“Life in the Kingdom: Love’s Divine Standard”

Matthew 5:43-48

(Notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 1/8/23)

What kind of person loves enemies, or the undeserving, or the unlovely? GOD DOES! The Gospel is God moving towards the undeserving people set in opposition to Him. It’s spelled out in Rom. 5:8. When it says, “His own love” it is emphasizing that it is not anything in us or that we have done that accomplishes salvation. For love’s sake, Jesus went to Calvary, dying for our sins. So friends, run to Him, trust in Him, surrender to His love. Proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes again. He is coming again FOR HIS PEOPLE!

God’s Kingdom is realized right now by the church: His people living out His ways in this fallen world. The church is fallen people, saved by grace, and governed by Christ, our King. In Matt. 5, Jesus is NOT explaining how to get into the Kingdom; He is explaining the nature of life in the Kingdom, the way His children should act.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is correcting the misuse of God’s moral law. His listeners had looked to their religious leaders for how to live out the 10 commandments, but those leaders contorted God’s law so that it didn’t accurately reflect God’s heart. The command in Lev. 19:18 to “love your neighbor” was misconstrued and misinterpreted. Jesus cleared up the question of “who is my neighbor?” with the parable of the Good Samaritan. EVEN AN ENEMY IS MY NEIGHBOR! What does it look like to love someone not working for your good? Look no further than Jesus. He loved Judas, didn’t He?

Some might say that the Old Testament is full of hate for enemies. Didn’t David hate his enemies? How does this square with Matt. 5? Here is the key: David and Elijah called down judgment when they acted as God’s representatives, not as individuals. Matt. 5 deals with our personal relationships.

How do we go about loving like this? Matt. 5:44 says to “bless” and “do good to” and “pray for” our enemies. This is love that is expressed, love that takes the initiative. Read Gal. 6:10 and Rom. 12:14 and see how they square with this verse. All three scriptures are saying that if someone is an enemy, treat him like a friend. Pray that his heart will be melted by the Father’s love. Pray that his eternity would be in Heaven, not Hell. Stephen is another example of this kind of love. He said, “Do not charge them with this sin,” even while he was being stoned to death. Church, this is how we imitate our Father. The Kingdom shows itself when God’s people love their enemies.

Agape love is NOT the love of feelings, but the love of volition (choice). It is sourced in the one doing the loving, not in the merit of the recipient. As someone once said, our command is to love, not to like! God commands me to CHOOSE to love my neighbors- friends or enemies- even though I may not FEEL love toward them.

What does the Father’s love look like? He causes His rain to fall on the good and the evil, the just and the unjust. The emphasis is on what the Father does. It is the indiscriminate love of God, or “common grace” as opposed to “saving grace”. His “saving grace” is reserved for His children (1John 3:1).

Love for my enemies is commanded in the Gospel. Love for my enemies commends the Gospel. And love for my enemies communicates the Gospel. The way you live your life may be the only gospel your neighbor ever sees. Agape love is a gospel reflex that comes from the hearts of God’s people.

How do we love those within the church? Note that Gal. 6:10 says “especially”, not “instead of”. The church is Heaven’s embassy here on earth. Each of its members is an ambassador of Jesus Christ. We live to represent His nature and His ways.

Finally, we are all works in progress. The commands of Matt. 5 are not natural to us. We need the Spirit to make us “perfect” (5:48). This “perfect” means complete, whole, mature. We know that we are growing in Christ when we love as He loves, when we are in submission to our Great King. We desperately need His grace to move in this direction. May we be the fragrance of Christ in our community, all for Your glory, Father. Amen.

**QUESTIONS**:

1. How does loving my enemies commend and communicate the Gospel?
2. How would reading all of Matt. 5 help prepare your heart for communion?
3. Let’s say you have a beef with somebody. What would “love that takes the initiative” look like?
4. Some have confused God’s “indiscriminate love for all” with His “saving grace” for those who repent, believe, and follow Jesus. How would you counsel someone like this? Which scriptures might you bring up?

“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” (van Dyke)

1. Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,  
   God of glory, Lord of love;  
   Hearts unfold like flow’rs before Thee,  
   Op’ning to the sun above.  
   Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;  
   Drive the dark of doubt away;  
   Giver of immortal gladness,  
   Fill us with the light of day!
2. Thou art giving and forgiving,  
   Ever blessing, ever blest,  
   Wellspring of the joy of living,  
   Ocean depth of happy rest!  
   Thou our Father, Christ our Brother,  
   All who live in love are Thine;  
   Teach us how to love each other,  
   Lift us to the joy divine.