

Series: The Sermon on the Mount

**Radical Love**

Matthew 5:38-48, Romans 5:8-10

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, October 19, 2025

Hannah: A reading from Matthew 5:38 through 48: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye and tooth for tooth,’ but I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,’ but I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, 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. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” the word of the Lord.

Paul: You may be seated. Thanks, Hannah. Any hometown teams? I asked Emily last night, I was like, “What are the Mariners? Is that like a professional soccer team or what?” I do not know soccer very well. Just kidding. Truly, I do not follow anything in baseball, so we were talking about this. I was like, “Oh, the World Series is happening. That’s great. Good for you guys.” So, I know I am losing friends by the minute. It is so good to be with you all today. This passage that we have before us today in the Sermon on the Mount, we have been walking through the Sermon on the Mount for the last several weeks, and the passage that Hannah just read for us, I think is actually one of the most confusing and misunderstood passages in the entire Sermon on the Mount. I think it is a really challenging, confusing passage, and as you listen to her read, and she said some of these phrases that we saw in it, like, “Do not resist an evil person,” Jesus literally says, if you see an evil person doing something evil, do not resist them. Just let them do evil? Like, what is He talking about? Then He says, “turn the other cheek.” Has anybody ever been confused about what that means and what you are supposed to do in a fistfight? “Go the extra mile. Love your enemies,” and if that’s not difficult enough, He ends the whole section by saying, “be perfect like your heavenly Father is perfect.” Jesus, are you serious? Like what? How could any of us ever do that?

I feel like it is so confusing because it feels like Jesus is a little bit absent from reality, because I mean, we live in a culture where you stand your ground against those who try to take your stuff. You are supposed to fight back. You are supposed to defend yourself and the ones you love, right? If someone is tailgating you on C470, you do not bless them. You brake-check them, am I right? That is how the world works, Jesus. “Turn the other cheek?” What are you talking about? I think what happens is inadvertently we feel so confused by this passage and we feel so unsure of what Jesus is actually commanding of us that we end up in a place where we sort of dismiss Jesus’ words, or we debate his words, but we do not actually end up living them out, because we are not really sure what to do with them.

I think some of us, we might read those words, and maybe you have been in this place before, and you have read through that passage, and you have thought, Jesus just, He probably did not actually mean this. Like, it is really poetic. It is beautiful language, but it is not practical. Like, it doesn't actually work in the real world, and so Jesus is just using exaggerative language, hyperbolic language to try to say, just be a really good person, and He is trying to do that through making a really big point. Others of us, we might have read that, and we might think that Jesus is actually really literal. Like He means that if you see someone attacking you, then you just let them do whatever they want. If you experience abuse in this world, do not resist the evil person. You just have to sit there and take it, which I think takes us to one of two spots. One is we really do not like that Jesus. That Jesus feels really weak. We want a Jesus that looks more like John Wayne or John Wick, someone who can take care of things when they go bad, and this idea of just turning the other cheek, it just feels weak. I do not want to live that way. I do not want to follow a savior who just tells me to turn the other cheek when things get hard.

Or we go another direction, and we take it quite literally, and we say to people who are in abusive situations or relationships, "You know what? Jesus just says, you have to just deal with it. I know your spouse might be evil. I know that person in your life might be evil, but you just need to accept the abuse, and you can't actually take anything into your own hands. You just need to allow that to happen to you." Then there are others of us, we come to this passage, and we think, all right, turn the other cheek, be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. Like, clearly Jesus is just talking about the impossible. He is giving us this moral Mount Everest that none of us could ever climb and none of us could ever reach the top to, and the whole point of it is that we could never be perfect like our Heavenly Father is perfect. We could never love our enemies. We could never turn the other cheek, and so literally what Jesus is trying to say is, "Hey, you need me. You can't do this on your own, and all you need is for me to come, save the day, make you perfect, and then I will give you the strength to help you love your enemies," and the whole purpose of is to really fill us with guilt. We read that, and we think, "Oh my goodness, what an absolute nightmare that I am supposed to live out all of that stuff," and it just is supposed to make us feel guilty so we recognize our need for grace, but what if Jesus actually meant what He said in the Sermon on the Mount, and what if He is actually calling us as followers of Jesus to live this ethic out, and what if Jesus is not calling us to some impossible idealism, and what if Jesus is not calling us to passively surrender to abuse in our lives, but what if Jesus is trying to show us a different way, what it could look like to be human, to be a follower of Jesus in his kingdom, to not abandon justice, not to stop protecting ourselves, not to pretend that evil isn't evil, but what if Jesus is describing something deeper about how we can engage with the world, a different kind of strength, a new way of being human and whole in a world that is often bent towards revenge?

