

## LOVING THE UNLOVABLE – MATTHEW 5:38-48

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<sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup> If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. <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.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

In our Wednesday night Bible class we have watched online, we have learned that there are many reasons why we are able to trust the Bible. One of those reasons is because the Bible is practical. There are so many people out there who use the excuse that since the Bible was written thousands of years ago it is not applicable, it's not practical for our day-to-day life. Today, we take a look at a very practical section of God's Word from our gospel this morning. A practical application which we can put into action immediately, right away.

However, these practical “tips” that the Bible gives are not the “tips” that we like to hear about, they seem like “tips” to get walked all over by people just trying to take advantage of you. Maybe that is the reason why people don't think the Bible is practical, because it's not what they want to do. But there is more to these “tips” than just getting walked all over by people. There's a reason why God's Word gives them to us and tells us to live this way. And that reason is not to build ourselves up, but build God up. Let's dive into the gospel once again and see how these “tips” are more than just “tips.” The overlying theme is LOVING THE UNLOVABLE.

(1)

It was God himself who gave his Law to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. They were wandering in the desert, having just left Egypt, they were waiting at the base of Mount Sinai. Moses went up and then brought down the two tablets of stone which had the 10 commandments written on them. But you can look through the entire book of Leviticus to see there were more laws than that. The Jewish religious leaders had 613 laws that you needed to follow, almost 250 of them are found in the book of Leviticus.

One section of those laws had to do with keeping peace and order in society. If someone's ox got away and killed your pig, your neighbor would owe you a pig. If there was an injury, the same injury would be payment, that's where we get the whole – **“life for a life, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth”** that

Jesus referenced in his Sermon on the Mount. And so it was no wonder that those listening to Jesus would have thought he was off his rocker, telling them to turn the other cheek. “God himself told us to get retribution,” They would have cried.

But once again, Jesus was not getting rid of everything the Jews held near and dear, he was going back to the beginning, with what these laws meant. Jesus reminded these people that God established these laws to keep peace and order in society, to limit the *personal* vengeance. And that’s really the key that Jesus is bringing out here. It is the authorities that are to enforce this retribution, not an individual who has a grudge. Jesus was saying that the Law rules in the State. As Christian individuals there is a different story. As Christians who are part of God’s Church, we live under something different, the gospel. So while the Law rules in the State, the Gospel rules in the church.

This is what LOVING THE UNLOVABLE is all about. Jesus gives four clear examples of ways we can LOVE THE UNLOVABLE or love our enemies. **“Turn the other cheek,”** “Give not only your shirt, but your coat too,” “Go the extra mile,” and “don’t turn away anyone who asks of you.” Certainly these words would have been confusing to the Jews who heard something different their whole lives. They heard and thought about justice, this seemed to be anything but. This seemed to be Jesus telling his followers to just lay down and take it. And in a certain way he was, it was Paul who wrote a little while later, **“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.”** Perhaps it is for this very reason that Christianity seems to undesirable to most. Or maybe to those who are Christians, they simply pay this section lip service.

But let’s take a look a little bit closer at what Jesus is saying with this whole LOVING THE UNLOVABLE.

1. When Jesus says to love our enemy, he is not saying that we cannot take legal action or resort to civil matters to avoid being taken advantage of. The apostle Paul, in the book of Acts, is a perfect example of using his Roman citizenship to his advantage in situations to avoid certain punishments, and also to appeal his case in a Roman court.
2. When Jesus says to love our enemy, and not to turn away the person who asks you for money, he is not saying we must give until it hurts, or we must give until we are not able to support our own wellbeing, until we become a burden on others. Rather, we should not let greed and selfishness limit what we give.
3. When Jesus says to love our enemy, he is not saying that we are to love them in their sin. We are not to love the enemies of God, who in their stubborn unbelief, reject his grace to them. Instead we are to love our personal enemies instead of seeking revenge.

