

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

MATTHEW 5

There was an old farmer who attended church every single Sunday.

He said he always benefited from the sermon. He told his friend, “To tell you the truth, I’ve never heard a sermon that I didn’t get something good out of it.”

After thinking for a moment his buddy answered, “Yea, me too, but I’ve had some mighty close calls.” *I’m sure we’ve all had some mighty close calls...*

But the sermon Jesus delivered in Matthew 5-7 was definitely not one of them. If sermons were pizzas, the Sermon on the Mount would be *a sermon supreme*.

Walk into most first century synagogues and you’d find a *boring rabbi* and a *snoring congregation*. The Jewish Talmud contains specimens of sermons taught by the rabbis. AT Robertson sums them up, “They are the driest, dullest collection of disjointed comments on every conceivable problem in the history of mankind...”

These rabbinical sermons resembled frozen, cardboard-like pizzas - whereas the Sermon on the Mount had thick sauce, chewy crust, and delicious toppings.

For the folks sitting on the grassy knoll overlooking the Sea of Galilee – those who heard Jesus’ sermon... this was a sermon they would never, ever forget.

Jesus had been traveling the countryside preaching the Kingdom of heaven was at hand, now He explains the nature

of His kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount is “the Christian Manifesto” – it’s the very heart of Jesus’ message.

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain...”

When we visit Israel we stop at the traditional site of the Mount of Beatitudes. On the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee there’s a knoll overlooking the lake.

As the hill slopes down to the water – it wraps around a banana grove forming an outdoor amphitheatre. You can stand on the ridge and be heard hundreds of feet away. The acoustics are perfect for delivering a sermon to a large crowd.

“And when He was seated His disciples came to Him.”

Notice, Jesus sits to teach. Today, a speaker usually stands to teach, but the rabbi in the synagogue would always sit. What you said while walking or standing was considered informal, off the record... But when you took a seat you were making an official statement.

Today when a university’s physics department creates a teaching position they call it “the chair of physics.” When Jesus sat down to teach - His disciples knew He was about to conduct official business – issue a heavy statement...

Remember Jesus came preaching, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Jesus brought heaven to earth. He went behind enemy lines to establish the kingdom of heaven among the kingdoms of men. But what are the values and priorities of God’s kingdom? Jesus answers that question in this sermon.

Jesus reveals the values of heaven are diametrically

opposed to traits prized on earth. The eight beatitudes stand in contrast to the values of this world...

The world admires haughtiness... Heaven admires humility.
The world loves to laugh... Heaven listens to our mourning.
The world is impressed with force... Heaven loves gentleness.

The world is into here and now... Heaven hungers for the spiritual and eternal.

The world demands justice... Heaven shows mercy.
The world assumes a corruption... Heaven expects innocence.

The world insists on its own rights... Heaven pursues peace.

The world crushes its enemies... Heaven loves its enemies.

Notice Jesus addresses the beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples. Verse 1 “His disciples came to Him...” This sermon is for Christians.

The only way to live the life of the kingdom is in relationship with the King.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a New Testament Law – or a moralistic code of behavior. Rather it’s the outgrowth or byproduct of a life connected with Jesus.

One final point of introduction, notice the first 8 statements are the *BE-attitudes* not the *DO-attitudes*. At the heart of God’s kingdom are *attitudes* – not *actions*.

The Pharisees said, “do-do-do”, while Jesus says, “be-be-be”. Frank Sinatra says, “do-be-do-be-do”, but that doesn’t

matter. What matters to God is not what you **do**, but what you **be...** The Pharisees did all the right things, but evil lurked in their hearts. Jesus desires a righteousness that comes from the inside out.

Remember, Paul was a Pharisee before he became a Christian, yet after His conversion he said of the self-righteous life he had manufactured, “**I count it but rubbish**” – literally, *dung* or *manure*. He says this emphasis on “**do-do**”... is just that... **dung!** God knows if you’ll **be the right person**, you’ll **do the right things**...