That is where we are headed today, but we can't resolve that tension that I think all of us feel too quickly. I think the words of Jesus are intended to make us pause and ask the question, "Jesus, are you serious? Do you literally mean this? Is this really what it means to follow after you?" and in asking that question, maybe, just maybe, what we will find is the ways we have misunderstood this passage, and understanding it in its context will unlock something for us, not just in a way that changes our hearts, but in a way that actually has the power to change the world.

I think that is what Jesus is doing in this teaching, and so He begins in Matthew chapter five, if you guys want to follow along in your Bibles or on your phones, and we are going to be in verse 38 to begin, and it says this: “You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,’ but I tell you, do not resist an evil person.” Now, when you hear that statement, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” what do you hear in that statement? What do you think Jesus is saying? Or what do you think that command is saying? What is it getting at? What is the heart of that command? Revenge. Revenge. Absolutely. You are three for three. Everybody got it, like, Wednesday night they got that, Saturday night they got that, and Sunday. It makes us think of revenge. It makes us think of retribution. It makes us think that if you take my tooth, then I get to take your tooth, and if you take my eye, then I get to take your eye. However you have harmed me, I have a right, maybe even an obligation, to get equal or even to you and to take my revenge against you.

Now here is the problem with that reading, is it is actually completely opposite of the original intent of that command in the Old Testament, so when God in the Old Testament says, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” He is not actually giving free reign for revenge and saying, “You have a right to get back at someone.” It was actually originally intended to draw limits around retribution and vengeance, to actually limit what we naturally do when someone harms us or does something against us, so to put it in context that will make sense in the ancient world, let’s say that I have a cow, and you really want my cow, and you are like, “That is a good cow that Paul has. I am going to steal that cow,” and then you kill my cow, and you eat my cow, and it was delicious brisket, and you are like, “This is amazing. I love this cow,” but I am really angry, because you just took my cow, and you killed my cow, and you ate my cow, and so I think, “You know what? I know they are my neighbor, but they just took my cow. I am going to go to their house, and I am going to steal three of their cows, but while I am doing it, for good measure, just so I make sure that nothing like this ever happens again, I am going to burn your barn down too, and then I am going to steal your dog and take your wife, because vengeance, you know what? Like I just, that is how I roll,” and all of you are like, “Man, I do not want to offend the pastor. He has got a vengeance streak.” That is what often happens in our world. If someone does something wrong, and we are not rational people who do like just recompense for those actions, we think “I am not going to just get even. I am going to make sure that they know they can never treat me this way again,” and so this command to actually say, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” it was God’s way of drawing some boundaries, some parameters, around our natural inclination towards violence and vengeance when people wrong us, that there is something in the human heart that says, when we are wronged, we want to go as far as we can to make other people pay.

I mean, it is a story that is so old in humanity. I mean, there are literally people groups that have been trying to kill each other for generations, for hundreds of years, because of this kind of scenario. Someone stole someone’s cow, and then they were off in the cycle of vengeance and violence, and so God was trying to draw some parameters to limit our heart that has been bent towards violence and towards vengeance, but what had happened is that by Jesus’ day, that law, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” had come to the place where it was essentially a slogan for payback like we understand it. It was permissive. It said that if someone wrongs you, then you have every right and maybe even an obligation to get them back, and so Jesus is trying to draw his audience’s heart back to the original intent of what

God had commanded. He is saying, “You have heard it said this, and this is how you are living this out, but I am going to give you a different command.”

Then He says something very, very challenging. He says, “Do not resist an evil person.” Do not resist an evil person. Let’s be honest for a moment. When you hear that, if I in any context, I said, “Hey, I know you see that that person is evil, and what they are doing is evil and wrong. I want you to do nothing about it.” Does that sound right or wrong? It feels wrong, doesn’t it? It feels like the opposite of what someone who is just and good and righteous is supposed to do. What is the quote, that all it requires for evil to flourish is for good men to do nothing, and Jesus here seems to be saying that, “Yeah, just do not do anything. Do not resist an evil person. Let them do whatever they want.” It feels like Jesus is saying, “When you see evil happening in the world, when you encounter an evil person, just be a doormat. Just let them do whatever they want, treat you however they want, treat others however they want. You cannot resist an evil person. That is against my command. You have heard it said, ‘eye for an eye,’ tooth for a tooth, but I say, do not resist them,” and it feels morally irresponsible, doesn’t it? It feels like, “Jesus, this does not even really feel like it matches with your ethic and how you engage with the world. When you saw people who were mistreating people, you did not fail to resist them. So why are you calling us to a different standard than you lived out?”

