

Jesus Culture: Love and Grace

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[0 : 00] Good morning Church. Today we are looking at the last two, you have heard it said, but I tell you, teachings of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount.

Let us remind ourselves of the setting of this sermon. We have seen that it was directed primarily to his followers. But a large, probably curious crowd from all over Israel listens in. Common folks, perhaps some Pharisees and nationalists, a scattering of Gentiles, including Romans. And remember that this sermon is not teaching people how to become righteous or how to enter the Kingdom of God. There is only one way to do that, and that is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

This sermon describes how those already righteous in King Jesus and already in His Kingdom should behave. They must exhibit a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees and the scribes.

Greater not in degree, but in kind, one that runs deeper and flows from a changed heart. It is a description of Jesus' culture, our culture.

[1 : 15] Now then, what is this greater righteousness that Jesus will uncover today? Let's dive into what Jesus has to say. He is addressing how we should relate to some people.

Which people in particular? Let's look again at the passage. If you look at the passage, you'll find that there's an evil person, someone who slaps you, one who is demanding from you, one who forces you to walk with him, another asking you for money, and lastly, an enemy and a persecutor. Basically, people who want something from you or is against you. Most of us, no matter how hard we try, sadly go through life with people who seem to dislike us or wish us ill.

Perhaps there's someone you try not to bump into in church. Or one particular school prefect who seems to pick on you at every opportunity. Or that work colleague who sabotages you whenever he can.

Or someone who picks on you because you are a Christian. Jesus says, The true test of your faith is how you respond to these people.

[2 : 32] Now what does the world say about responding to such people? We are told, Get even. Take revenge. Stand up for your rights. Get back what is rightfully yours.

Don't lose face. And yes, what is more natural than to hate them? If you think about it, countless books, movies and television shows dwell on the theme of personal vengeance or retribution.

And let's be honest, we root for the hero to be able to get his just revenge, don't we? Alexanders Dumas, the Count of Monte Cristo. Itiawan Class, for you Korean drama fans.

You have heard it said, Eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. Verse 38. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

An eye for eye, tooth for tooth. This command is found in the Old Testament and first appeared in Exodus 21, 23 to 25.

[3 : 38] Now this is a law given to govern the judges so that punishment will be fair and balanced, unbiased and not excessive.

But even so, it is not applied literally. In all the Exodus 21 examples, the judge will not damage your eye if you happen to damage someone else's eye.

For example, if a man injures the eye of a slave or knocks out his tooth, the slave is to be freed as compensation. Neither eye nor tooth is demanded of the offender.

However, by Jesus' time, this law had long been used to justify personal revenge and vengeance. People were taking things into their own hands to avenge wrong done to them.

And it's no different today. This is what Jesus is against. Not its legal application, but personal retribution. Giving as good as you get.

[4 : 44] Don't get mad. Get even. Our children will say, You kick me three times, I kick you back three times. See pain or not? Jesus says, But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

Meaning, do not retaliate. The opposite of eye for eye. In the example that he gives, If someone slaps you on the right cheek, Turn to them the other cheek also.

Don't slap back. Refrain. Turn away. Scholars point out that to be slapped on your right cheek Implies that the person had to use the back of his right hand to slap you.

Like that. It is more than a slap. It is actually an insult. So don't trade insults for insults. Do not escalate the conflict.

Be meek, merciful, and a peacemaker. Turn the other cheek would also imply a willingness to endure further insults. It takes a believer who is secure in his identity as loved by God To be able to absorb insults after insults and yet not retaliate.

[5 : 59] And what if you are insulted because you are a Christian? What did Jesus say about that? He said, You are blessed. Rejoice and be glad. For great is your reward in heaven.

Matthew 5.11 Knowing this, how would you respond to that auntie who just insulted you Because you decided to refrain from food offered to idols?

Or to that classmate who just sneered at you for being a Jesus freak? As we read the Gospels, we see Jesus correct and debate with his critics and slander us.

But he did not trade insult for insult nor violence for violence. When they wanted to stone him, he just walked away. And Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2 that when they held their insults at him, he did not retaliate.

When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he trusted himself to God who justifies justly. And Paul would write in Romans 12, Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

[7 : 06] Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. And if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 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. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Note, obeying this command does not mean you do not protect yourself, or your family, or other people from harm.

It does mean though, that personal retribution is not an option. Two, it does not mean that those who do evil, violent crimes, can go scot-free.

