

Sermon on the Mount – Who is Your Enemy?

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MAIN VERSES

[Matthew 5:21-22](#) • [Matthew 5:27-28](#) • [Matthew 5:38-39](#) • [Matthew 5:43-44](#) • [Mount Psalm 137](#) • [Jeremiah 29:4-7](#) • [Romans 5:10](#) • [Matthew 5](#)

From Murder to Loving Your Enemies

Shabbat Shalom, everybody. Continuing our study on the Sermon on the Mount, and I hope it's still edifying. I know at the beginning, everyone, this is such a blessing, this is so encouraging, and then we start getting into the actual little short messages, and there's less and less of that.

Not a murderer. I didn't kill anybody, but if you have hatred in your heart and bitterness in your heart, then you're convicted in the courts of the kingdom of heaven.

Adultery? Man, I haven't done anything. Yeah, but the moment you objectify someone for your own benefits in your mind, you're convicted in the courts of the kingdom of heaven. That's not encouraging at all.

Then we come to "Eye for an eye." Yes! But Yeshua says, "Hey, why don't you try not? Why don't you try not? Why don't you try not repaying evil with evil?" "Yeah, but that's fair." Well, that's not a word that is an attribute for the kingdom of God. Fair. There's justice, but the accusation of fairness doesn't go in line with self-sacrificial love.

Then we come to loving your enemies. He could have taken an intermission at this point in the sermon—loving the people that you want to hate and that you have support in hating and that the world cheers you on and stripping them of the label of a human being so that you can dehumanize them and demonize them so that you can do things to them or wish things to them in your mind. That's tough.

A Good World Gone Bad Through Violence

And so last week we discussed and observed how the authors of the Bible collectively put together a tapestry telling the story of God and man, the story of a good world gone bad through violence. We saw how in the flood violence does not stop violence, how Israel was formed out of a place of slavery and oppression, how Israel continued on and they were given a mission to be different than the rest of the world, to become the light to all nations. And how when they entered into the land, they instead became the greatest empire on earth is how 1 Kings describes it. At least under the monarchy that only lasted three generations until it failed. King Saul, King David, and King Solomon.

And instead of being a light to the nations, Israel under the Solomon kingship became a society of structure. Structure that divided people by classes. From the wealthy to the poor, slavery was employed even to build God's temple, and silver was as common as stone in Jerusalem, where the revenue to the nation was created by importing weapons of war from Egypt and selling them to surrounding nations, arms dealing and profiting off of war and death.

This led to the downward spiral and the collapse of both Israel and Judah, exiling them from the land and the very gift from God, something that Hebrews calls the rest of God entering into his rest. And during this time when they're exiled in Babylon, the prophets begin to speak and they foretell a time when violence and war would be banned from creation, where guns would become garden tools, chariots would become firewood to keep people warm, where Israelites would produce food and blessing for all. And this would all be led by a new king, one called the Prince of Peace.

When the Jews or Judeans were forcefully exiled out of the land and into the land of Babylon, it was an incredibly humbling experience, as it would be. They found themselves lamenting because of their enslavement and oppression. They found themselves dreaming of one day going home, even with everything stripped from them. At the beginning of [Psalm 137](#), on the banks of Babylon, yearning to be back in Zion. And some had a lot of contempt for being where they are, with oppressors all around. It's understandable, so much so that they were wishing a violent death to the infant children of their oppressors in the end of [Psalm 137](#).

Love the Psalms, but I am surprised that God felt the need to include all of them. Because there's a variety of complaints to God in the Psalms. There's a variety of humanity in the Psalms. And I love that kaleidoscope of emotion.

Seek the Peace of the City

And in the midst of their struggle, as they found themselves in this place, God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 29, starting in verse 4. And he says, go ahead and put it on. He says this: "This is what the Lord says. God Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city, the pagan city, to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it. Because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

Just falling in love with this section of Jeremiah. So what does God tell them to do when they're in exile? They're in a strange place. They've been kidnapped. They watch their family members die. Rape occur in their land. All of their fields razed. All of their homes destroyed. Children taken away. Everyone killed, packed up on carts or made to march across to Babylon, where they're forced to live as the lower, the bottom of the pyramid class.

And God says, rise up, sharpen your swords, make spears. And when the timing's right, impale the Babylonians. Wipe them out, show no mercy, slaughter them as the author of [Psalm 137](#) yearns to do. They all deserve to die because they are the enemies of God. Oh wait, that's not what God says here at all, is it? No. First, God reminds them that he's the one that's in charge. Not Babylon, not them. He also reminds them that the Babylonians didn't carry them away into Babylon. He did. He did it for their crimes against the most helpless and poor among them.