Well, this is where I think this part of the passage gets so, deep, and so beautiful, but we have to unpack some of the historical context to understand what Jesus means when He says, “Do not resist an evil person,” because what I would say is, following right after Jesus says, “Do not resist an evil person,” He gives three examples, three illustrations of what He means when He says, “Do not resist an evil person.” These are the three that He says in the next couple of verses, when He says, “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” How many of you are like, “Yep, sign me up, that sounds like a fun time, want to do that, “and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt,” this is example number two, “Hand over your coat as well.” Sounds like you have a really bad lawyer. I do not think they are doing their job for you very well if you are getting sued, and you are giving everything else, and then the third example, “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two,” and some of you guys are trapped in relationships with friends or spouses who force you to run with them, and this is not talking about that, okay? It is a different thing that Jesus is getting at.

It is a different historical context that we have to dive into, but I am going to say this. We are going to go deep here for a moment, and I am going to really try to bring out what is going on in Jesus’ world when He says these things to make sense on our own, but I am asking you to hang with me, stay with me. I am going to try to bring it alive for you a little bit, but what it feels like when Jesus says this, “turn your other cheek, give your coat, go an extra mile,” it feels like Jesus is saying, “Just be a doormat. Let people walk all over you. Let them do whatever they want to you. If you feel like you are being taken advantage of, you probably need to let someone take more advantage of you.” That is what it sounds like. Is that actually what Jesus is saying?

So, let’s walk through these one by one. This is what Jesus says it looks like not to resist an evil person. The first is He says you need to turn the other cheek. Okay, turn the other cheek. Now there is a really important detail that Jesus gives in scripture. Did you catch what cheek Jesus said someone is getting slapped on? What is slapped, which cheek? That question made no sense at all. Which cheek does Jesus

say has just been slapped? The right cheek. All right, I need someone who is willing to come on stage and be an illustrator. Yep. Asher, do you want to come up? Chris, one of you youth? Yeah, Asher, come on up. Everybody, give it up for Asher. All right. Here is the thing. Asher, I promise that I will not slap you, and you are not allowed to slap me, okay? All right. Now, I am a little directionally challenged, and I do not know left from right. Which one is your right cheek? That one right there, okay. I am right-handed. How many people in the room are right-handed? Lots of us, okay. In the ancient world, just about everyone was right-handed, okay? Everyone was right-handed, and so if I want to hit Asher on the right cheek with my right hand, which is my dominant hand, how would I have to go about doing that? If I try to swing like a normal fist and hit him, then I am just hitting his left cheek, but I want to hit him on the right cheek. Jesus gives a very, very explicit detail. I have to back slap him, right? Like, that is the way you get your right hand to hit someone on the right cheek.

Now, in the ancient world, Asher, I promise I am not going to hit you, but in the ancient world, a backhanded slap to the right cheek was one of the most severe insults that anyone could give another person. I mean, think of all the worst words that we could use to describe people in our context. That is what was happening there, but more than that, more than it being a massive insult, a backhanded slap to someone's right cheek was a way of asserting dominance and superiority, and so it was actually a class thing. It was a hierarchical thing. It was that a soldier could slap a peasant. A master could slap a slave. A man could slap a woman. If I come to Asher, and I hit him with my right fist on his left cheek, it is a blow between equals. If I slap him with my right hand on his right cheek, it is saying, "You are beneath me. You are not even worthy of a proper altercation," and so, Jesus does something interesting. It is that context where someone is being slapped on their right cheek, and Asher, let's just say for a moment, I slap you really hard, it causes you to stumble, but then you stand back up, and you turn to me your other cheek. Can you turn your left cheek to me? What is Asher doing in that moment? He is saying, "You can hit me again if you want, but you have to recognize that I am your equal. You cannot treat me like an inferior person. You cannot treat me like I am beneath you." Asher, good job, man. Thank you for coming up here. Thanks for not slapping me.