No, people who commit evil crimes are to be punished, but not as an act of revenge on your part. Paul writes in Romans 13 that God has established governing authorities to punish the evildoer. Punishment for crime is the government's duty. So, in the murder of George Floyd, it would be wrong for a member of his family to take revenge on Derek Chauvin.

[8 : 24] However, it would be perfectly right if the jury finds Derek guilty and the judge passes a sentence on him. If you somehow manage to overpower an armed robber in your house and you tied him up, it would be wrong for you then to further harm him out of vengeance.

Personal revenge is not an option, but it would be right for the judge to sentence him to jail time and even the cane. Now, what about the person who demands from you?

Jesus says, Be gracious and give them more than is legally required. Give sacrificially, even if they are your enemies.

Look at verse 40. 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.

His audience would have understood what he meant. And let me give you the historical context. At that time, people wore long tunics on the inside, a shirt if you like, and a thick outer clothing on the outside, a cloak, a coat if you like.

[9 : 41] The poor use their cloak on the outside which is thicker for bathing or as blanket to keep them warm. When some borrow money, they use their clothes as collateral.

In Exodus 20, 25, the law forbids anyone from keeping overnight the cloak of a person used as collateral to a loan.

The cloak must be written to its owner by sunset so that they can use it for sleep. So, when Jesus says, Give your cloak as well, he is asking for a personal sacrifice.

He is telling his disciples to give to the one demanding even more than what the law requires. Do what the law requires and then go further.

Let grace abound even at your own expense. The second example would have angered the Jewish nationalists and surprised the Roman soldier. Verse 41, If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles and it is from here we get the expression to go the second mile.

[10:58] You see, in the Roman Empire, the Roman soldiers could force their subjugated people to labour for them. The law allowed a soldier to force you to carry his load for one Roman mile which is equivalent to a thousand steps.

And this law reminded the Jews that they were an occupied people. So, what is Jesus saying? Submit to the Romans?

Not just submit. When you reach your one thousand steps, don't just drop the load at the soldier's feet. Carry the load another mile.

Do it voluntarily. not for Caesar, but for your king in heaven. The first mile was a legal requirement. The second mile was grace.

Do what the law requires and then go further. To do this for anyone would have been remarkable, but to do it for an enemy was unheard of.

[12:07] Let grace abound even for your enemy. What would the effect of this be? When you give up your coat as well, when you go that second mile, your adversary would be puzzled.

The Roman soldier would have been shocked at your actions. They would then ask, why? And that's when you'll be ready to explain your action as a Christian.

Gospel opportunities will be there to share of the servant king who came to serve and to give his life away. He walked the second mile to his death for the forgiveness of sin.

How can we do this today? Think of your responsibility at work. What is legally or professionally required of you? How can you go beyond your obligations?

If you're a nurse or doctor, what can you do to show you care beyond your duties? If you're a teacher, is there something you can do for your weak students beyond the allocated time each day?

[13:13] If you have employees, would paying someone more than minimal wages be feasible? If you're a lawyer, how would going the second mile for your clients look like?

What of the robber you overpowered? If you found that this was an act of desperation to feed his family, would you go the second mile to help his family?

If your tormentor in school one day sat in the canteen hungry, would you share your food? If your rival at work looked speechily at you and said he needed your help with a part of the proposal, would you volunteer then to go over the rest of the documents with him?

All these are to demonstrate the greater righteousness of the kingdom, one that springs from a changed heart filled with love and grace, and they would generate gospel conversations.

You are the salt of the earth and light of the world that points to the king. Lastly, in this section, he says, kingdom people are to demonstrate generosity.

[14:34] The theologian Spurgeon wrote, be generous, a miser is no follower of Jesus. The God of the Bible stands with the poor and needy.

And Jesus assumes we will be giving to the poor in the next section of the Sermon on the Mount. He will say, when you give to the needy, not if.

And the Greek words used imply that those asking and those borrowing from you are in a desperate situation. They are not likely to pay you back.

Note that Jesus is not asking us to give or lend without discernment. In Matthew 7, 6, he tells us not to give our pearls to dogs and pigs.

And Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, tells us to deal wisely with the slothful, lazy, and irresponsible people. But otherwise, as we are able, Jesus says, let grace and love abound, give and lend, expect nothing in return.

[15:41] This passage we examine sets us up for the next. You have heard it, but I say to you. And what were the people saying in verse 43?