All of this is getting at one thing: LOVING THE UNLOVABLE is not about doing it for yourself, it’s about doing it for God. When we LOVE THE UNLOVABLE we show the love of God. We show that we are not only Christ’s people, but we are Christs to people. When we love our neighbor, and our enemy, we are doing something completely different that people have no choice but to stop and take notice. Treating people with love means not only giving up our rights, but it might also be telling people something they need to hear – something about their sin, something that likely does not seem all that loving.

Now there was a recent study that just came out about top grossing movies in 2013. Nine of the top ten most profitable movies were family-friendly (like *Frozen*). Movies that were religious themed and patriotic were also very profitable. Maybe surprisingly what wasn't as successful – movies with profanity (like *The Wolf of Wall Street*), and movies with sexual content (like *We're the Millers*).

Now how do top grossing movies, relate to me loving my enemy? It serves to act as an example of how we can come to confuse our roles as Christians. Like we have been hearing about in the last few weeks, Jesus has been saying "Let your light shine," and from this last movie report, it looks like Christians have been letting their light shine with their money, in choosing which movies they want to go see. And that's a good thing. We make the mistake, however, when our primary goal as a Christian is to make the world a better place. As wonderful as that sounds, that is not our goal as Christians.

## (2)

If we start acting like making the world a better place is the be all and end all of us being a Christian, we have completely lost ourselves. We have completely lost sight of the primary figure in Christianity – Christ. God isn't interested in how much money we spend at what films at the box office. God isn't interested in how many people we can bring up out of financial poverty. God is in the business of saving – not only LOVING THE UNLOVABLE "out there," but also LOVING THE UNLOVABLE "in here." God loved us the unlovable.

It can be easy for us to forget how unlovable we are. And I'm not just talking about how unlovable we may have been as kids growing up. I'm talking about how unlovable we are now. We try to cover up by our outward actions, our kind words, and our smiles, but underneath all that we lie, we steal, we cheat. We lie when we confess there is nothing more we could do – whether that's in studying for a test, or helping an acquaintance. We steal from other people's time when we selfishly make them wait on us. We cheat other people of the credit they deserve when we pass an idea off as our own in a paper, or at work.

If you stop and think about it, we're not as good as we so often think we are. Which means LOVING THE UNLOVABLE starts at home. It starts with God. The word Jesus uses for "love" here is that special word for undeserved love, specifically used of God's undeserved love for us. But not only is his undeserved love on display in sending the sun to shine and the rain to fall upon the good and the bad alike, but his undeserved love in sending his Son to take our place, to take our punishment. God LOVED THE UNLOVABLE, and he made the UNLOVABLE LOVABLE. Which we now can love ourselves, not because of anything we have done, but because God loves us, God thought enough about us to die for us. And a love like that can change everything. Our love to others imitates Christ's love to us – undeserved.

It is God's love that fuels us to LOVE THE UNLOVABLE, not to make the world a better place, but lead people to him, to tell them of the undeserved love our God has showed them. It certainly can be a good thing to love those who are your neighbors, your close friends. But don't stop there. Jesus, in the parable of the good Samaritan identified everyone as our neighbor. This is where we are different than the world. The world prioritizes who is deserving of our support and who is not. The only problem with that is that is subjective, everyone will have their own list of priority people. When we take away who is deserving and who is not, we are only limited by our time and resources. Time and resources that are only expanded when we join together with other Christians in a congregation like Grace, or in a church body like the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

There are certainly good and practical applications that can be drawn from this section of God's Word. But the danger comes in when we think that it is only about drawing applications, that God is only teaching how we are to live. He is not teaching us how to live, he is teaching us how *his* kingdom works, how *his* gospel works. We are never the subject of Scripture, we are always the object. We are the object of God's affections. These "tips" Jesus gives in Matthew 5 are not just trying to make you a better person, it's about doing whatever we can to help other people's relationship with God. It was Martin Luther who said this: "We are Christs – with and without the apostrophe." A heart like Christ's has no room for vengeance. But is filled with love for all. Amen.