

Sermon on the Mount 2

If you haven't seen the documentary *The Social Dilemma* on Netflix, I highly, highly recommend it. It gives a really important insight into the cultural moment we're all living through.

In short, the movie explores how **algorithms** are drastically changing our world.

Algorithms (another word for formulas of computer code) are what drive our social media feeds, recommended content on YouTube or Instagram, even the auto-fill suggestions on Google...

As the movie points out, these companies' algorithms have **just one objective: engagement**. They want us tapping and scrolling and watching for as long as humanly possible. Because the longer we scroll, the more ads we see. The more ads we see, the more money they make. Period.

It seems relatively harmless, until you realize that some of **the most engaging content** (the stuff we're most likely to click on) is that which makes us outraged, or which confirms biases we have, or proves to us why "the other side" - whatever side that is - is a bunch of morons.

You can see why that's a problem. Without even meaning to, our harmless scrolling is shoving us farther and farther into our ideological corners, it's putting up walls between different family members, and it is fostering a wave of national hatred unlike we've ever seen before.

Suddenly, **our country is filled with enemies**, out to get us. We clench our teeth, look out at the world around us, and wonder how those people could possibly be so evil.

What do we do about this? I mean other than burning our phones and living in a cabin in the woods, is there any way that we in the Church can respond?

ENEMIES

Well, I believe the answer is yes. And as with every message in this series, the answer comes straight **from the mouth of Jesus himself**.

Buckle up friends, because today we're going to look at arguably one of Jesus' most radical, countercultural teachings: to love our enemies.

Go ahead and grab a Bible and turn to **Luke 6:27**. [Greet campuses]

Now, the full sermon on the mount is found in Matthew 25, but **Luke** also captures some of the same teachings of Jesus in *his* gospel, and his version of *this* teaching is a bit more fleshed out.

Luke 6:27-36

"But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

"If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.

"Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate."

Ok. "Love your enemies." Of all the teachings of Jesus, this has got to be the easiest one to just say, "uh, nah. I don't think so. That doesn't sound right to me."

I mean think about how he describes our enemies. The end of verse 27.

Those who hate you. Or in verse 28. Those who curse you. Last week we talked about **blessing** - God's favor resting on you. Well, cursing is the opposite. It's asking God to take his favor *away* from someone.

He goes on. Those who hurt you. And in Matthew's version, he also includes "those who persecute you." Remember, persecution means people who are

chasing and hunting you down for some reason.

If I were to sum all of this up, I would describe an enemy as

Enemy = someone standing in the way of your wellbeing

Someone who is standing in the way of your growth or your health or your happiness or your social standing or even your financial situation.

An enemy stands in the way of your wellbeing.

And in ancient Israel, for the people hearing Jesus teach this for the first time, it would *not* have been hard to imagine who those enemies were.

It was a **dog-eat-dog world**. It was easy and normal for corrupt people to steal your property or wealth. If you landed on hard times, there was always someone nearby ready to sweep in and take everything from you.

If things turned south with your neighbor, they might **curse** you, which was a terrible thing in that culture.

Taxes were insane back then, and tax collectors had a reputation for always trying to squeeze you for a little more.

And of course, **the Roman Empire** was occupying Israel at the time. You had Roman soldiers “keeping the peace” who would so often abuse their power.

If you lived in Jerusalem, you would have seen *hundreds* of **crucifixions** in your life. Men nailed to a cross, gasping for breath, so the Romans could teach you a lesson. It wasn’t just execution; it was terrorism.

All that to say, if you were in the crowd listening to Jesus teaching this, it would *not* have been hard to know who your enemies were. There were *plenty* of people standing in the way of your wellbeing.

So, let’s get back to what Jesus is teaching here.

“Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.”

What in the world is Jesus talking about here? Does he really mean it? It feels like **masochism**. Are followers of Jesus really supposed to be a bunch of weaklings letting everyone else walk all over us?

Well, let's take a closer look at what he says next.

LOVE

Look at verse 32. Jesus says, “If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that?” The next verse: “If you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit?” And so on.

He says even sinners do that.

What I think he's getting at here is that loving those who love you back, doing good only to those who do good to you... it's **the status quo**. It's the default setting for humanity.

