

Love Your Enemies

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Happy Resurrection Day. Because He lives, we have hope that things will be better. Because He lives, we have eternal life and a secured home in heaven. And because of His resurrection, we can know that His Word is true and His promise to save our souls has been fulfilled.

Our text this morning addresses one of the most challenging and perplexing instructions Jesus ever gave us. And it is relevant for this season of celebrating Christ's resurrection and for this time of soberly remembering why He needed to be raised.

Jesus said in Mt 5:43–48, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more [than others]? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Why did Jesus tell us to love our enemies? And what does it mean to love our enemies? Both questions are answered in a single demonstration of Christ's love for us.

Jesus did as He taught.

Romans 5:8 says, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” As sinners, we are more than agents of rebellion against the ways of God, we are despisers of God's way, and despisers of God. We are His enemies, until we repent and accept His way is the right way.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ exposes the vicious hate that seethes in the souls of those who oppose God.

Jesus was betrayed in the garden of Gethsemane with a kiss then mercilessly tortured.

Isa 53:3–5 prophetically said, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were [our] faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he [was] wounded for our transgressions, [he

was] bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

Our gain of peace is because of His loss of peace. Our healing is possible because of His willingness to endure unimaginable injuries.

Isa 50:6 prophetically said, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.”

Jesus was mercilessly beaten, flogged, ridiculed, tortured, and crucified. Hebrews 9:22 says, “Without shedding of blood is no remission.” Jesus began to shed blood after the first punch by a soldier ripped his skin, and He continued to shed blood until the last drop oozed from His side after being punctured by the soldier’s spear. His body was bloodied and disfigured by the ripping and tearing of His flesh from beatings, flogging, and piercings.

Isaiah 52:14 prophetically said, “As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.”

The crowd watched the torture of Jesus. They saw His suffering and His bleeding flesh. They saw the whips tear His flesh off His bones. They saw Him grimace. They saw a crown of thorns painfully pressed into His scalp. They saw Him beaten to a bloody pulp, and yet they had no compassion and no sympathy. There was no decency, no civility, and no empathy.

Rather than cry for mercy, the crowd cried more pain and more suffering to be inflicted on Christ. Their vicious hate for Christ and their utter absence of compassion is beyond description. They saw the horror of His pain and wanted more. Not a hint of remorse or compassion was present in their hearts.

And what is described of Jesus’ torture and death is nothing compared to what He really endured when His Father turned His back on Him. That was the moment and the day God died as He cried out, “My God my God why hast thou forsaken me?” Infinite anguish and fear is the full experience of eternal, never-ending condemnation and separation from God.

Amazingly, and yet not surprisingly, the story of Christ’s horrific crucifixion shows that the cruelest passions and most vicious acts of humanity are no match for the infinite love of God.

How did Jesus endure such a cruel torture and still say while hanging on the cross, “Father forgive them.” How did Jesus maintain the presence of mind in the shock of His misery to hear the thief on the cross next to Him and offer words of comfort to him, “today you shall be in paradise with me.” How was it possible for Jesus, shredded, bleeding, and hanging on nails, able to look at His mother and John and give them caring counsel, saying, “woman behold thy son” and to John “behold thy mother.” How is it possible for Jesus to still care for others and still offer comfort to others during His time of greatest agony?

Jesus possessed an inhuman quality of love. Even during His darkest hour and while suffering the most excruciating pains, He was still taking care of others. He was more than a man. He was God manifested in the flesh. Because of love, infinite, divine love, He deliberately chose to suffer to pay for our sins.

His suffering gives so much more meaning to His words in Lu 6:27–28, “But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.”

1Pe 2:21–24 reinforces this admonition. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed [himself] to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”

Jesus came to reconcile souls with His Father. This is our purpose too. We are here to live for Christ, to be like Christ, and to fulfill His commission to go into the world to win souls and train more disciples. We needed His love, and we needed someone to share His love with us, even while we were yet sinners and enemies of God. This is what it means to love our enemies, and this is why Jesus tells us to love our enemies.

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