And then he challenges his people: resist violence, resist, resist subversively. Do what they don't expect. "I want you to settle down. I want you to act like this is your home. I want you to build houses in the pagan cities with all the neighbors that don't like you because you're from the land of Judah. I want you to have sons and daughters."

No, I don't want my kids to be going through that. I mean, the end of the world's coming, right? We're there in Babylon. I don't want to have kids and bring them into that world.

God says, no, you don't understand. Have children, sons and daughters, and give them away in marriage and build families and build relationships. Do not decrease, but increase.

And in the very next verses, God says that they'll be enslaved for 70 years, and then God will judge Babylon along with the leaders of Judah whose actions led to all of this. And he says that God will regather them, and he will bring them back into their land—back into his rest. Don't depend on your own efforts to redeem yourself. Allow me to judge the nations and I'll carry you out.

Two Captivities, One Pattern

Gosh, that seems like another story in the Bible, right? It sounds like the Exodus story. It sounds like the Exodus story.

See, we have a few similarities. You guys know that the Bible wasn't randomly stitched together, right? Even the book of Psalms is stitched together in a specific order so that the chapters tell a story. It's a story of the Bible that was meant for us to understand something. And so many times you'll see connections or patterns or hyperlinks or whatever you want to call them—echoes.

And so we have the Exodus story and the exile story. One took place in Egypt with the Israelites when they were enslaved. Remember the whole Passover lamb incident? The Red Sea parting and God redeemed his people. And then you have the exile story where Israel sinned, did the opposite of what God told them to do and be, found themselves sent back—a reset—back into a land of oppression so that he would do it again and bring them back home.

And so in the Exodus story, of course, God tells the duration of oppression to Abraham, remember? Your descendants will be enslaved for 400 years, but I will pull them out. But God says the same thing. He says, you'll be here for 70 years, and then I will redeem you.

In the Exodus story, the Israelites cry out to God, and Jeremiah says, you will cry out to God, and he will hear you. In the Exodus story, the Israelites subverted oppression nonviolently. Throw all the kids in the river. And the midwives said, all right. And it says that God blessed them and they multiplied. Same thing is happening in [Jeremiah 29:5-6](#).

No, you don't kill everybody. That's bad. That's oppressing you. You build houses. You become successful. You become a contributor to the community. In the Exodus story, it says that Israel increased in numbers drastically. And that's what God says through Jeremiah to the Israelites to do in Babylon. You increase in numbers drastically.

Wait, is this going to be another exodus? A greater exodus? In Exodus, they prospered via economic wealth. Not simply when they left and took all the gold. But remember their complaint? They said, man, at least in Egypt, we had infinite all-you-can-eat fish and watermelons and lagoons. We had it all for free. That was a benefit. Prospering in a sense. At least we had all that.

God tells Israel, no, you will pray for the pagan nation and the pagan cities you find and the pagan soldiers and all the pagan neighbors that don't like you. You're going to pray for them and you're going to pray for the well-being in the city and you're going to petition God that blessing and prosperity would come to this place because if they prosper, you're going to prosper.

In the Exodus story, it says that God judged—I will judge the gods of Egypt. And he says the same thing in Jeremiah. I will judge the gods of Babylon. Marduk will fall. And God redeems his people in the Exodus story. And in Jeremiah, God says, I'm going to redeem my people. And I'm going to bring you out of this place and return you home.

And what I want to point out is that both of them leave captivity without killing anyone.

Love Without Discrimination

Save Moses, come home. But leave it better than you left it than you arrived with it. And God says, I'll take care of the rest. And boy, did he do that with the Persians. Israel never had to lift a finger, just like God said earlier in the Torah. But the difficult verse—the difficult verse in [Jeremiah 29](#) is verse 7—where he commands Israel to seek peace and prosperity for this place that is a prison. It's hard to do, isn't it? It's hard to do. It's hard to pray for your oppressors because they're going to benefit as well. God never told them to fight about politics in Babylon. They were not told to wish harm toward any of the kings and leaders because they didn't like them. They were not told to call them names. They were not told to degrade them and mock them. They were told to pray that they prosper in the type of blessing only God can give. And in doing so, you will be set apart as my children. You will be set apart among the sinful.

And so we return to the Sermon on the Mount, where Yeshua is teaching the ethic and the constitution of this arriving kingdom that is crashing into earth, that is so radical that it's uncomfortable. And of course, he says this in [Matthew 5:43](#). Yeshua, the master, the curator of the story of God, says that God loves indiscriminately. And then he tells us we should love indiscriminately. You're not allowed to discriminate against another person when it comes to your love. That means that whatever a person has done, is doing, and will do is not allowed to be considered when it comes to your decision to love them, or bless them, or give to them, or meet their needs, or be their neighbor. Because if you claim to be a son or daughter of God—those are the uncomfortable words of Yeshua. If you discriminate against others and restrict love to only those you deem worthy, you're no different than Hamas or ISIS. Those who personify the label of evil.

