

Sunday Sermon: February 19, 2017

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:38-48

Sermon Theme: The Best Sermon Ever: The Best Love Ever

<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 someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him 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 sons 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 brothers, 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.

What is love? We have just celebrated the holiday that focuses on love. The card companies and the gift sellers want us to think that love is as simple as a nice supper, flowers, or candies.

Love is not simple at all, is it? It actually can be pretty difficult because we have so many different types of love that we practice. We love our favorite foods, our favorite things and we love our families. Sometimes we use like and love interchangeably, sometimes we don't. Some people confuse companionship or sex for love, when they are very different things.

If you listen carefully, there is even a difference between how married and unmarried people talk about love. Unmarried people may talk about falling in and out of love, the butterflies of meeting someone new and their soul mate, while married people will talk about love being a choice that is sometimes difficult to do.

There are many different kinds of love, still we use the word love to describe them all, but if we are only focusing on earthly love we are missing the most important type of love there is. As Jesus continues the Best Sermon Ever, he teaches us about the Best Love Ever and how to live that love in our lives of faith.

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English only has one word for love and we use it in many different ways for many different reasons. Other languages are much more descriptive. Greek is one of them. Greek has three different words that define three different types and kinds of love. There is a type of love called *eros* love. This is the type of love that a husband and wife feel for one another. This sexual love is a blessing that God has given to be used within his bonds of marriage.

There is the *phileo* love. This *phileo* love is seen in the name Philadelphia..... and we know what that means. The city of brotherly love. *Phileo* love is the type of love that we see when people hold doors for us, when we use please and thank you, or when we don't interrupt someone else. It is the love that we show to each other on a daily basis that avoids fights and easily makes friends.

Finally, there is the *agape* love. This type of love is completely different from the others because the example for this type of love is not often seen in human beings and what we do for each other. *Agape* love is the type of love that Jesus has shown to us. It is love that is shown to people who do not deserve the love and who will not return that love.

Let me give you an example: You might show love to the puppy in the pet store because it is so cute and lovable. It wags its tail at you and licks your face. It does all the cute things that puppies do which immediately warms your heart. It's easy to love that kind of puppy because it does such a good job of being cute and lovable. This is not *agape* love.

*Agape* love, which Jesus shows to us, is the love that is shown for something that is not lovable. What about the other dog you see on the way home? The emaciated mongrel with three legs, which is infested with fleas, that sits in the gutter, which is caked in mud as it rains, sitting in the middle of a huge pile of garbage. There is nothing about this dog that is lovable and most of us would just continue to drive by. This dog is not lovable, there is nothing about it that deserves love or a reaction of love from us. To stop and show love to something unlovable, as Jesus did for us sinners, is *agape* love.

Jesus turns the entire concept of human love upside down when he explains to his followers what kind of love they are to show. He shows us that while we know and understand *phileo* and *eros* love, it is the *agape* love that we should be showing.

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With these words Jesus shows just how backward the Law of the Jews had become and how sinful and unlovable the people were in applying that Law. Eye for an Eye was part of the Jewish Civil Law. This was the penalty part of the Jewish court system. Simply, let the punishment fit the crime. However, the people soon began to take justice into their own hands and sought vengeance themselves claiming the right under the Law to do so. The Jews thought, “My love has limits. If you cross me... Eye for an eye.”

*Agape* love, the type of love Christians are to show to others, goes much further than showing kindness and love to people, it also includes the absence of many things. It includes the absence of evil thoughts and intentions. If someone is mean to you, fighting you, or even sues you, do not try to get even, hurt them back, or avoid them in the hopes they will go away. Jesus says go out of your way to make it right with them so that they can see your love even in these unlovable moments. Our mindset should not be, I will love my loved ones and pray for their goodness, and the other people can figure it out themselves. Our mindset should be: **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**

While Jesus guides us in true love, he also shows us that we often fall short in showing true Christian love to others. We think we are doing that, when we are really not. **[the Father] 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 brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?**

Everyone in the world understands the concepts of love and caring for someone. Even unbelievers show love to one another. They give Valentine's Day gifts, they get married, they greet each other with pleasantries, they share each other's problems, they lend a helping hand. Jesus is not saying that any of these things are bad, but he is saying do not pat yourself on the back for these things, this is not the fullness of love that I want you to show to other people.

Christian Love goes beyond the pleasantries to something much deeper and more important. Remember that example of the puppy and the mongrel at the beginning of the sermon. Which one are you? I would like to think that there is something about me that is cute and lovable, something good in me that would catch God's eye as he is watching over his creation. Maybe it is the wonderful way that I donate to charity, maybe it is the large sums of money that I give to my church, maybe it is the way that I never have a mean word for anyone, maybe it's my cheerful disposition and that I am always wagging my tail of happiness for all to see. While I think that I am the cute puppy that is worthy of love, what God sees is the three-legged, flea-infested mongrel in the gutter, caked with mud and garbage of sin.

We are sinful. Nothing that we do can ever get rid of those sins. No matter how much better we want to be tomorrow, while we are smiling and saying nice things, we will still sin and gossip about someone, say something unkind or untrue about someone, or even say mean and hurtful things to someone. We know that no matter how many nice words we say or nice things we do, we know there are just as many other heartless words

and actions that infest us like flea all the time. We know that there are people in our life that we either can't or won't forgive and those thoughts of anger, hatred, and vengeance stick with us like mud and garbage caked fur.

As we said, if we saw this picture, not many of us would stop. But God did stop and provided for us something that we could never do for ourselves. Paul says in Romans 5, **But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** God noticed the sin-infected mongrels and he loved us. He sent his Son to provide a way for us to be clean and healthy again. Through the cross, Jesus has lifted us up from our sin-filled gutter, washes us clean of the filth and grime of sin and heals the wounds that sin has caused in our lives. Jesus has shown us *agape* love. He has loved us, who are unlovable. He adopted us and made us his own, even though we don't deserve a bit of that love.

This love goes beyond our understanding, but it is the love that Jesus tells us to reflect to others. We have a message of love to share with all people. Through Jesus we are forgiven, heaven is ours. We have a gift of love to give, not just on Valentine's Day, but every day. We have the truth of Christ to live and to share in this world. This is love for body and soul. It is the Best Love Ever.