julie.

And once we'd kind of exchanged the pleasantries and got the small talk out of the way. I said to her, Julie, what brought you here? And she pointed to a man over the other side of the room called Eddie.

And she said, Eddie brought me, or rather, Eddie invited me on this course last year. And I became a Christian last year. And she said, I work for him. But you know what?

Last year, to my shame, I stole from him. And he caught me. And we went through the processes to make a right and everything like that.

But instead of firing me and reporting me and getting rid of me, with zero pressure and zero coercion, he kept me on.

[36 : 01] And he said, do you want to come to my church's alpha course? And so she said, it was everything that I didn't expect that he would react in this moment.

Everything I didn't respect. And I thought, hang on. Maybe there is something to this thing that I dismissed so quickly. So she comes on the alpha course. She learns about Jesus as she becomes a Christian.

And there she's on the alpha course the next year, sitting with me, talking about it. She said, I just want to help people meet the Jesus who transformed my life. So Jesus is saying, just see it to his disciples.

In light of who the Father is, be people of surprising mercy. And be people of shocking grace. And be like this. Why?

Be like this because your Father is like this. How do I pray? And then we'll stand to sing our last couple of songs. And Father, I just pray, Lord, that a big picture of your heart would capture our affections today.

[37 : 12] And Lord, if we're going through some really thorny things just now, Lord, help us. Give us the wisdom to know not just what to do, but how to glorify you and know you in these moments.

Thank you for our church family that we can come around each other and help one another with these things. But Lord, so I pray that you would help us today just savor the gospel.

That while we were your enemies, you died for us. Father, thank you really, truly. This is not a sermon about how we are to live. As much as it's a sermon about who you are.

So, Father, thank you for our time together. And as we respond, Lord, in praise and worship, Lord, would your spirit be working in our hearts. And we pray all of these things in Jesus' worthy name. Amen.