Do you see what Jesus is doing? It is this situation where someone's dignity is being demeaned, where their humanity, they are being communicated that they are less than, and Jesus is coming up with this creative solution in that scenario to not fight back with violence, not return evil for evil, but to present an alternative solution that says, "You cannot treat me this way. Now, you may think I am beneath you, but I am pretty equal." Can you imagine for a moment that scene playing out in the world? Someone just backhanded someone in the markets, and that person stands up and turns the other cheek in an act of defiance and resistance, saying, "You cannot treat me this way. You can hit me again if you want to, but you have to acknowledge that I am your equal." What Jesus is doing in this context is He is trying to give this profound, non-violent resistance step, a way of reclaiming agency and dignity in a situation where someone is trying to strip away both of those things.

Now the next example is similar to this one. It says, "Give them your coat," so Jesus says, "If someone is suing you and they are trying to take your shirt," which is a weird like cultural thing, we will get to that in a moment, "then you should also give them your coat." Now in the ancient world, in Jesus' world, most people had two garments. They had a long tunic that was essentially their shirt, what we

would call a shirt today, and then they had a heavy overcoat that would go over that, the long robes. If you have ever seen like any Biblical story on TV or in movies, that you are familiar with the attire. It is this heavier wool coat, and the thing about the coat that was so important is that it was actually not just clothing for a garment. It was actually very functional, so it would serve as a blanket for most people, because they did not have sleeping bags. If you imagine traveling from one city to another, it is a multi-night journey. They do not have tents and sleeping bags and all of that kind of thing. They have these heavy coats that would serve as a blanket for them and keep them warm, and there is actually a passage in the Old Testament where God commands creditors, people who are trying to take back and get people who owe them money, where He says you can take someone's shirt, but He forbids them from taking their outer cloak, their coat, and so Jesus here, He is painting this picture of someone who is in debt, probably a poor person, and in order for the creditor to try to get some sort of promise that this person is going to pay back, they are taking the last possession that they are allowed to take, their shirt. They have taken everything else, and this is the last way that they can show that they are credible to pay back the debt, and Jesus says, in that scenario, when someone has been so ruthlessly greedy that they have taken everything from you, go ahead and give them your coat, too.

Why would Jesus say that? Because if you imagine that scenario playing out, suddenly a person who is deeply in debt and poor, they have no coat, no shirt. They are essentially naked in public, and you might think that that would cause that person to feel shame, but in that culture, the shame would be placed absolutely on the creditor, because they would say, "Man, you are so ruthless. You are so unjust. You are actually disobeying the law of God, and you have put this person in a place that is not survivable because of your greed," and so it is this, again, non-violent, creative way to expose the injustice and the evil of the systems of this world. Doesn't it all sound like you are not resisting an evil person? It sounds like you are not repaying them in kind.

Then the last example Jesus gives, He says, "Go the extra mile." You are probably maybe a little more familiar with the historical context here, but essentially it was this, in the ancient world, the Romans, they had the ability as soldiers to make anyone they wanted march up to a mile carrying their gear. So you imagine you are a Roman soldier, and you are walking from one town to another and there's a whole group of people going to trade or do worship or whatever it might be, and you see them, you're tired of carrying your pack, your spear, your shield, your sword, all of that stuff, and so you just place it, pick anyone out of the crowd you want and say, "You have to carry my stuff. I'm essentially turning you into a pack animal, because I am so much more than you. You are beneath me, and all you are is a donkey to me."

Now imagine being an Israelite in that scenario, and imagine the resentment, the bitterness, the frustration of being stuck in a position where you are required by law to carry your oppressor's equipment and gear. I mean, how frustrating would that be, and if you resisted that, you would either be beaten or thrown into jail, and so you can't resist that way. You can't fight back, and so Jesus gives an alternative, and He says, what if in that scenario where a Roman soldier forces you to go one mile, what if you get to the end of that mile, and you volunteer to go another? Suddenly, you are making this person look very foolish, and again, you are taking back your agency. They are not forcing you to do anything. You are choosing sacrificial, suffering love in the place of retaliation or violence.