Verse 2, “**Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed...”**”

The word literally means “**happy.**” People assume happiness is the result of what I **acquire**, or the **acclaim** I receive, or the things I **accomplish**.

Not so, happiness is a result of a right **attitude**.

You can also translate the word “**blessed**” as “**congratulations.**” Jesus is saying, if you have these attitudes, congratulations! - It’s proof you belong to His kingdom.

In rapid-fire let’s comment briefly on each of these beatitudes...

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Some folks are full of themselves. But the “**poor in spirit**” are just the opposite. They look outside of themselves, and throw themselves on the mercies of God.

Jesus will bless their humility, and admitted neediness, with the kingdom of heaven. What an irony, in God’s kingdom

spiritual beggars end up royal heirs.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Jesus blesses the person who is willing to “mourn” – who knows there’s a time for tears. There’s *sin in us* and *sin around us* – and our eyes can’t stay dry when we really understand sin’s consequences. *Glibness* is unbecoming a Christian.

The first step in fixing what’s broken is realizing it’s broke. Jesus will comfort the person who stops pretending all is well and mourns over their brokenness.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Meekness is strength under restraint. It’s choosing to hold back when it’s within your power to act. A “meek” person is under control. He knows it’s better to win his opponent’s respect, than the game - souls are more important than scores.

Once, Zach was playing shortstop. A weak hitter was up who hit a ground ball his way, but uncharacteristically, Zach air-mailed it over the first baseman’s head.

I was about to jump on him, when he winked at me, and shouted, **“Dad, I just wanted to let the kid get on base and feel good for a change.”** That’s meekness.

The meek inherit the earth. God trusts *authority* to people with the right *priority*.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” *What’s your driving passion? What yanks your chain?* Life is full of *stuff* that creates a bloated

feeling for a time – that’s why we call it *stuff* - but it never slakes our spiritual thirst. Jesus is the true thirst-quencher. Jesus satisfies the seeker.

That’s why we need to seek, and knock, and ask. Do you hunger for God?

It’s been said, “Tell me what you seek, and I’ll tell you what you are!”

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

Apart from God’s mercy heaven is out of my reach. And that’s why I need to be **“merciful”**. Can I deny you my forgiveness, when God forgives me so freely?

Jesus says *the more mercy I show, the more I’ll know...* Bury the hatchet - cut your brother some slack. Show mercy today... tomorrow, you might need some.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Coffee can be too strong, or too weak - and I’ll still drink it – but a fly in my cup makes it intolerable. Likewise, my love for God is sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, but it should always be sincere. Hypocrisy is the fly in the cup.

Jesus desires genuine faith. Only **“the pure in heart... shall see God.”**

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

“Peacemakers” like to fight. They confront hostility, assault misunderstanding, and attack problems with peaceful solutions. They war for peace.

A peacemaker tries to destroy his enemy by turning him into

a friend.

Never are we more like God than when we fight for peace. This is why in verse 9 Jesus calls the peacemakers, “*sons of God.*”

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Usually, when you take a stand for what's right, those who are in the wrong will take a shot at you. Persecution follows the Christian.

Just remember, folks the world calls *chumps*, God calls *champs!*

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

When you stand for Jesus, those who oppose Him will try to bring you down.

Don't be surprised when it happens - rather “rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” We get medals in heaven - scars on earth.

Remember, the beatitudes are **the believer's birthmark**. The Spirit plants them in us when we're converted. It's up to us to nurture them as we grow...

In the preamble to the US Constitution our founding fathers guaranteed us the right “to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. But the founding fathers were wise old goats – they knew they could guarantee the right to *pursue* happiness, but *finding it* was a different matter... Make

happiness your goal, and that's the best way to end up unhappy. Happiness is never the result of a direct pursuit.

Always remember, *real happiness is a by-product of living life God's way.*

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." Salt serves four primary functions - a **preservative, seasoning, a thirst-producer, an antiseptic.** And this is the influence we should have on our world...

