

**Tuesday, August 11, 2020**

**SERIES: REWRITING JESUS**

**SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD**

**TITLE: Love Your Enemies Pt. 2**

We need to pray for the lost. We need to pray for the salvation of our enemies. Yes, our actions are salt to the world. Remember, Jesus said that *we are salt*. Yes, our words are light. Again, Jesus said *you are light*. But the salvation of our enemies is not something we can fix. Salvation is only experienced by the working of the Spirit. That's why Ephesians 6 says,

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm" (ESV, Eph. 6:12-23) .

If our churches want revival; if we're going to see our enemies come to Christ; if we're going to see our friends and family come to Christ, then we must be people of prayer.

Charles Spurgeon said, "The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. So is the prayer meeting a grace-ometer, and from it, we may judge the amount of divine working among people. If God be near a church, it must pray. And if He be not there, one of the first tokens of His absence will be a slothfulness in prayer."

**So yesterday in our reading from Luke 6: 27-30, we discovered that Jesus' first direction is to Be Loving, by doing good, blessing, and praying.**

Direction number 2, we'll discover as we read on – Again, Luke 6, beginning at verse 31 (NLT): Jesus said,

**<sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would like them to do to you.**

Yes, this is the famous Golden Rule. I quote this verse at least 5 times a day at my household. "*Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you.*" If we did this, the world would change. Why? It embraces the notion that we are all image-bearers of God. Genesis tells us that we are made in the image of God. This means we are all worthy of respect. Here in verse 31, we discover the next direction from Jesus: **Be Respectful.**

Being respectful is the outflow of the Golden Rule. It is a good baseline for our daily lives. Treat others, act in a way that you want to be treated. Be respectful. You would think that at this point in mankind's existence, we would get this by now. But unfortunately, we just don't get it. The people we are closest to are the people we can hurt the most with our words and actions. We ignore intrinsic value and respect.

A member of our church shared with me a story about how their neighbor was out of work. But their unemployment didn't stop their partying. They drank. They became louder and mean. The morning after, no apology would come – nor would they remember much of it. This carried on for months. Finally, this attendee decided to treat them as they would want to be treated. The attendee had noticed how they hadn't eaten real food for a long time. So they started taking over home-cooked meals and desserts. Eventually, the neighbor softened up and was given the Gospel. This wouldn't have happened naturally, without being respectful to their undeserving neighbor.

We all bear the *Imago Dei*. That is the image of God. Because of that, everyone deserves respect - doesn't matter their political persuasion. It doesn't matter their sexual preference. It doesn't matter whether they wear a mask or none at all. Every person deserves respect. When we do this, we will show the world that we really believe what we say we believe. That we believe in the *Imago Dei*: That everyone bears the image of God, and that we believe in the sacredness and the beauty of life.

Does respect mean endorsement? No. Does respect mean validation of their actions? Of course not. When Jesus confronted the adulterous woman, he said, “*Go and sin no more.*” So we're not called to ignore sin. But we do recognize that people, apart from Christ, will do as their broken nature desires. But because they bear God's image, we would treat them as we want to be treated, and that is, of course, with respect.

So again, **the first direction Jesus gives is to be loving, by doing good, blessing, and praying.** The **second direction Jesus gives is to be respectful.** Jesus next shows us why these directions matter. Look, beginning at verse 32:

**<sup>32</sup> "If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! <sup>33</sup> And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! <sup>34</sup> 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.**

What a statement and a key difference between the world and those who follow the Word. The system of the world is to love those who love you and hate those who hate you. I once heard a comedian discuss the insanity of praising a parent for saying, "I take care of my kids!" The comedian rightly responds, "You're supposed to take care of your kids! What do you want - a cookie?" This is kind of what Jesus is saying. Being kind to the kind, and giving to those who give, is a no-brainer. It's easy. It's what most people do. But to love those who hate you, give to those who never give, helping those who never help you, that's the hard stuff.

Jesus challenges us to be different. But why? Because of the amount of grace we have received; because of the Gospel. It's because of the Good News of Jesus Christ that makes this paradigm shift. You see, when we embrace and understand what God has done through Jesus Christ, we have no reason but to give, without expecting anything in return. When we embrace God's scandalous grace, we can't help but love our enemies. It's what He did for us!

## DISCUSSION:

N: Let me turn to my loyal discussion partners Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Cara, how do we keep this amazing news of the Gospel fresh in our minds each day? How do we remember that it's God's grace, not our performance, that saves us?

C: Because if it was based on performance Nat, I'd have lost already. So the Gospel is the same today as it was, and it's going to be the same tomorrow. And that's the hope we have. So there's no guessing game whether or not I'm saved. I just have to remember that I don't deserve it, no matter how wonderful in moments I think that I am. So, too, I was never told about it, so it makes me want to tell others about it. That's my motivation.