What is Jesus getting at with these different examples? What I think Jesus is giving us this idea that we are not supposed to resist an evil person, what He has in mind is not that we just let evil flourish and do whatever it wants. What Jesus is saying is that we do not return evil for evil. What He is saying essentially is the countercultural way of the kingdom of God, the countercultural way of Jesus, is not retaliation. It is not fighting fire with fire. It is not fighting evil with evil, but neither is it retreat. It is not just passively surrendering to abuse and oppression. Instead, He is advocating for redemptive resistance. Live by a different way. Engage with a world that is bent on brake checking and violence and vengeance in a way that restores your dignity, your honor, but also gives you agency in these situations. He is actually inviting us to confront evil and oppression and darkness, but in surprising and bold ways that are rooted in our dignity, and this is so important, in ways that do not perpetuate the cycles of violence that we see everywhere in our world, so He is saying, if someone slaps you, do not try to fight back. Expose them. If someone is greedy and unjust, do not try to get away with what you can. Expose them. Take back your agency and your dignity and your pride. Starve the world of violence and vengeance. I think Jesus is operating from this mindset, this idea that in order for violence and the cycles of violence to perpetuate themselves, they require return acts of violence, and so if one person commits an act of violence, and then you return in kind, then suddenly we are stuck in the cycle, because then they have to get you back, and then back and then back and then back, and that is how we end up with thousands of years of people trying to kill each other, and Jesus is saying, starve that cycle. Do not allow that violence to breed and to grow and to infiltrate the world.

Right now in our home we just found out, on Friday I was tearing apart our bathroom, and we found out that we have a bunch of black mold, which is a little bit of why I think my voice is shaky today, but in black mold, the only way you can get rid of black mold, you clean it, you kill it, you do all of that, but the only way you can guarantee that it does not come back is if you make sure it does not have the thing it needs to feed on, which is moisture. You have to make sure everything is dry. I think what Jesus is saying is something essential, violence is like black mold. It grows in the dark places. It grows in the evil places. It affects our world. It infects our world. It causes disunity and unhealth, and the only way to conquer violence and vengeance and hatred is not to perpetuate that cycle, but it is to starve it, and that is the ethic of the kingdom of heaven, which I think helps us understand the context of what Jesus is saying, but I am not sure it makes it any easier. I am not sure that the call to turn the other cheek gets any easier in that scenario, but it helps us understand what Jesus is after.

Then He follows up that whole section by the last case study in this section of what it means to have our righteousness surpass the Pharisees and what it means for us to fulfill the law, and so He says in verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy,' but I tell you to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Now, in each of these case studies we have been looking through the last several weeks, Jesus is quoting scripture, and He is saying, "You have heard it said it was written in scripture, but I say to you," and He is not rewriting the law. He is trying to help us understand the original intent, and so I am wondering, as you read this, "You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy,'" is there any passage in scripture where God commands us to love our neighbor and hate our enemy? I will give you the answer to the test. No, He does not. He does not ever command us to hate our enemy, so what is Jesus quoting here?

He is not quoting scripture. He is quoting culture, because what had happened was people had added an addendum to the command to love your neighbor, and people said things, and we actually have these written testimonials where people would say things like, “Love sons of light, and hate sons of darkness.” Love people who look like you, think like you, act like you, are from your tribe, and hate people who are different than you, do not look like you, do not think like you, do not worship like you, and so Jesus is living in this culture where people have essentially turned the command to love neighbor into an excuse for tribalism, to say, if people do not look like us, if they do not worship like us, if they do not think like us, then we do not have to love them. I am a Jew, I am an Israelite, I am a good Jew, a good Israelite. That means I love my neighbors, my Israelite people, the people who think like me, and anyone outside of that camp, I have permission from God to hate. That was what was permeating the culture, which we can’t relate to at all, can we? Like, not at all. That does not sound like anything we see going on in our world today, where people hate people who do not look like them, or think like them, or act like them, or believe like them. Jesus is pushing back against this tribal reality, and so what is He saying? He’s saying, this is how the world works. Everyone loves their people. It is easy to hate those who harm the ones you love, but if you want to be able to stand in resistance to evil by turning the other cheek, giving up your coat, going the extra mile, then you need to understand that the source of being able to do that is love for your enemies.

The question is, why would anyone do that? Why would anyone in their right mind love someone who has harmed them or the people that they love? Why would anyone do that? That would be the natural question people would have here, and this is how He answers it: “‘You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy,’ but I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” We are going to come back to that point in just a second, “because this is what God is like. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” I want you to think for a moment, if you are in an agrarian society, two of the most important things in your world are sunshine and rain, because nothing grows if there is not sunshine and rain, and if nothing grows, everyone starves. What is the point Jesus is making?

