

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin  
February 5, 2017

## #WhatJesusSaid “Love Your Enemies”

Matthew 5:43-48

*<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

### Service Introduction:

Love your enemies... No one had ever said this before.

The kernel of this truth was planted in the Old Testament. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But most people would never have defined your neighbor as the same person you would call your enemy.

What does “love your enemies” look like in everyday life? Why should we love our enemies? What about those enemies who continue to hurt us? These are the issues that we look at today as we begin **#WhatJesusSaid**.

### The Message:

It was a Wednesday afternoon. I was talking with my circuit pastor, the pastor's pastor for our area. I was complaining about one of my enemies, a member of the congregation in Missouri.

After I finished my rant, the circuit pastor asked, “When was the last time you talked with her?”

“Ten days ago. They were out-of-town this past weekend.”

“Wait a second,” my friend replied. “She hasn't said anything to you for the last ten days and you are still this upset? Who has the problem here?”

## 1. Chained to our enemy by vengeance

It was a life-changing conversation. I realized that I was chained to my “enemy.” Even when we weren’t in each other’s presence, I was connected to her by my anger and my desire to put her in her place. I was chained to her by vengeance.

I wouldn’t mention this if I thought I was the only one. But I think this is pretty typical of the way our sinful nature works.

How do you break the chain that connects you and your enemy?

Our first reaction is to use something sharp like a hatchet.

So your enemy says something on Facebook. You take your hatchet and start chopping away.

Isn’t that what we do when we spend 30 minutes or an hour crafting just the right response... whether it is to a Facebook post or an email? We are using our sharp tongue and our sharp wit to respond just perfectly and cut the chain between us. But what happens? Typically, the chain just gets thicker as more words fly back and forth.

This is the opposite of what God commands us to do in James: “Be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). Instead, we are quick to speak and slow to listen!

A sharp tongue doesn’t cut the chain. It just strengthens it. As the proverb says: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

Another approach to dealing with this emotional link to your enemy is to ignore it.

I know many families who have experienced this. Family members don’t speak for years. They pretend that they have broken the chain. But the fact that they have nothing to do with each other isn’t a sign the chain is gone. The pain is still there.

So are we stuck with being chained to our enemy? The great news is “No!”

God can break the chain. He has the key! Be quick to die! Let’s read about it in Romans 5:

<sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

How does this unlock the emotional chain between you and your enemy? It gives you a different value system.

Often we are chained to our enemy because what she or he did devalues us.

What is remarkable is that we devalued God by every sin we have committed; yet God values us by being willing to sacrifice his Son for us. While we were still sinners, while we were God's enemies, we have been made his friends. This is what gives us worth. Your worth is not dependent on what people think or say about you. Keep your eyes focused on Jesus' death for you, and let the emotional chains fall away.

But what about those enemies that have hurt us and that are hurting us? Should we just keep letting them hurt us? Perhaps the emotions that tie you to your enemy are not his or hurtful words of the past, but the knowledge that they continue in those hurtful sins and have no desire to stop. Perhaps what they have done left a scar on your heart that binds you to that person because you are angry every time you think of that person. How do you get free from that chain?

I think of a horrible mistake I made with a member in Missouri. It was an evangelism Bible study and I asked everyone to think of someone in their lives that needed to hear the gospel. I said, "Ok, you have someone in mind. Now let's pray dangerously. Let's pray that God would use us to share the gospel with that person." Suddenly one of the women started to sob. What had I done? After we were all alone, I learned that she had been raped by someone and that is who had come to her mind. Yes, he needed the gospel. But how could she even think of keeping some kind of link between herself and him?

How do you deal with an enemy that has hurt you so deeply?

God can unlock that emotional chain by enabling us to forgive that person... that doesn't mean what he or she did was ok, but that you willing step out of the position of executioner and leave that as God's role. That's what Paul talks about in Romans 12:

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The next section talks about the government as God's agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrong doer. God unlocks the chain by enabling us to "leave room for God's wrath." We

“forgive” even someone who has hurt us when we say, “God, if you can bring him or her to repentance, God be praised! But if he will not repent, then, Lord, I know that you will punish him, if not in this world, in the next.”

I’m not saying this is a once-and-done thing, but over and over again placing our enemy into God’s hands allows these emotional chains to be unlocked. Your enemies need not control you.

## **2. Chained to Our Enemy by Love**

But I would also like to give you another picture of this chain. Rather than trying to break the emotional chain that links us and our enemy, God can change this chain. Rather than it being a chain forged with links of vengeance, bitterness and anger, it can be a chain forged with links of love. That’s what Jesus was saying in the Sermon on the Mount. Love your enemies.

This idea was shared with us at the Passion Conference last month. The speaker mentioned that Paul was chained to a guard (Acts 28:16). That chain could be a source of bitterness and anger for Paul. But instead, it is evident that Paul used that chain to be a source of love to the person on the other side of the chain. Paul is chained to the guard. But the guard is also chained to Paul. He can’t get away. And so Paul shared his faith. Listen to what Paul says in Philippians 1:

<sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

The whole palace guard heard the message. That soldier experienced the love of Christ through Paul because he was chained to Paul. Paul saw that the links of the chain uniting him and his enemy could become links of love.

The result? At the end of the letter to the Philippians, he wrote: “All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household” (Philippians 4:22). People in the ruling household heard the gospel and believed. Could it be cause Paul saw that he was chained to that Roman soldier by love?

Who is your enemy at work, at school, in your family? Is it possible that God has emotionally chained you to him or her so that you can use that chain as conduit of love?

Jesus said,

*<sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Where can our Christian faith shine the brightest? When our reactions are so different than what others would expect. Fellow Christian, who is your enemy? Jesus is saying, “I loved you as my

enemy. I sacrificed for you when you were my enemy that we might be reconciled, that I might make you, my enemy, into my friend.”

This is our call as well. To whom are you emotionally chained? Love them!

This is the person to think about when you memorize the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment this week:

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.

Speak well of your enemy. Assume the best of your enemy, the best motives. As you speak to others, take their words and actions in the kindest possible way.

Our second lesson (1 John 3:11-18) reminds that our love cannot be just saying kind words. Let love be in action and in truth.

Love them even when you'd like to do the exact opposite. Have you ever heard of the phrase, "Go the extra mile"? Do you know where that comes from? It is just before our Gospel Lesson. Jesus said: "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles" (Matthew 5:41). When a Roman soldier forced you to go a mile, offer to go the second? When you feel your enemy is forcing you to do something, show love by doing even more than he is "commanding" you to do. Go the extra mile.

That's what the Father looks like, isn't he? He shows love to the evil and the good. He shows us love when we are faithful and when we are unfaithful. It is that unconditional, self-giving love that moves us to say, "Father, make me look like you. Let me use the emotional chains that unite me with my enemies to be chains across which love flows."

The woman that I spoke about at the beginning of the message? The one that I was chained to by feelings of anger and frustration? Our relationship deteriorated to that point that she left the congregation. But 19 years ago at this time of year, she happened to be the sanctuary when I announced that I had the call to come here. As she left, she shook my hand and said, "Pastor, you can't go."

It wasn't that we suddenly saw everything eye to eye. But over the years, we had each showed love to each other. The chain of vengeance and anger became a chain of love that helped each of us grow in our faith in Christ.

What did Jesus say? Love your enemies. This made Jesus different from anyone who ever came before him. It is what makes his followers different than the world around us. It is what draws others to Jesus. Amen.

prepared by Pastor Peter Panitzke

414-422-0320 ext 122 or [ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org](mailto:ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org)