Loving Our Enemies

Text: Matthew 5:38-48

Isaiah 55:8, 9: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” The truth expressed in these two verses is a perfect example of God’s thoughts being diametrically at odds, if not outrightly opposed to our human nature. It is not natural to love our enemies, yet the Lord gave us a very clear command concerning this difficult obligation.

I. THE ENEMY DEFINED

The Bible says in I Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:” If I could paraphrase, I would say this verse means, “Stay wide aware and awake because your enemy the Devil is stalking you to bring you and your testimony into utter ruin.” It is in the fallen nature of Satan to hate and destroy. Isaiah 14:12, 13: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!” In pride the Devil attempted to usurp the power of the LORD Most High. Ultimately, the Devil will fail. Isaiah 14:15: “Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.” Matthew 25:41: “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Sadly, those who reject Christ are consigned to an eternity with all the fallen angels and the leader, Lucifer himself. Until then, the Devil is in the earth conscripting the disobedient and unrepentant. And those who choose Christ and obedience to God are the declared enemies of Satan. The Bible says the Devil wants to devour the follower of Christ. The Word devour comes from the word *καταπίνω* (*katapino*) which means to gulp down entirely; to thoroughly waste. Two of Satan’s defining names are disclosed in Revelation 9:11: “And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.” Abaddon = destruction; Apollyon = Destroyer. Jesus said, “The thief (Satan) cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Our Lord pointed out that the Devil lives up to his name!

II. THE ENEMY WITHOUT

It is important to keep in mind that when a Christian is under attack, Satan is the source. John 8:44: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” Those who follow Satan are motivated and driven by the wicked heart of the Devil. This is confirmed in Ephesians 2:2: “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” It will be easier to love those who declare themselves our enemies, if we understand who their father is and that the Devil is the source of their hatred.

From our text, our Lord commands us not to return in kind to those who hate us and design to do us harm. We see the phrase “But I say unto you…” repeated in Mathew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39 and finally in Matthew 5:43, 44: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” Our Lord has given us a golden rule to follow. Luke 6:31: “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” We are commanded to love even people who are not likeable.

III. THE ENEMY WITHIN

The commandment to love our enemies is going to require supernatural intervention. Therefore, we must face the battle within ourselves. Keep in mind the battle is a spiritual one. Ephesians 6:12: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

I John 2:16 describes the threefold battle that we’re in. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” There is a story of a man who did a very dangerous thing in the midst of the American Civil War. He walked between the enemy lines with a grey coat on and blue trousers. He got shot from both sides! Romans 13:14: “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” A Christian will not win while straddling the proverbial fence. We need the tenacity of a Joshua as found in Joshua 24:14 and 15. Through Calvary

and the embrace of the Gospel we may win against Satan himself, the enemy without and the enemy within (Revelation 12:10, 11).

CONCLUSION:

We give to those who do not love us, the unconditional love God gives to us. Ephesians 2:4, 5: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).”

We obey the Lord, such as in the matter of loving our enemies (Romans 12:14-21) and leave the results to God. Ecclesiastes 3:11: "He hath made every thing beautiful in His time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." I examined the eight leading modern Bible translations used by evangelicals and in every case the newer translations have changed Ecclesiastes 3:11 from "His" time for "its" time. When I try to run my life according to random time or my time, the path will lead to disappointment. Let us live our life in joyful acceptance and trust in His time.

Many years ago, I came across this story and although I have heard slightly different versions, my favorite is related by Missionary Lou Nicholes: “Missionary Henry C. Morrison was a great missionary who served the Lord in Africa for over 40 years. On the way back to the United States he began to wonder ‘will anyone remember us?’ Unknown to Henry Morrison and his wife, Teddy Roosevelt, the former President of U.S., was also on board that ship. He had gone to Africa for a hunting trip that lasted nearly a year. When the ship pulled into New York harbor he looked to see if anyone had come to welcome them back home. Thousands of people were there cheering. Bands were playing. There were signs, banners, and billboards everywhere saying, ‘Welcome Home.’ Henry and his wife were so excited about the crowds of people that were there to welcome them home. When they went to get off, they realized that the people were already gone. They had come to welcome Teddy Roosevelt. Henry Morrison went to his hotel room with a heavy heart. As he sat there on the bed, he asked his wife, ‘Honey, I just don’t get it…for 40 years we poured our lives into ministry and service. And yet we come back to America and not a single soul comes to welcome us home!’ His wife came and sat down next to her husband, put her hand on his shoulder and comforted him with words that he would never forget. ‘Henry, you have forgotten something; you’re not home yet!’ Job 16:19: “Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.”

-Pastor Pope-