Our presence should arrest and slow down the corruption going on around us.

Our joy should add spice to the blandness of this world. We're salt on the grits.

Our winsome witness should create a thirst for God in the people we know.

And the love we show should help to heal the open wounds all around us.

We're salt, but we're also light, verse 14 "**You are the light of the world.**"

Light's primary function is two-fold: **First, it drives out darkness.** Light exposes misconceptions and dangers. Light reveals the truth.

And second, light gives off warmth. It cures the world's coldness.

As a man said of his Christian friend, "**I feel more alive when I'm around him.**" This is the kind of invigorating influence we should have on the folks who know us.

Jesus continues, “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” What good is a light under a blanket?

You hang the light in the center of the room so everyone can enjoy its benefit.

Notice, Jesus calls us “the light of the world” – not “the light of the church.” We need to get out in the world if our light is going to shine. *Coach Little League, get involved in the PTA, join a Bowling League* – don’t retreat from the world.

Engage it with the deliberate attempt of being a witness for Jesus.

There are two reasons why most unbelievers refuse to trust in Jesus...

First, **they’ve never met a Christian.** Second, **they have met a Christian.**

We all have an influence. With some of us it’s positive – with others of us it’s negative. Let’s be *salt and light*. As Christians our job is *to sprinkle and twinkle*.

In verse 17 Jesus makes an important statement, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”

The intent of the Law was to show us how to love God and love each other. Yet in the first century the Jews, particularly

the Pharisees, kept the Law out of duty, not love. Their righteousness was a loveless, legalistic, self-righteousness.

In contrast, Jesus obeyed the Law's intent. He fulfilled the Law with love.

Here's the problem with the Law. It tells me to do loving deeds, but fails to impart love - whereas Jesus fills me with His love so I can act in loving ways.

I like this poem, "To work and run the law commands, yet gives me neither feet nor hands. Better news the Gospel brings, it bids me fly, then gives me wings."

Jesus fulfilled the Law. He provided means to live the love the Law required.

There were rabbis who believed when the Messiah came He would do away with the Law of Moses and establish a new standard of righteousness.

But Jesus respected the Law of Moses. The Law had lofty goals. It was all about love. Jesus wanted to fulfill those goals – by empowering folks to love.

Jesus reiterates His respect for the Law in verse 18, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." A "jot" was the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. A "tittle" was the smallest stroke on the smallest letter.

The authority and longevity of the five books of Moses, as well as, all the Bible is more certain than the sun coming up tomorrow. *Don't fiddle with the tittle.*

“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

In the minds of the disciples who first heard it, this was a staggering statement.

In Jesus’ day the Jews had a statement, “If only two people go to heaven, one will be a scribe and one will be a Pharisee.” The Pharisees were zealous in their efforts to observe the Law. They were meticulous to keep the smallest details.

For example the Law said *no work on the Sabbath Day* – but what constitutes “work”? You’d think carrying a load would be work - but what constitutes a “load”?

Here’s the Pharisee’s definition, “food the weight of a fig, wine for a goblet, milk for one swallow, honey to for a wound, oil to anoint a small part of the body, water to moisten an eye patch, paper to write a note, and ink to write two letters.”

According to the Pharisees a tailor sinned if he went outside on the Sabbath with a needle in his coat. It was a sin to lift your young child to your knee on the Sabbath, or wear false teeth, or an artificial leg – you were carrying a load.

Jesus would’ve agreed, don’t work on the Sabbath, but what’s more loving? Bouncing a child on your knee, or

making him play by himself? The Pharisees missed the point. Rabbinical righteousness was strict observance of laws - an outward form of righteousness. Jesus taught - **love and you fulfill the Law.**

Jesus displayed an inward righteousness that comes from the heart.