The Cost of Exclusivity

Don't even the pagan nations do this, he says? Don't even the tax collectors do this? Worst of the worst. Gosh, when we think about tax collectors, we think of IRS agents, right? Well, it was different, actually. These were fellow Jews under the Roman occupation and oppression of the

first century. Romans were like the Nazis, let's be honest. They would kill for fun and they'd get away with it because they had privilege, like Deputy Sean Grayson assumed he did a few weeks back. As David taught a few weeks ago, they would walk past you and they would make you a mule because they could—class infrastructure—because you were subhuman if you were a Jew. You're just like that if your love is exclusive, is what Yeshua says.

No amens, okay. Sure is fun to sport the title of Christian. So easy to do and it's popular, despite what people want to say. Being a Christian is pretty popular in America. We can proudly boast about it behind our keyboards. We can make huge public displays of faith, not to impact people but to impact our identity. We invoke God. We shove it into the oath of fidelity to empire and tell our kids to say it as part of their education. We love the popular title of Christian, especially in the South. Until it means to acknowledge what Yeshua calls us to actually do and to teach to our children.

I Struggle With This

And I have a confession to make to all of you. I struggle. I struggle with this. And I think it's better to be transparent and admit that you struggle with the words and teachings of Yeshua, of Jesus, instead of trying to conform them to validate where your faith is currently. I struggle with loving my enemies. But I find comfort in how my children listen to me sometimes and make me feel kind of like a good teacher. Sometimes like a good dad. Sometimes, yeah, I did a good job. What's that saying? Practice makes? I tell them all the time. Practice makes perfect. And I know—I know my wife constantly corrects me by saying no, it's practice makes progress. Yes, yes, practice makes progress.

So I challenge you. I challenge you. If you struggle like I do with some of the teachings of Jesus, I challenge you to start practicing. And you can start by simply praying for the most evil and vile people on the planet. You can start by praying blessings over them, by praying that God will be revealed in a way that would be restorative and transformative in their lives—that warriors of empire and greed and lust and violence will become warriors of the kingdom of God. And I believe if you can imperfectly try, you will see God move in and through you in ways that you never allowed him to do before.

Identifying the Enemy

Practice makes progress. How is it that we come to a place where we identify people as our enemies? You ever think about that? Because let's be honest, I mean, the obvious are people

that want to kill us or hurt us or say bad things about us or gossip. Yeah, it's enemies. But we'll watch someone on TV and automatically, yep, label—enemy, right? We will see groups of people that we feel threatened by, whatever demographic, enemy, enemy. They're against me. They're threatening to me. I have fear, so therefore I need to get my defensive mode up. And there's so many answers to that question. How do we come to that place where someone becomes our enemy, that line in the sand.

And I believe, I believe it boils down to a lack of empathy for another. Long journey for me. Because the moment that you have empathy for another person, they become human. They become a human being again. And when I say empathy, I don't mean sympathy. Not at all. I'm not saying I agree with them or anything like that or what they're doing or condoning it. No. No. I mean seeking to understand who someone is and why they do what they do. Just to understand. Even if their understanding is wrong, just seek to understand them. To see them outside of the label that you want to give them.

Labels Strip Away Humanity

We love labels, right? Love it. Especially this season in the United States of America. Love some labels, don't we? Liberal, conservative, gay, terrorist. Fill in the blanks. And these labels are not standardized. I mean, they're relative to who we want to point the gun at, right? The label gun. We'll call anyone any name just to strip their humanity away so that we can feel like we're at the top of the pyramid in the class infrastructure.

And when you come to the understanding that this horrible person who's done horrible things and probably is still horrible and may do horrible things in the future, when you understand that at minimum they're also a father, a son, a brother, a sister, maybe have an education, maybe saw extreme trauma in their lives at some point, maybe they like caramel frappe lattes at Starbucks too, you realize you actually have, even if you don't like it, some things in common. And when you reach that point, you see them as a human being. That's the moment when you're able to pray for them. That's the conduit for getting to the place where you can say the words and say their name to God, not followed by a curse.

The Power of Practice

That's the moment. This is not an endorsement of the things they've done or will do or are doing. No, it has nothing to do with this. Absolutely not. But if we're serious about at least attempting, practicing, practicing to be as our Father in heaven, then we need to be trying. We

need to be making effort, even if it's just a little bit of effort. We need to practice more than we make excuses.