He is saying that this is a natural bedrock blessing that everybody needs for survival, and does God weigh the scales of who is good or bad, right or wrong, evil or good, righteous or unrighteous, before He sends the rain? No. Does God weigh whether or not people worship Him or curse Him before He causes the sun to rise every morning? No. Jesus is making the point that God is someone who loves people who are righteous in His camp and loves those who would curse His name and spit in His face, and that they both experience blessing, and so if you want to be like your Father in heaven, if you want to be a child of God, if you want to resemble Him, He is not talking about getting into heaven when you die. He is saying, if you want to resemble your Father, if you want to look like your Father, then this is how you will treat people in the world around you. He is saying this is what God is like. He is saying that God loves like this, that God’s love is lavish and indiscriminate, and He loves without hesitation and without favoritism. He gives to the faithful and the faithless. He gives to the grateful and the resentful. He gives to those who worship Him and those who curse His name. God’s love is unearned, uncalculating, and unrelenting, and Jesus says, if you want to follow after me, if you want to be a citizen of my kingdom, if you want to look like your Father does, then that is what it looks like to look like Him, to love your enemies.



To make that point, Jesus makes a joke about what this would look like, because He essentially says in the next few verses, “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” He is essentially saying, think of the worst people you can think of, the IRS. Even they know how to love their families, and then He says, “and if you greet only your people, what are you doing more than others? Again, do not even the pagans do that?” Modern context, this is how I would describe what Jesus is doing here. How many Apple users do we have in the room? Apple users, a lot of Apple users. How many Android users do we have in the room? Okay, Apple users, how do we feel when the Android users come into our group chat, and they turn the bubbles not blue, but green? We do not like it, right? It is like, “Get out of my group chat. We do not want you here,” right? Jesus is saying, of course you love your Apple users. Everybody loves people that have the same bubble that you do. Everybody thinks that that is great, but I am calling you to even, yes, Apple users, love the Android users among you, even when they screw up your group chat with the weird bubble that does not look like yours,

It goes a deeper level than that, doesn’t it? Because again, we live in a world where we try to love people based on whether or not they look like us or think like us or worship like us. I think what Jesus is saying here, though, is if you only love people who look like you and think like you and worship like you, that is not the gospel. That is tribalism. If you only love people who vote the way that you do, that is not holiness. That is partisanship. If you only love people who are born in the same country as you, that is not Jesus’ love. That is nationalism. If you only love people who sin and disgust you less than your own, again, that is not Jesus. That is just hypocrisy. What Jesus is trying to say is, if you only love the people who look like you, think like you, worship like you, if you only love the people who love you back, what good is that? That just keeps the same cycle of evil going in the world. Everybody can do that, but the love of God? The love of God crosses every aisle, every border, every bloodline, and every grudge we hold in our hearts. It does not have boundaries or limits, and if we want to look like our Father in heaven, then that is the kind of love that is supposed to characterize the community of Christ. I think what separates Christians and followers of Jesus from the rest of the world is this. What makes us different as followers of Jesus is not whom we love, but it is how far we are willing to extend that love to others, how far we are willing to say that you might be my enemy for whatever reason, but I still love you, because that is what my Father has called me to do.

So, we started with this question, is Jesus serious about this stuff? Is Jesus actually wanting us to do what He says? Or is it just poetic? Is it just weak? Is it just the impossible? I think what Jesus is saying is that He is deadly serious about this call to live like Him and to turn the other cheek and to go the extra mile and to give people our coats, and while those examples might not resonate with us in our historical context, the ethos and the ethic is the same. I think Jesus is so serious about it that He says this to wrap up this entire section, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Let me ask you, Waterstone, when you look at the way you love your enemies, and maybe you’re thinking to yourself, “You know what, Paul? ‘Enemies’ is a really strong word. I do not really have enemies, but I really do not like the neighbor who lives next to me, because he parks his beaten-up truck in front of my house,” so like, just think of that person, maybe not an enemy, but someone you do not like, someone you do not get along with. Have you loved them perfectly as Jesus has commanded you to love them? No, and I have not either.

Which feels again like an argument for the impossible, that Jesus is just saying all of these things to make us understand how impossible it is to live out this ethic, and actually what I think Jesus is doing is He is trying to show us something about who we are and what it means to follow Him. When we hear this word “perfect,” we hear the idea of flawlessness. We hear never sin, never make a mistake, never leave the narrow path, always following Jesus, never doing anything that we are not supposed to do, but that is actually a mistake. That is a misunderstanding of this word, “perfect.” The idea behind this word is not perfection or flawlessness. It is wholeness. It is this idea that in following after Jesus, Jesus is not demanding perfection from us. What He actually wants is for us to be whole, to be complete, to be mature.

