

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 24 Sep 2023

Sermon Title : Loving Our Enemies

Speaker : Rev Shannon Chan

Text : Matthew 5:44

INTRODUCTION

In the world, there is a list of regular enemies which we read about in our daily news. Truth be told, it barely scratches the surface as there is a glaring hatred between people, communities and nations that mark them to be enemies with one another. If we live long enough, not many of us will manage to go through life without collecting a group of people who just might not be sorry to learn that we have died. There are people who detest who we are, whose we are or what we stand for. In Matthew 5:44 Jesus says, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,.."

Context of Matthew 5:44

This verse is sandwiched between verses 43 and 45. Verse 44 starts with a "But" and ends with a "comma", so verse 44 must be due to something preceding it in verse 43 and there must be something that follows in verse 45. Hence these verses are taken together collectively.

Matthew 5:43 – "You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy."

Matthew 5:44 (NIV) – "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Matthew 5:45 – "that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

Jesus preached this sermon at the mount where He zoomed in on the Kingdom of heaven which is God's Kingdom (with a capital K) among other kingdoms still present on earth today.

- Be aware that there exist a kingdom of darkness (with a small "k") and kingdoms of people who engage in toxic behaviour be it scheming, playing games, manipulating or where there is ungodliness, unrighteousness or just sheer evil.
- Amid these, true followers of Jesus are called to live with God's Kingdom Heart.

We can read Matthew 5-7 to know the many facets of the Kingdom's Heart but today, we will only focus on verses 43-45.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

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What the Pharisees taught (v.43)

In v.43 Jesus highlights the problem with what the Pharisees were teaching. In fact the law of Moses did teach to love your neighbour as yourself which can be found in Leviticus 19:18, but it seemed that overtime, it got twisted to become:

- Love is limited to 'neighbour' i.e. fellow Israelites
- Hatred (Gk. *miseo*) of enemy (Gk. *ecthrous*) is justified

The teaching seems to have morphed into loving those who love you, your friends and family, and those who are kind to you. Then we have 'who is' and 'who is not' our neighbour being debated even in Jesus' time – neighbour excluded enemies and hatred for enemies was justified. We can understand and sympathize with them as they were under Roman control and unkind domination which made the Romans their enemies.

Who is my Enemy? (v.43)

- It is the person who does not love you (5:46) - they are not for you but against you. They do not wish good for you. They want you to fail, to die, to suffer, to lose.
- Or someone who hates and reviles and persecutes you (could be) for your faith. They are on the other team. They belong to the other kingdom, the kingdom of darkness. They are the unrighteous.

What Jesus taught (v.44)

- **Love [that unselfishly seeks the best or higher good for] your enemies**

Amplified (adapted)

Persecute means to harass, impose and mistreat. Persecutors are the most difficult enemies to love - if you can learn to love your persecutors, you can love any of your enemies. The word "persecute" is also in the present tense implying "continual action", unrelenting without an end in sight:

- Jesus is saying that "even as your enemies are persecuting you, you are to be actively loving them."
- Even though king David described in 1 Samuel 13:14 as a man after God's own heart, in Psalm 139, he spewed out, "do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord. I have nothing but hatred for them. I count them my enemies." and there are other Psalms that sound very far from "love your enemies", these Psalms do not give us license to hate our personal enemies.

Actually, they have nothing to do with our enemies but everything to do with God's enemies. As I consider my enemies, I cannot get away thinking just because someone hates me, I am justified to count them my enemies. John Stott wrote, "There is such a thing as perfect hatred, just as there is such a thing as righteous anger. But it is a hatred for God's enemies, not our enemies." Further note this: "It is entirely free of all spite, rancour and vindictiveness, and is fired only by love for God's honour and glory."

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Live with the Kingdom Heart

Love (Gk. *agapao*) them means...

- Living in order to be like our Father

Jesus knew that even as He emphasised these words, there is a kingdom of darkness out there and other kingdoms of people present around us. But His followers, like us in our generation, are to be and to live, right here right now, in the realm of the Kingdom of heaven, God's Kingdom. We are called therefore to live with the Kingdom Heart to love our enemies. It means to be like our Father in His very nature, His being and practise His doing to love all people, even our enemies. We resemble our Father in heaven when we are "love" – that is our posture of being and our practice of doing when we act with love.