Love your neighbour and hate your enemy. What culture would not agree with that? For his audience, his neighbours would, their neighbours would have been fellow Jews, and the enemies are the Samaritans, the Gentiles, especially the Romans, the tax collectors and sinners in general. Love your neighbour as yourself is found in Leviticus 19.18 and Jesus would point out later that to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbour as yourself are the two most important commands.

But you will not find and hate your enemy as a command in the Old Testament. Love your neighbour and hate your enemy was conventional wisdom.

The enemy here can be any person who opposes you or who wants to harm you. It may be for religious reasons, racial, business or any other reason.

[16:57] Or, it's someone whom you hurt who simply won't or can't forgive you. To be persecuted is to be subjected to repeated hostility and ill treatment.

And people are commonly persecuted because of race or religious or political beliefs. Because in this sermon Jesus was primarily teaching his disciples, it would be likely that he was addressing religious persecution.

The enemy would then be secular, religious or sectarian. But even so, what he says is applicable to all types of enemies and persecutors.

If you thought turn the other cheek was difficult, what Jesus says next makes no sense in our world of conflict. What is the way of Jesus? Verse 44, But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Love your enemies? What? An enemy is by definition not loved. Love the one persecuting you and making life miserable for you?

[18:11] And furthermore, the Greek words used means keep on loving and keep on praying. Wow. Why love your enemies and pray for your persecutors?

Verse 45 to 47. Look, Jesus says, If you love your enemies, you are imitating your Father in heaven and you show yourself to be his children.

See, he loves not only the good and the righteous people, but he also loves those who are still his enemies, the evil and the unrighteous ones.

He sends his sustaining sunshine and his nourishing reign to them also. The Mindanao Christians and the Moro-Islamic Liberation Front soldiers, the Chinese Christians and the unbelieving Chinese Communist cadre, the struggling Iranian Christians and the Iranian religious police all receive his common grace for living.

So, Jesus, so love your enemies the same way your father loves his. Another reason Jesus gives why not to discriminate in who you love is that if you do, you are no different from those you despise.

[19:30] The Jews despised the tax collectors whom they regarded as national traitors. They were collecting taxes for the enemies, the Romans. Romans. look, Jesus says in verse 46, even the tax collectors whom you hate, love those who love them in return.

If you, my disciples, verse 46, if you, my disciples, love only those who love you, what reward will you get? You are no different from everyone else in the world. Then he gets them to look at the Gentiles.

Some Jews will not greet a Gentile pagan. Greeting them would be like blessing them. it is giving them the shalom, asking God's peace to be upon them.

In verse 47, he said, and if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Even the pagans do that.

If you are only willing to greet your own kind, you are no better than the people who do not know God. So Jesus says, love like children of God.

[20:39] Love not just your neighbor, love also your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Bless people who do not yet know your God.

Otherwise, we are no better than anyone else. And Jesus made it clear later in the parable of the Good Samaritan that your enemies are actually your neighbors, whom you are to love through sacrificial service.

How are we to love someone who wants to harm us? Only one way, with a love that comes from God. The Greek use different words to describe different kinds of love.

They are all translated love in English. There is a love between family members, the love between friends, the erotic love between lovers, and so on.

The word here is agapeo. The noun is agape. It is the love God has for people. It is a benevolent love that seeks the good of and which bestows favor on the recipient.

[21:48] This kind of love may involve acts of kindness, discipline, or even punishment to bring about something good for the person loved. That is the kind of love Jesus is asking you to have for your enemy.

It is an unselfish love that seeks the good of your enemy and drives you to pray for them. Prayers not of cursing, but of blessing.

Paul would later write in Romans 12, bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. We pray that God will meet all their needs, especially their need of reconciliation with God.

This is the love that a Christian victim will have for the Islamic state soldier who wants to kill him. A love that hopes that the soldier will repent and be reconciled to the God of the Bible.

A love that a Christian will have for that office mate who just called him stupid for believing a God in a world of pain. That love that wants him to know a God who endured pain and suffering and died even for him.

[23 : 00] There may not eventually be any reconciliation between you and your enemy. We leave that to God. The Bible says if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

We do our part in obeying God and we pray for opportunities to have gospel conversations with them. We pray that God will find them the way he did us, God will give them the same gift of eternal life that he has given us in King Jesus.

And this is something you will not do, you will not be able to do if your heart has not yet been transformed by the cleansing blood of Jesus. We love because God first loved us.