But think about it. **The status quo of our world is a mess**. It's broken. If everybody only loves those who are easy to love, then the world stays full of enemies. The world stays full of hate.

If we just love in the default, easy, *natural* way, nothing is going to change. The corrupt will stay corrupt. The evil will stay evil. Haters are gonna hate.

But Jesus doesn't want to maintain the *status quo*. **Jesus is calling his disciples to something more.**

Look at verse 35.

“Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will *truly be acting as children of the Most High*, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.”

We are called **to act as children of the Most High**. We are called to act the way God acts towards this world.

And how does he act? Well, let's think about that.

Humanity has spit in God's face time and time again. We've turned our back on him. We've rejected him.

Over and over we take the blessings he gives us and **we squander them**. We trample all over one another for our own advancement. We take his creation - people, creatures, the land itself - and we trash the whole place.

We may not be able to stand in the way of God's wellbeing (he's God), but we can definitely stand in the way of his intentions. **We act as the enemies of God.**

And yet, just think for a moment about how he loves us, even as his enemies. Time and time again he offers us grace and forgiveness and mercy. Jesus says at the end of that verse, "He is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked."

What better example do we have than the Father **sending his only son to die on a cross** on our behalf?

And even then, even as Jesus is dying at the hands of Roman executioners, he prays

Luke 23:34

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

Can you even *begin* to wrap your mind around that level of absolutely undeserved love?

That's what we are called to emulate. Verse 36. "You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate."

So here's the question: **why does Jesus call us to this?** We're not God. Our default setting is selfishness.

What's the point of asking this of his followers knowing that we're just going to fail eventually?

Well, I think the answer boils down to one simple truth: **Love and hate are**

not equal in power.

Think about it this way: **hate is contagious**, right? It's what we're seeing in our country right now. When one person hates, another person hates back.

Same thing with corruption. It spreads. Abuse is handed down from generation to generation. Selfishness breeds selfishness. Our brokenness infects the world.

But so does love. Love is infectious too. And love is far, far stronger than hate.

By entering our world through Jesus Christ, our Creator began **reversing the flow of hostility**. His love started catching on. Everywhere Jesus went, lives were transformed. People found dignity. Enemies turned into loving family.

Think about his disciples! **Matthew** the wealthy Roman-helping tax collector side by side with **Peter**, a working-class peasant boy from a fishing village. Natural born enemies turned into brothers.

The Apostle Paul started out literally persecuting Christians, but once he encountered the love of Jesus he went around spreading that love to anyone who would listen.

He was a pioneer bringing the love of Jesus to the Gentile world. Gentiles - the quintessential enemies of the people of God!

In the early Church the **Roman Empire** tried to stamp out this movement of love. They persecuted Christians. They executed them. But these "little Christs," as they were called, kept on loving and loving and loving, and the movement spread like a wildfire.

Yes, **hate is powerful. But love is irresistible.**

Jesus is inviting us to trust that his love will overwhelm hatred, and by loving our enemies, **we can upend the status quo** and bring healing to our world.

So, no. Loving our enemies is not masochism. It's not us being pushovers. It is

a movement of bold and powerful world transformation.

It's a provocative act of **setting aside our rights**, our comfort, maybe even our dignity... for the sake of God's irresistible love catching on.

Yes, it is outrageous, but our savior Jesus showed us the way.

PRACTICAL

So let's talk about what this looks like. Let's see if we can find some practical next steps that we can take in our *own* broken, hate-filled world.

How can we be compassionate, just as our father is compassionate? How can we love as Jesus loves?

Well, let's start with verse 29. "If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also."

What happens when you're slapped? Your face turns hot, your adrenaline starts pumping... you're outraged! You want either to lash out or run away.

Turning the other cheek is neither. It's **a response of humility to an act of violence.**

Offering your shirt when your coat is taken away **is a response of generosity to an act of selfishness.** These are completely backwards from the very normal responses of outrage.

Imagine if you were the slapper or the coat-taker. How incredibly disarmed would you be in that situation? You probably wouldn't know what to do! You might even be convicted to start changing your ways.