And as a pastor, I'll be honest, I love hearing when someone says they agree with my message. "Yeah, I love your sermon. It was great. It's so encouraging. It's nice." But I don't want you to agree or disagree with this message or even last week's message. I want you to struggle with it. I want you to struggle with it. I want you to struggle. I hope you struggle with the words of Yeshua, the hard words of Yeshua. I hope that you're forced to meditate on them so much that it causes you a little bit of stress in your life. What did he mean and how did he mean for me to do it? I agree, I disagree, I affirm that message. I don't care because that does not produce anything nor does it strengthen the kingdom of God.

Meditate on the Hard Words

I'm not always right. I know, I'm not always right, which is why I don't want to hear my commentary on these words, this teaching of Jesus and leave saying "Good job, pastor. I agree." Because I could be completely off base for how I view the radical nature of Yeshua's teachings. And so I want you to meditate on it. As a believer, as a proclaimed Christian, I want you to meditate on the Sermon on the Mount, specifically the hardest teachings you struggle with. Maybe this isn't one of them. I want you to be bold enough in your Christian faith to attempt to practice it in whatever way you feel like you can or need to practice it.

Man, I love Mahatma Gandhi, despite him not being a Christian. You guys are familiar with Mahatma Gandhi, the revolutionary in India in the early to mid-20th century. See, the British did what the British did, and they had occupied many parts of the world and exploited the land there, and they had occupied India for the purpose of exploiting their resources and exporting them for the benefit of the British Empire at the expense of the Indian people. What an idea, right? India's traditional industries that they thrive in, such as textiles, were undermined by the British imports, leading to widespread poverty of the citizens there and economic dependence. It's the same thing empires have done till this day, even in Africa. Africa is by far the wealthiest continent on all of the planet.

Resources and Revolution

By far the wealthiest. Diamonds, gold, platinum, coffee, oil, tea, to name a short list of resources they are abundant in, but have some of the most areas of poverty that you've probably ever seen on the planet. I wonder why that is, but we never think twice about it. We just say,

"Oh, they need water, they need a well built. We're going to send food and donations, build an orphanage." It's good things, but there's something that's causing it. The British in India imposed heavy taxes on Indian farmers, leading to famines, mass suffering. And Gandhi rose up and he led a revolution—although not perfect. He led a revolution of independence that led to freedom of India from the colonization of the British Empire. Something that our nation should appreciate, right? Liberty, independence. But he didn't do it with violence. He did not do it by mocking the leadership of the empire, spitting or attacking soldiers. He led a revolution based on a religious conviction. And he was a huge fan of the Sermon on the Mount, by the way. He was a huge fan of Jesus. I have some quotes where he kind of expressed that he was disappointed in Christians. He's a huge fan of Jesus. And it was not simply non-violent action. We always hear about the Gandhi movement and the non-violent action because that's the label. It was more than just not killing your oppressors.

Empathy with the Enemy

What he taught and implemented was a full spectrum of empathizing with the enemy. Sounds like he's been reading the Bible, right? Yes. This philosophy led him to reject any form of dehumanization or demonization of the British people, even as he fiercely opposed the colonial system that they represented. Let's sit on that for just a minute. Let that sink in. He was against dehumanizing the British people, even though he fiercely opposed the colonial system that they represented and supported. Did you know you can disagree and oppose a government while loving and wanting blessing for the people that live under it? I don't know. That's something the world doesn't want you to know you can do, by the way, because it's much easier to wrap everyone with one label. He recognized that the British were not his enemies, but rather individuals caught in a system of oppression themselves. His approach was to resist the unjust system without dehumanizing the people enforcing it. He even advocated for reconciliation and friendship with the British after India's independence. Many times he spoke directly to the British officers and the leadership, writing letters and in-person meetings, always showing a level of respect and dignity toward them, understanding their positions while opposing their policies. This empathy made his resistance more about changing hearts than defeating an enemy, because the people were not his enemy. They were humans. They were humans.

A Weapon of the Strong

Do we have the quote? Yeah, go ahead, throw the quote up there. He once said, "Nonviolence is a weapon of the strong. With the weak, it might easily be hypocrisy. Fear and love are

contradictory terms. Love is reckless in giving away, oblivious as to what it gets in return. Love wrestles with the world as with itself and ultimately gains a mastery over all other feelings." Despite this man not being a believer, I really appreciate some of his words. With the weak, it might easily be hypocrisy. We struggle many times because it's in our nature, I believe, because of the nation we're in. We're very pro-revolution in some senses. That's our origin story. The Revolutionary War is our exodus story here in the United States. And so that's what we understand how to do. We always need to have enemies because we always need to fight because we want to be free from everyone, right?