N: Wow. Yeah. I think there's this delicate balance between remembering our past, remembering what God's saved us from, and how amazing it is, and how much it changes us, versus not just living in the past, and allowing Satan to drag us through the muck and mire of our past sins, but rather embracing who we are in Christ. And I think you've found that balance, between remembering what Christ has saved you from, and remembering how precious and sweet that Gospel message is. That is great motivation for us today. Arnie, what happens when we take the Gospel for granted? And is that where we get stuck spiritually?

A: Yeah. You know, and I've heard lots of reasons why people take the Gospel for granted. A lot of times they're just too busy. What I see over and over is people actually become overconfident, and it's just, they don't realize, or they realize, but they get overconfident. It's just like missing three days of not eating, you know? Well, yeah, you can live without eating for quite a while, but what happens? Well, you're weak, and you need nourishment, and pretty soon bad things start happening. And in your spiritual life, it's the same. And the problem is, you can go longer without spiritual food, than you can without physical food. And the more confident you are, the less successful you're going to be in your spiritual life. At least we've seen it a million times over.

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Jesus came to Earth for a purpose. That purpose was to pay a debt for us. We were created by God, but we turned our back on Him by sinning. We are all messed up, and start off as enemies of God. But Jesus came and lived a perfect life. He had a message of love – He loved His enemies, even when He was rejected and hated. His love resulted in Him being betrayed, beaten, whipped, and crucified on a cross. He died on a cross and was buried. His enemies thought they won. But Jesus was God in the flesh, and after 3 days in the grave, He literally, physically and historically, rose from the dead. He died and rose again to pay for our sins and give us eternal life. This is the Gospel: The life-changing Good News that we embrace! We love others because He loved us. This, my friend, is the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To experience this love and forgiveness, all you need to do is believe it. Embrace it and let Jesus change you from the inside out. So, we love like this, because it is proof that God has changed us, and our example of love is a way to influence our enemies, and encourage other believers.

Jesus then concludes this message with the last direction in Luke 6, verses 35-36.

**<sup>35</sup> "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. <sup>36</sup> You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.**

Jesus here encapsulates the last few verses to remind us one more time: Love your enemies! Do good to them! Why is Jesus restating these directions? Because He wants us to get them! When you see repetition, it's because it is important! He says we should give to our enemies and do good to them selflessly. Do it without expecting anything in return. Do it so that it benefits them. Our motivation is not for the reward, though Jesus says our reward in heaven will be very great. This is awesome, but it can't be our motivation. We should act as children of the Most High, because it is the natural outflow of our love for Him.

Then in verse 36, we find the last direction from Jesus: **Be compassionate**. Your version may say *be merciful*. I think this is very important. By being compassionate, we are withholding judgment for our enemies. We need to be patient and understanding that apart from God, and a relationship with Jesus, they are acting as they should. Their thoughts, beliefs, and actions will be aligned with the world's and not with God's. So, we need to be merciful and compassionate. When we show our enemies compassion, we will stop judging the book by its cover. We will throw aside prejudice and ask the question: "I don't understand where you are coming from. Who are you? What's your story?" We will be seeking a greater context because every person matters and so does their story.

Several years ago, I was attending a training out in rural Nebraska. I spent 3 days with about 40 other individuals, digging deep into personal values. One person I met was a woman, who I will call Tanya. Tanya was a bit rough looking, and seemed stand-offish; not necessarily mean, but just not someone you felt you could buddy up with - someone easy to judge by their cover. On the last day of our training, we all had the opportunity to let go of a burden: something holding us back in life. Tanya opened up and shared how when she was in her mid-20's her then-husband up and left her, while abducting her two kids. At that point, it had been 5 or so years since she had seen or heard from her kids. She knows they are overseas, but has little hope of seeing or hearing from them again.

Hearing her story explained a lot about her. It made us all not so quick to judge, but instead show her compassion and mercy. You see, we all have a story. We all have a past that no one else has experienced. Remember your story. Remember your life before Christ. It will make you less quick to judge others: even your enemies. Remember where you come from and remember the difference Christ has made. Now you are a new creation. Be compassionate.

So where do we go from here? Jesus taught that we are to love our enemies, not hate them, as many of us have rewritten. We are to love them by doing good to them, by speaking kind words to them, and by praying for them.

I watched a video on YouTube, of a woman whose son was murdered. If it was up to her, she would have cursed the murderer's name, and done everything to make sure he died, if possible.

But that's not what she did. She forgave him. She spent time in prison visiting this murderer, and ultimately sharing the Gospel with him. She conveyed forgiveness and love. If that was the end of the story, that would be good enough. But it's not. This man was saved! And eventually he was released from prison. Now, guess where he lives? *Next door* to this mother whose son he killed. She now calls him *her* son, because of the grace of God. Can you *imagine* loving the person who murdered your son? Can you *imagine* living right next door to him? Can you imagine taking him in as your *very own*? Well, you should, because this is *exactly* what God did for you!