When we respond with love to an act of hate... *love wins!* **Love is more powerful than hate.**

Ok, practically speaking *today*, how do you turn the other cheek?

Well, people probably aren't slapping you or stealing your coat all that often, but they *are* doing things that make you feel outraged.

Cutting you in line, insulting you in class, lying about you, or trying to scam you. Your face burns hot then, too, doesn't it?

What if we were to respond in those situations of outrage with complements and positivity?

Remember in grade school we were taught that for every "put down" we had to give **two "put ups"**? ("sigh... I like your shirt, I like your shoes")

What if we did the same thing, but it was *their* put down and *our* put ups? It's simplistic but **responding to hate with love** is a great way for people to see just how selfish they're acting.

The next time you feel outraged by something a coworker does or a family member at Thanksgiving says or someone at the grocery store does, **compliment them** and see how far that little act of compassion really goes.

That's one idea.

Second, in verse 27, Jesus says "Do good to those who hate you," and this one is a little more intense.

We live in a broken world, right? So I can confidently say that *someone* has stood in the way of your wellbeing recently.

Someone acted like an enemy. Maybe they hurt you or embarrassed you or insulted you. They acted out of some form of hate. And I don't think I'm crazy to think that you may still hold a grudge.

Think about that person. Get them in your mind. Think about how you feel about what they did to you.

Now, writing them off, trying to forget about them, brushing it under the rug... anyone can do that. That's just **keeping the status quo**. But Jesus calls you to be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.

What is a loving, undeserved act you could take towards that person right now?

Could you buy them a gift? Give them a shoutout them on social media? Write them a note? Send them some money?

Maybe you can simply forgive them and welcome them back into your life. Give them another chance. Allow them to be transformed by the love of Jesus in you.

When someone acts in hate, you can **act in love**.

Remember. **Hate is powerful. But love is irresistible.**

Now, one quick aside. I want to be clear about this. There are some situations, like an **abusive spouse**, where the most loving thing you can do is to back away and leave for a time.

Staying put in a situation of abuse is not loving. It's *enabling*. If that's you, please get help.

You can call Grace Church. We have pastors on call. Or you can call the domestic abuse hotline.

Stepping away from an abusive relationship for a time may be exactly the kind of loving action which helps your abuser see their actions for what they really are.

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Ok, compliment your enemies. Act in love towards them.

The final practical response to all of this has to do with the **social divides** in our nation I mentioned at the beginning of my message - all these algorithms driving us apart.

In verse 28, Jesus says, "Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you."

Undoubtedly there is a **group of people in our country right now** that you consider to be standing in the way of your wellbeing. Enemies. It could be supporters of a specific political party, or a protest movement,

or some ideology, or economic class...

Based on what you're seeing online these days (thanks to those very helpful algorithms), it sure does seem like *that group* is out to curse you. To hurt you. Right? Dead set on making your life miserable.

Those are the people Jesus asks us to bless. To pray for. He is inviting us to ask for God's favor to rest on them. **Pray for them.**

And man, if that's not the hardest thing of all this, I don't know what is.

I mean, if we're honest **we don't wish them well.** We want them humiliated! Defeated!

But we are called to love. And remember, love is more powerful than hate.

If we do this, and ask God to bless our ideological enemies, **one of two things is going to happen.**

One, perhaps God's favor *does* rest on them and **they start to see the light.** Maybe the presence of Jesus will enter their life and they'll change their ways (assuming they're wrong, of course).

But even if that *doesn't* happen, here's what will: **your heart will change.** By praying for God's blessing on your enemies, you will start to see them the way God sees them. Not as monsters, but as sinful, broken people just as much in need of his grace as you are.

You will start to develop compassion for them. Empathy. And perhaps you will start to dream of a day in which your enemies are not destroyed, but healed, welcomed into the family, and worshipping Jesus by your side.

Compliment those who outrage you. Act in love towards those who hate you. And pray for your enemies.

It is outrageous. But in this divided time, this is exactly the kind of posture we need to take to bring healing to our world.

Grace Church, let's be little Christs and reverse the flow of hostility. Let's conquer hate together with the love of God.

[PRAY]