As Christians, Jesus has freed us from the legalism of the Law, but not from its love. Jesus puts His love inside us. *His righteousness comes from the inside out.*

In the remainder of chapter 5, Jesus contrasts *His righteousness* with the *righteousness of the Pharisees*. The difference between *love* and *legalism*...

The Pharisees boasted they'd never murdered anyone. But in verse 21, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

Notice, not all anger is sin. There are causes that justify our anger. Jesus got angry – but always for *the right reason*, at *the right time*, and *in the right way*.

Here Jesus is pointing to the outward righteousness of the Pharisees.

They bragged that they'd never murdered anyone, but the unjustified anger smoldering in their hearts was the spiritual equivalent of cold-blooded murder.

Jesus is saying don't be proud you haven't done the *deed*, when the *seed* is in your heart. So you've never pulled the

trigger – powder burns, medal filings aren't on your hands - but your anger has blown up at your wife and kids. If every angry outburst killed someone, your morning drive to work would be a killing spree.

It reminds me of the man who was bitten by a dog. The doctor takes tests, and tells him he has rabies. He suddenly pulls out a piece of paper and starts to write.

The doctor says, “You don't need to write a will. You're not going to die. We've got medicines that can treat rabies.” The man answers, “*I'm not writing a will, I'm just jotting down names of people I want to bite.*” Anger, not just murder, is a sin.

Jesus goes on to describe escalating forms of anger, “**And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.**” Anger is like the gasoline you purchase at the pumps – it comes in different grades, or octane levels - various intensities.

There's **suppressed anger** – or what Jesus calls “**anger without a cause.**” It's an illicit anger we hold on to, and nurture, and let smolder below the surface.

There's **explosive anger** – it's an anger that lashes out and shouts “**Raca!**” The word was Aramaic slang for “**empty-headed**” or “**idiot.**” It was an insult.

There's **premeditated anger** – “**You fool**” was more than a simple insult. It was a calculated, deliberate attempt to be vengeful. It was character assassination.

Verse 23, “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar...” Here’s the first step in dealing with anger – **be in the habit of coming to the altar.** Worship God. His presence has a way of diffusing and disarming our anger - changing hearts.

And while you’re at the altar, if you “remember that your brother has something against you *(if God brings an issue to mind – an unresolved conflict)*, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way.” In other words, it’s a mockery to seek harmony with God, while we ignore the rift we have with our friend.

“First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Hey, life is too short to spend it mad – or have someone mad at you. Pick up the phone – write a letter - apologize for your part in the drama. Do it today!

Jesus says, “Agree with your adversary quickly...” Keep short accounts.

As Paul put it, “Don’t let the sun go down upon your wrath.” There’s a Latin proverb, “He who goes to bed angry has the devil for a bed-fellow.”

Here’s the point, deal with anger before God deals with you. “Agree with your adversary... while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you are thrown into prison.

Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.” Unresolved anger becomes a prison in more ways than one.

Deal with your anger or it will destroy you one penny at a time.

Jesus also warns us in 5:27, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Every guy in this room knows it is one thing *to just look*. You see a pretty girl... "Yep Lord, she's a pretty girl", then you move on. But it's another thing *to look to lust*. It's the lingering look - it's when the imagination takes over the image.

It's true, "Promiscuity begins in the *head*, long before it ends in the *bed*."

Certainly, the consequences of the *deed* and the *seed* are different.

The deed will get you the electric chair, or a venereal disease, or break up your family. No other human may know about *the seed*. But in God's eyes *the seed* and *deed* are one in the same – the same sin, just at different stages of development.

True righteousness begins in the heart. Love overcomes anger and lust. When I love my enemy I'll treat him as a friend. When I love people I won't selfishly look at a pretty girl as a means to gratify myself, but as a person who belongs to God.

Jesus tells us the way to deal with anger and lust is to take radical action.

Stop with the business as usual - if you know there's a hostility brewing, "leave your gift at the altar, and... be reconciled to your brother..." The same with lust...