- Holding the tension between the 'tough' and the 'tender'

What that means for us is that in loving our enemies, we need to hold that tension between the 'tough' and the 'tender'. Most, if not all of us, like "tender - gentle, kind, sweet and non-confrontational" and don't quite like the "tough" because sometimes, they come through as very tough love and unloving. However, we might remember:

- o Jesus, the Son of God, was often tender – a bruised reed He said He would not break - which forceful people forget to admit. That Jesus was time and again confrontational - and fearful people for whatever reason try to ignore.
- o Jesus walked away from a number of enemies - toxic people who wanted to hurt Him but He did not walk away from the cross.
- o As He faced off with His enemies, Jesus, the Perfect Example and Role Model was both tough and tender. His love flagged them out, and called them out, "you brood of vipers, you whitewashed tombs (which appears to us as not loving and even offensive). Yet He loved them enough, more than they deserve, to choose to die for them.

Loving our enemies does not mean fellowshipping with them in their ungodliness and sin (Psalm 1) but desiring and seeking their good spiritually. Today, we live in times where we bend over backwards so as not to offend. From my observation, people are friendly as long as the person lines up with what they think should be done or said. If not, it is possible that we become their 'enemy #1'. Then they will become toxic in the things they say or in their behaviour and actions to the one they perceive will not play ball with them. It happened to Jesus too though He is the perfect man. He had to hold the tension between being 'tough' and 'tender'. We are in good company when loving our enemies is not to be afraid of holding the tension between the 'tough' and the 'tender'.

- **When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer**

The Message

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Live with the Kingdom Heart

Pray for them means...

- Pleading in prayer for their salvation, for their souls, and also for the repentance of our enemies.
- Recognizing and looking full in the face, of their evil towards us.

To live with the Kingdom Heart, out of love for those who hate, conspire against us, backstab, malign and mistreat us, (if you are in pain) let PAIN FUEL PRAYER. The kind of prayer that declares our Shepherd will defend us, that our God will surround and uphold us, that He is teaching us to trust Him, that pleads for the souls of our enemies, their repentance, for their salvation or that they be delivered from what has mastered them. Beyond these, it is about personally recognizing and looking full in the face of their evil and being able to pray forgiveness for them and thus, be set free of the burden of blame and bitterness. After all, the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross for the lost world, said this, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

CONCLUSION

A story was told at the recent Intentional Discipleship Making Conference. It was of someone living in a very hostile and persecuted environment, having ministered there for some years. It was so hostile that even going out for daily provisions like rice can give problems because people refused to sell to him. He had to walk for hours in order to get rice. 4 weeks ago, a mob consisting about 300 people came to attack him and his family. They injured him and his family. They wanted to blind him, but God protected him. The police came and he was sent to hospital for medical treatment and care. Resting in the hospital, he sent a text message to a church member to please pray two things for them, firstly recovery from his injury so he could be discharged from the hospital and secondly, pray for his persecutors.

In the face of all these evil, how many of us will ask for prayer for, or even consider praying for our persecutors – who became our enemies without cause. The church member asked him to consider moving to another village, a safer place. He said, "I can't. Who will preach the gospel to these people if I leave? God knows they need the gospel." What courage, what faithfulness and what a Kingdom Heart of love and prayer for his enemies - so unmerited and undeserved.

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. Appoint someone to read Matthew 5:43-45 slowly.

What does it mean to love your enemies?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 3a. What is God's Kingdom Heart?
 - 3b. Why do you think Jesus corrected the teachings of the Pharisees on "Loving Our Enemies"?
 - 3c. Jesus had to hold the tension between 'tough' and 'tender' in loving His enemies. Share an occasion where you had to hold the tension between 'tough' and 'tender' in loving an enemy.
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4. Is there someone you find challenging to pray for because the person has been giving you a hard time?
 - a. Why is it important that you pray for the above person and not hate him/her?
 - b. How can your group members help or encourage you to overcome the challenges in 4. above?

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C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share your experience where you obeyed Jesus' example on "loving your enemy".

OR

Give thanks to God for loving and forgiving you even when you were His enemy.

6. With a prayer partner, bring all that have been shared to God, seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance on how to be like your Father in His very nature, His being and practise His doing to love all people, even your enemies. Pray also for your group and our church to love with the Kingdom Heart of God.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. Nobody Loves Me Like You – Chris Tomlin <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KicvBB2L68>
2. Thank You Jesus For The Blood – Charity Gayle <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbCnh5Q2o1Y>
3. Just As I Am (I Come Broken To Be Mended) – Travis Cottrel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOjLXuJgbd0>

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