I want you to think about someone in your life that is an enemy. I know we can all identify that person. We all have people in our lives who don't appreciate our faith and who have made our lives harder because of it. Say that name out loud, or write it on a post-it note or, better yet, put it on your calendar on your smartphone. I want you to ask God for direction on how you can 1) do good to them. Identify one specific way you can do something that will benefit them. 2) Identify a way you can bless them with words of kindness. Maybe through a snail mail note. Maybe a compliment on their Facebook wall. And 3) I want you to commit to pray for them. Take the next 7 days and pray for them. Are they hurting? Pray for peace. Are they unsaved? Pray for salvation.

If we follow Christ's teaching to love our enemies, we will influence some to Christ and others to follow His teachings. Either way, God gets the glory, we are transformed, and lives are changed.

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N: Ok, so I have given *everyone* an assignment. All of you listening, but also myself, Jason our radio engineer, Paula our producer, Pete our editor, Chris our transcriptionist, our staff here at Back to the Bible, and last but not least, Arnie and Cara. Do you have people you'll follow up on with this assignment? Not to identify them, but tell us a little about them, or your situation with them, or maybe you have a story of someone you've been obedient to approach, even if they seemed like they were standoffish.

C: I cannot think of one enemy Nat, but I do have people in my life that are nonbelievers, and they're at different levels. So my big thing, I have a friend that is hardcore atheist. He takes two steps forward; at least he takes those. And then he'll go back six steps. I have another friend and he's starting to move forward pretty rapidly. And I've noticed in both cases, I just stopped trying to just openly evangelize to them. I just am their friend, and they know Jesus is important in my life. And so what I like to do is pepper the conversation with nuggets from the Bible that they don't even know are from the Bible. And then they'll go, "That's good. Where'd you hear that?" "Oh, it's in the Bible. I know you don't want to hear it, but it's got a lot of stuff in it." And you know, you just kind of, and they get more and more curious about it. But I don't really have enemies. I mean, I'm really oblivious. I'm sure there's plenty of people that don't like me. I don't care. I mean, I just, I am who I am, and I love the Lord, and everyone knows it.

N: Well, it's because you haven't discovered the We Hate Cara Facebook page, so that's good.

C: I'll be the first one on it. How about sociopaths? Let's not approach them, [Right.] Right?

Look, I think as Christians too, if someone is Bad News Bears, I think you don't have to feel guilty for not going and asking them, you know, for a cup of coffee, because they're destructive people. So I don't know if you have any wisdom on that, Nat, but I can pray for people from afar, but I'm not going to mingle with those types of nuggets. You know what I'm saying? Because they're dangerous.

N: Yeah. I think we need to be wise and cautious in how we do outreach, and who we do outreach with, because there are people who are going to be more effective in reaching some of those people, especially with safety. I mean, Paul wasn't stupid. I mean, that guy got out of harm's way several times. Even Jesus avoided hostile situations until the time was right. And so us too, we need to be wise. And there are some people that clearly are evil and unsafe, and we can scatter seeds from afar, and God will bring the right person, with the right message, in the right way, at the right time, should that person become saved. So we don't need to feel guilt or pressure, by not going to everyone, everywhere, at every time, especially when our safety is in jeopardy. So I think there's wisdom in how we interact and who we interact with. Arnie, do you have any thoughts on this? Are there any people in your life that you're really wanting to reach out to, who honestly are hostile towards you, because of your faith?

A: You know, I'm a lot like Cara, I don't really have enemies out there. I've had a habit long time ago of letting the past go. You can't change the past, and all it does, is make you bitter. So I'm sure there's been people in my past that I've considered enemies, but I just forget about it, and move on. And I think God has given me that ability to do that, so it's not a big struggle at this time in my life. And I think Jesus - being a Christ follower - is probably what's helped me the most, is He forgave me. So, you know, it's just not a big deal. And as we talked before, sometimes the toughest people are Christ followers, that are much, much harder, but even then, why be bitter? I mean all it does is nail you; it doesn't help the person.

N: Right. We've got to remember to not add more offense to the Gospel, because the Gospel is already offensive enough to a fallen and broken world. You know, maybe it's not an enemy scenario, but maybe it's just that person who's a bit standoffish. You know, I think about people who maybe just are standoffish to the Gospel. There's a person I think of - it's a friend of mine who is an atheist - and he actually worked for me years ago. And I remember, you know, me declaring my faith in a conversation. He was very adamant in fact, about he's an atheist, and God doesn't exist, and you're stupid if you do, and it's a crutch. And he just went on and on and on, on this attack. And what was interesting, is though even today, I think it's been like 15 years since I've known him - he's still an atheist; he was very standoffish to the faith and anything I had to offer; but just by living with intentionality, by sprinkling in, as you said, Cara, little nuggets of God's Word, and letting him see the difference that my faith has made - it's amazing how much he is willing to share and open up his life to me. Though he still finds it foolishness, he at least now says, "Well, I don't know and can't know that God doesn't exist". So he's an agnostic really at best, but just by over time, by being willing to engage him in a very natural way, he has become more and more open. So maybe it's worth taking the risk on that person who's just a little bit standoffish, but we need to do so with wisdom, and allow God to direct the path.