I want you to think for a moment of a peach when it is finally ripe. Now, I did hear last week when I was gone, officiating a wedding up in the mountains, I heard that when Billy preached, there was one heresy he said from the stage, and it was something about Georgia peaches being better than Palisade peaches, and we just need to correct that right now. That does not stand in Waterstone, and that is not an acceptable belief to hold, and we will just condemn that as heresy, okay? I do not know if Billy is in the room right now, and he is probably, I will get an e-mail from him tomorrow, but here is the thing. If you about a peach, and you think of a peach when it is ripe, when it is like juicy in the way that it was intended to be, that is what makes a peach whole and this idea of what Jesus has. A beaver that is completing the dam, it is doing what it was intended to do. It is living out its intended purpose, so Jesus looks at all of us, and He says, be whole like your heavenly Father is whole. Live out your intended purpose in life. Be whole like God has called you to be whole. Jesus is not demanding perfection from us. He is inviting us into a way of living where our inner motives and our outer actions are aligned, where what is happening inside matches with what people see outside. It is not a moral guilt trip. It is an invitation into maturity.

I want you to think again about the peach growing into wholeness. Does a peach start out whole? No, it grows into that. You are either perfect, or you are not perfect, but you can become more whole, and so what Jesus is inviting us into is a new way of experiencing life and being human with Him, that as we follow after Him, as we live according to the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, what we actually experience is wholeness, that we are so instinctively shaped by love that we begin to live out the same kind of love that God has shown to us.

We know that Jesus is serious about this command to turn the other cheek and to give someone your robe or to carry something further than they tell you to do, because this is what Jesus lived out on the cross. The cross proves it, that Jesus was not just calling us to some impossible ethic that we could not live up to. I want you to think about what happened to Jesus on the cross and on the way to the cross. They struck Him on the cheek multiple times, and He did not retaliate. We are told that they ripped the robes from his back. We are told that they made Him, they forced Him to carry the cross, his own instrument of execution, from miles to the hill where they took his life. Jesus does not just call us to something that is impossible for us to do. He calls us to something that He Himself embodied. The reason we are told He went there and did that is because while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we counted ourselves enemies of God, God reconciled us to Himself. While we looked at God, and we cursed Him, and we slapped Him, and we pierced him to a tree, God’s love knew no borders, and it did not know any limits, and He brought us from enemies to family because of the work of Jesus, and Jesus is saying, if you have experienced that, if you understand that, then that is the same ethic that you yourself will live by.

I think that the church today has to choose between two ideas. I think the church has to decide whom and what we worship. Do we worship the false Christ of power, or do we worship a crucified Lord of mercy? I think we want a Jesus that looks like John Wick or John Wayne, but the world does not need more of that. What the world needs is Jesus, and the question is, will we live out that calling to become like Him and live for others and love our enemies? I think Jesus in this passage, He is not calling us to be doormats. He is calling us to be doorways, where that through our lives and following the example of Jesus, people can experience the grace and love of the Father that we have been shown, the grace and love of the Father that moved us from enemies to friends to family and that shows that to the world. May your life be a doorway of God's grace this week to a world that desperately needs it. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we come before you, Lord, I am sure there are people in this room struggling with this teaching, people to whom the call to love their enemy, the call to love those who have harmed them, who have hurt them, who have betrayed them, it feels like a very, very impossible task. There are those of us that have hearts that want to reject this teaching. We would rather live in the cycles of violence, because it feels strong. It feels like we have control, and yet, God, you have called us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us. God, I pray as we wrap up this time together this morning, that that would be what we do together, that if we have anyone brought into mind who has hurt us or harmed us, I pray that we would pray for them. If we think of someone who has caused us to experience harm or injustice, I pray that we could pray for forgiveness for them, and not by our own strength or our own power, but only through the power of Christ and what He has done on the cross, to bring us from enemies to family, and from that place of understanding, that kind of love, may we be doorways to the world of your grace and your mercy and your goodness. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Romans 5:8-10 says this, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, and since we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him. For if while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life." Waterstone, this week may you go in the strength recognizing that God has reconciled you to Himself and may you be a doorway for that same grace and that same love for our world, and in Jesus' name you are released, amen.

45:33 minutes