A lustful heart also calls for drastic action. Verse 29, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you..." As I mentioned this morning, Jesus didn't intend to be taken literally. If I can lust with my right eye, I can also lust with my left. It's tragic that disturbed folks have used these words to harm themselves.

On January 8th, this year, a young man, 20 years old, living in northern Idaho, cut off his hand with a circular saw because he believed it bore the mark of the beast. The news report said he cooked it in a microwave - then called 9-1-1. Jesus is using a literary device known as **hyperbole** – or **exaggeration for emphasis**. When He says pluck out an eye, or cut off a hand – Jesus means, take drastic action to get to the root of your problem even if it might hurt.

He says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you..."

If I wanted to pluck out an eye I would never have enough nerve to do it myself. It requires a doctor's assistance. Likewise, some struggles with sin require outside help... accountability, support, counseling... You can't fight them on your own.

He continues "For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into

hell.” Overcoming addiction involves adopting a new mindset. Heaven has to be valued more than your vice.

You have to understand what’s at stake. *“But I’m a Christian. I have the liberty to drink.”* Not if you’re an alcoholic and one drink will lead to a drunk. You have to forgo that freedom – or in a sense, lose a hand – if you want to get to heaven.

“And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you...”

Again, what is the source of my problem? For some of you chopping off a hand may be canceling your cable - or restricting your internet access - or breaking off contacts with certain people – or changing the route you take home from work...

Victory requires an uncompromising mindset, **“For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”**

In verse 31 Jesus discusses divorce. **“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’** Moses allowed divorce, but it was never God’s desire. It was a concession to man’s hard-heartedness.

Here Jesus sets the record straight, **“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”** Note the exception.

In the case of sexual infidelity the violated spouse is under no obligation to take back the adulterer and remain in the marriage. He or she is free to move on.

In the Old Testament an adulterer was stoned – making the offended spouse a widow or widower – and thus, free to remarry. In the New Testament Jesus allows the sinned-against spouse the same freedom, while providing hope to the guilty.

Whenever I think of divorce I think of what Sylvester Stallone, of Rocky fame, once said, “Boxing is great exercise as long as you can yell ‘cut’ whenever you want.” This is how the Jews treated marriage. They concoct lots of loopholes.

Jesus is saying that His love will *stick it out* - and find a way to *work it out!*

Verse 33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black."

To insure honesty the Pharisees had developed a system of oaths.

Swearing by a third party reinforced your commitment to a promise. The more prominent the third party the more serious you were about keeping your word.

Swear by God's throne and you asked God to hold you accountable. You were serious. Swear by your own head and you may or may not keep your word. Rather than promote honesty all these oaths did was provide a cover-up for dishonesty.

Jesus thought this whole idea of oaths was silly and deceptive.

Why swear at all? Why not just keep your word in the first place? Be a man or woman of your word. **“Mean what you say, and say what you mean.”**

Verse 37, **“But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”** Jesus is saying real love keeps its promises!

“You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”

Understand, the human tendency is not an eye for an eye – it’s you take one of my eyes, and I’ll take two of your eyes. It’s one-up-man-ship. It’s back at you, but a little harder than you hit me.

Jesus says love goes the opposite direction... It shows mercy, rather than demand justice. When we’re attacked, God wants us to retaliate in love.

Let me make three important points in reference to these verses...

First, **Jesus is not stripping governments of their right to wage war and defend their citizens** – His sermon is for individual believers not governments.

Second, **Jesus isn’t stripping you of your right to self-defense.** Notice, He says if someone slaps you on the **“right**

cheek.” Statistics show that 90% of the population is right-handed. So, how does a right-hander hit you on the right cheek? Only one way - with the back of the hand... And in almost every culture a back-handed slap is more an insult than a violent attack.

Jesus is saying if you're insulted – slough it off – turn the other cheek.

But if someone threatens you, it's your responsibility to defend yourself. If a guy breaks into your house to harm your family blow him away with your shot-gun.