While we were yet his enemies, Christ died for us. Eventually, you hope, God willing, your enemy becomes not just a friend, but a brother or sister in Christ.

If you think about it, Jesus has already illustrated other ways to love your enemies in the passage we examined earlier in the sermon. Do not retaliate.

[24 : 13] Do not take revenge. Do not trade insult for insult. Give more than what they demand. Go the second mile with them. Shower them with grace.

Meet their deepest need, even material ones. Jesus' life is the best example of his words. Jesus must have caused great consternation when he picked Matthew, the tax collector, one regarded as a national traitor, to be his apostle.

And today, we are reading the gospel that Matthew wrote. He ministered to people whom other fellow Jews would have despised.

He spoke to the Samaritan woman and ministered to her village. He delivered the daughter of a Canaanite woman and healed the servant of a Roman centurion.

And as he hung on the cross, being persecuted and mocked by the very sinners he came to redeem, Jesus loved and prayed for his enemies. He said, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.

[25 : 22] And he died for them. Jesus gave us six, you have heard it said, but I tell you teachings, in this section on the Sermon the Mount.

And he ends this section with these words, verse 48, Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Be perfect like God.

For many of us, if not all, this statement causes despair. The word perfect here means being whole, being complete, being undivided.

Our Heavenly Father is absolutely holy, pure, and glorious, complete in himself, whole, undivided, a perfect being, true and true, in breadth and depth.

Only Jesus is perfect like God the Father, whole, complete in himself, completely pure from inside out and in the breadth of his personality and actions, undivided in his purity of character, purpose, and actions.

[26 : 33] The Pharisees were not perfect. They had a divided personhood. They tried to keep their outward behavior right, but their inner hearts and their motives did not match.

And they would do well in one part but not another. And that's the way of sinful mankind. No one is perfect like God. But Jesus tells us to have a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and the scribes.

throughout the six, you have heard it said, but I tell you passages, Jesus is telling us to be undivided, to have the right actions that come from a right motivation that comes from a right heart, a righteousness that springs from a righteous heart, a heart that has been changed because Jesus has given us a new heart in place of our heart of stone.

be perfect is in the future tense. It literally means you shall be perfect. In this life, we must be willing to have our hearts molded by Christ as we battle with our old selves.

We pray to be delivered from our divided selves, to be whole in our personhood and to be undivided in our devotion to God, to have an obedient heart out of which will birth godly behavior, and one day, this prayer will be answered in full.

[28 : 01] In 1 John 3 verses 2 to 3, it writes, John writes, dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known, but we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

All who have this hope will in him purify themselves just as he is pure. One day, when Jesus comes, we will be like him, pure.

While there should be a level of dissatisfaction with our current state, and we strive to have purity and unity of heart and action, let us be glad of what Christ has already transformed in our lives and look forward to the day when perfection will truly be ours too.

The question for us as we conclude this sermon is, what sets you apart from those who do not know God as Father? What can they see in your life that will make them go, wow, what is this?

I don't understand. Can you tell me more? How can we attract gospel conversation? Is it by loving only those you love?

[29 : 19] Greeting only those of your own kind? taking revenge on those who oppose you, whether for your faith or other issues? Bloodletting in a revenge attack for a bloody raid on your neighbourhood?

Getting into a fight in a tit-for-tat? Trading insults? Being tight-fisted and miserly? Jesus says no. Citizens of this world do that.

You are citizens of the kingdom of God. Rather, it is by being meek, merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker.

By living in a manner that is even above that of ordinary decent people. By drawing your standards not from everyone else, but from your heavenly Father.

By loving in a new kind of way. Loving not just your neighbours, but your enemies. By blessing them. Turning the other cheek.

[30 : 19] Going the extra mile. Giving more than what is required of you. By giving and lending generously. That is a radical change life that will attract the attention of an unbelieving world.

And we should be doing all these things not as an outward show, while gritting our teeth and in our hearts seething with hatred, but because our hearts have been radically changed by Christ to have overflowing grace and love.

Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that Lord, you have given us this promise to be perfect as you are perfect.

We thank you that you are the one who will work in our lives and who will eventually give it to us in Christ Jesus. In the meantime, teach us to love like you love and teach us to love the way Christ loved.

Teach us to relate to people around us with grace and with love, to be fully citizens of your kingdom, practicing the culture of Jesus.

[31 : 44] Thank you in your gracious name we pray.