Why We Make Enemies So Quickly

And we're always so quick to identify people as enemies. We're always so quick—even walking through the grocery store, you see someone that looks different, that dresses different, whatever, fits the color in the picture. And instantly, we're uncomfortable because we're scared of them for some reason, maybe something we've seen on TV, or maybe an interaction with someone like them. And then fear leads to bitterness, right? And then bitterness leads to drawing a line in the sand because they are not on my side. It happens so quickly and so easily, doesn't it? Wait until someone pulls in front of you without putting their blinker on. So quick. And we will declare them an enemy by saying a vibrant, poetic song, I'm sure. And many times, we don't even realize we're doing it until we're halfway through all of the words. Right? Anyone? Like, no, it's who we are. Practice, right? Practice. Bless you. Practice. It's a step. It's a step. Yeah, well, in the South, we've inverted the whole thing. You're right. Bless you. You don't want to know what that means, right? We invert it because we understand that it's wrong, so we sugarcoat it to make it a more passive-aggressive form of enemy-izing.

Enemies of God

And then if we really get desperate to identify enemies, we will identify people as the enemies of God. And the thing about identifying someone as an enemy of God is we now have justification to wipe the Sermon of the Mount off the table because we're going to defend God. Okay? Little old you, little old me. And then you begin to imagine what it looks like to destroy the enemies of God. And then you fantasize about destroying the enemies of God. And then you have the Crusades. Enemies of God. God's not big enough, right? It's so funny. People will mock Christianity around the world, even in the United States. Happens all the time, right? We have stereotypes and we want to get so mad that they're doing the thing Jesus said people would do. And that's how we know we just want to get so mad. And I don't think God is threatened by

someone remarking something they don't understand. Enemies of God. Something about that phrase, enemies of God. Paul talks about it in [Romans 5](#), verse 10. He says this. Wait, what does he mean we?

Equal Enemies of God

What if instead of viewing people as our enemies, we view them as enemies of God, just like we are and were? What if we found common ground and empathy in being equal enemies of God? The difference being we've seen the truth and we've been reconciled through our faith, through the death and resurrection of King Jesus Christ. Like if we had that mindset, what would our prayers look like then? What would your prayers look like for the person that you're thinking about right now? They would look like praying that they, too, would be reconciled to God through the overpowering impact of who Yeshua is. And maybe that's where we should start when we try to practice such a difficult skill. Enemies of God. And instead of wanting to defeat them, maybe God is powerful enough to change even their hearts, despite us not really wanting him to. And so what if we prayed that that would take place? What if we tried just a little bit?

Pray for Your Enemy

And so as we close today, during this time of reflection and worship, I want to encourage you to close your eyes, and to pray for your enemy. Simple as that. Who or what it is. Could be a people, could be a whole group, a whole nation, could be a single person. Challenge you during this time, surrounded by your community, who supports you to do that. And if you need prayer today, if you need support for any situation, or if you need someone to help you pray for the unprayable, as we have a prayer team on either side of the stage, you're welcome to have help or encouragement for anything that's going on in your life. And maybe you're here today and that thing, that weight that is indescribable, that may or may not be based in this very thing, maybe that's something you realize you're tired of carrying around. And if that's you today, you can come up for prayer or you can symbolically come up, place it here on the altar. Powerful thing to do. But if that's you today, you don't have to walk out of here with that weight anymore. Let's begin practicing the teachings of Yeshua together as the community of God.

Closing Prayer and Blessing

Avinu Malkenu, our Father, our King, Father, we thank you for this opportunity to challenge ourselves, challenge our hearts, challenge our feelings, challenge our weaknesses and strengths. Father, I know we know your word says that the Holy Spirit that resides in us right now is the

same spirit that gave life to the body of Yeshua. It is that powerful. And we ask in the name of Yeshua that it would do its thing in our lives, in our hearts, that we would learn to practice the hard things as a follower of Yeshua and as your children. That you would make us perfect and complete just like your character in regard to indiscriminately loving Yeshua. That whenever we feel ourselves shutting down the gates, drawing the borders, making our love exclusive, that the same Holy Spirit would challenge us and remind us of the words of our King. We thank you, Father. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Sing Shema with me. Shema Israel Hear, O Israel The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity. May the Lord also cause you to increase and overflow in love for one another and for all people in order to strengthen your hearts as blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all of his holy ones. And may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you his peace. In the name of our Sar Shalom, our Prince of Peace, Yeshua HaMashiach, we pray it. Amen and amen. Shabbat Shalom, family.

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