Third, **Jesus is not suggesting we become doormats.** Turning the other cheek is now allowing someone to repeatedly use us and abuse us.

Sometimes we love someone by standing up to them.

Here's what Jesus is saying at the end of chapter 5 - **My priority needs to be a love for people not a demand for my rights.** Here's the challenging question Jesus is asking, *“Am I willing to give up my rights, in order to show you love?”*

My right to dignity – slap me on the cheek, but your insult won't stop my love.

My right to possessions – take my cloak – your soul means more than my shirt.

My right to liberty – I'll walk a second mile – your salvation is more important to me than my convenience. A second mile is my opportunity for a further witness.

My right to security – I'll be generous. I'd rather you survive than me thrive.

My right to dignity demands that you treat me with respect. But Jesus says, “**I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.**” Whenever I’m insulted a wall goes up.

“*That’s it, I deserve better treatment. I’ll never speak to him again.*” Jesus says, don’t immediately erect a wall. Rise above it. Love is stronger than an insult.

Jesus challenges **my right to possessions** in verse 40. “**If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.**”

Jewish men in the first century wore two garments - an inner tunic (*it was like a shirt*) - and a heavier outer cloak (*which doubled as a jacket or even a bedroll.*)

In verse 40 Jesus isn’t abolishing personal property rights in society. He’s just saying to Christians **don’t put possessions before people.** Our job isn’t to die with a stocked wardrobe – it’s to take as many people to heaven with us.

And if giving away a tunic or two can save a soul - then do it.

“**And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.**”

Under Roman rule a soldier had the right to recruit a civilian to carry his armor.

You might be late for work, and suddenly a Roman centurion would tap you on the shoulder and you were obligated to carry his stuff one *million* – the Roman mile. A

million was a little shorter than our mile. *This inconvenience irritated the Jews.*

They counted each step and when they reached 5,280 feet they dropped the armor and stomped off... Jesus is saying a soldier's salvation is more important than my convenience. Carry his stuff a 2nd mile, and tell him about God's love.

Love is more concerned about *your salvation than it is my convenience.*

And understand Jesus is not just talking about how we treat our friends.

Verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' Understand the rabbis said "*hate your enemies*" – not the Old Testament. There were times when Israel defeated their enemy in battle, but it was never a matter of hate. It was a matter of justice and righteousness.

Jesus counters the rabbis - "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..." Abraham Lincoln use to say, "The only way to destroy an enemy is to turn him into a friend." This needs to be my attitude.

A town in Mexico held a passion play. It was dramatic and life-like. Once the actor scheduled to play Jesus got sick before the performance. A replacement was needed. The only man available was an unsavory character, the town tough guy.

As he carried the cross to the outskirts of the town the soldiers hit him - spit on him - cursed him. It was all the ole boy could take. As they were lifting him up onto the cross he turned to one of the guys playing a Roman soldier, and whispered to him, “You better run because after the resurrection I’m going to get you!”

Jesus could’ve had the same attitude. He could’ve beat up his enemies after His resurrection. Instead He prayed for their forgiveness. He died to save them.

In a sense this is my greatest opportunity to be like Jesus - love my enemies.

Yet you and I both know this is also the point of my greatest failure... This is why there’s no way I can obey the Sermon on the Mount in my own strength.

Love my enemies? You got to be kidding... But here’s what we learn - **what God asks us to do, He enables us to do.** The righteousness of Jesus is greater than that of the Pharisees. His love flows in and through us.

Jesus says love your enemies **“that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”** The world is full of common grace. God provides opportunities for everyone. Even your enemies are not beyond the reach of His grace.

“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” It’s easy to love the person

who loves you. But the mark of God's love is love for the unlovable.

CS Lewis once said, "Do not waste time bothering about whether you love your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love them." Step out by faith to obey God, and He'll supply the love you need.

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Wait a minute! How can we possibly be perfect? We can't be on our own. It's only when God's Spirit loves through us that His perfection is seen in our lives.