

**Matt. 5:43** “You have heard that it was said, ‘*You shall love your neighbor* and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**Matt. 6:1** “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

**Matt. 6:2** “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Matt. 6:5** “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

We have some serious business to face this morning, but before we can move into this we need to clean something up. As we have seen the last 2 weeks, Jesus is going to take religious teachings from his Jewish society and upgrade them, or make them even more demanding. Some Bibles have done an unfortunate thing with this. At the beginning of each of these upgrades, it usually makes it sound like things are taken directly from Scripture, or from Jewish teaching. Today we see this: “You have heard that it was said, ‘*You shall love your neighbor* and hate your enemy.’ I will just blurt this out to save time. In the history of the split between our original Jewish ancestors and ourselves, Christians have often tried to say that Jewish teachings are not as loving as ours. They have tried to say that Jewish people are not taught to love, or that they don’t actually love God. This is terrible. And there is a long history of this.

I need us to look at something odd.

**Matt. 5:43** Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη· ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου καὶ μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου.

Don't panic, this is the Bible. It is just in Greek. Kristina has this set up for us. A neat thing about Greek NT copies is that they always do **bold print** ( or italics ) when something is being quoted from somewhere else. When things are not quoted, they are just normal. Please notice that here it does in fact quote from Leviticus **“You shall love your neighbor.”** You can see the bold print. But then it says “you shall hate your enemy.” If we look we see that it is not bold. It is not a quote, in fact it is not a quote from anywhere. Nowhere in Jewish tradition does it say that you should hate your enemy. There are certain Bibles that do it this way, and that is not accurate, and it is not honest. We need to insist on honesty and accuracy. Because this teaching is so very crucial, we need to make sure that we get this right.

Jill and I watched a new movie, in the way that we see new movies these days. There is no movie theater, just our living room. But they are still making new movies. On July 10th one was released featuring Tom Hanks playing the part of a WW 2 Navy officer who was commanding a battleship called GREYHOUND. We highly recommend this movie. In the movie it is his first trip across the Atlantic to England to protect a convoy of supplies from German U-Boats, which did so much destruction. In fact, the U-Boats killed 72,200 people in WW 2. There are 37 ships in all trying to get across to England. There are 4 escort battleships and other cruisers to protect them. But the sea-wolves are hunting. BTW, 75% of all

U-Boat crews died in battle, 28,000 men. It was very dangerous, and many were killed, both of the Allies and the U-Boats. A special thing in the movie is that Tom Hanks is a devout Christian man. He prays before he eats. He prays before he sleeps. He prays when he wakes up. He is a gentle and good man who has been asked to take part in a dangerous and terrible thing. Having hundreds of people dying at a time is always a terrible thing. But in the face of this, Tom Hanks is a man of great faith.

At one point fairly early into the movie, there is an exchange between a U-Boat and the Greyhound. The U-Boat had already sunk 2 ships. The Greyhound chases down that U-Boat and is able to destroy it. You can see in the water the oil and wreckage and maybe even blood coming up from the U-Boat being blown apart. It is clear that it has been destroyed. One of the young officers shouts out, and understandably, “Yeah! 50 dead krauts! Yeah.” Tom Hanks looks at him without celebrating and says “No, Mr. Nystrom, 50 souls.” There is an awkward silence. No Mr. Nystrom, 50 souls.”

I imagine some people watching the movie were bothered by this. If someone is trying to kill you, and you must kill them to stop them from killing you, that is a most serious situation. But that is one that we humans have faced for a very long time. In Jesus’ day, there was much dying, and much more would come in the next 100 years after his death. Probably 1.5 million Jewish people would be killed by the Romans in Judaea in 2 different wars. So for Jesus to try to teach something about how you deal with your enemies, and what should be done, this is so very important.

If we thought the other upgrades were tough, this one is by far the hardest. Jesus says literally that we must love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute us. And if we read carefully we can see that there is one key reason why we should do this. We will get to this. But this one seems more irrational than the others. Love our enemies, and pray for those who would hurt us? Really?

I have felt rage in my heart, I have felt what I would call hatred. I was picked on by bullies quite a bit until I was in 11th grade. The whole world changes when you sprout up to being 6'4" tall. I grew 2 more inches, but when you are taller than most people, they suddenly start to leave you alone a bit more. But even after I had gotten taller, in my last year of high school, I was jumped by 4 football players who decided for some reason to humiliate me. They succeeded. They physically grabbed me, wrestled me to the ground, and threw me in a rotten little pond, filled with stinky muck. I cut my leg. I was not happy. From that moment on, I felt such hostility against these 4 guys. Whenever I would pause to remember what they did to me, I would burn on the inside. In fact, I felt something awful. It was almost like I could feel some kind of dark poison within my heart. I would feel that and think "WHOA!" What is that? And then I would quickly realize that I did not want to feel that feeling inside me. I had to learn to forgive them for what they did. At my 20th high school reunion I had the great blessing of receiving an apology from one of the guys. We both had tears in our eyes. We became friends that day, and we still are today. In fact 3 of the 4 are my friends now, 2 of their phone numbers are in my phone. One of them died 5 years ago, and we prayed for him and his family when Jill and I were first with you.

That poison is gone, and I am so thankful for that. Some have tried to suggest that there is some strange strategy here of getting your enemies to quit, if only you love them and pray for them. I am not sure that will get them to quit. But it will keep you from hating them. No Mr. Nystrom, 50 souls. Jesus actually explains why he wants his followers to love their enemies, and pray for those who would hurt them. Why do this? Because you will be more like God. And it just could be that THAT is the goal of everything. As the great CS Lewis once explained, it is God's intention to make lots of little replicas of himself.

God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust, and the sun to shine on them as well. Why should we not let ourselves become filled with hate? Because God is not filled with hate. And we need to move in God's direction in all things.

Speaking of God's direction, we can deal with this last part quickly for this morning. Jesus has simple advice: Beware if you want to look all holy and religious so that other people will see you. There are many, but there is one thing about Facebook that makes me sad. For a number of years now, I have seen many people that I know who post pictures of themselves with their hands in the air, tears running down their faces, with their eyes closed, because they are "worshipping." Every time I see another of these pictures of someone with their hands in the air, looking like they are having an ecstatic moment being touched by the Spirit of the Living God, I think it is great. But I usually feel "Eww." If you are fortunate enough to be having a deeply spiritual and intense moment of God's grace and touch in your life, frankly, no one needs to ever see that but God, and God already sees it fine! Why would anyone post such

a holy and precious thing? I would even add that this would be a truly intimate thing. That seems to defeat the goodness of the entire moment. Jesus would say “If you are going to do this, do this where no one else can see it. If you want others to see, you really need to ask yourself about why you need others to see such an intimate thing as God touching you. As Jesus would say, you have already had your reward. You just took something so truly holy, and you turned it into something else to give you glory. Jesus says “Hey...don’t do that.” What is between you and God is to be between you and God.

Well, as of right now, we are 50% of the way through the Sermon on the Mount. I know that I have enjoyed getting into this with you, and I hope you’ll be back with us next week to keep the journey going. Next Sunday will lead us into what we have come to call the Lord’s Prayer. I look forward to us walking through that together. As our friend St. Paul would say, ***Grace to you and peace, in the name of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*** Amen.