

## **Love Your Enemies and Pray For Those Who Persecute You!**

Dear Friends, our Gospel today is taken from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It speaks of loving our enemies. Not tolerating them, or vaguely accepting them, but loving them.

Jesus is calling us to move heart, mind and soul away from the morals of the world and into the Way of His Kingdom.

As we heard in our 1<sup>st</sup> reading from Leviticus"

"Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy. You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart..."

In the Gospel, Jesus clarifies the meaning about His Teachings about Retaliation and Love of Enemies with examples:

1. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well.
  - During Jesus' time: A superior could slap a worker or slave with the back of his right hand. Such a slap was meant to insult and humiliate, and show dominance.
  - So, why does Jesus tell these already humiliated people to turn the other cheek?
  - By turning your cheek when struck, you force the one striking you to hit you with an open hand, thus making him face you as an equal.
2. If anyone wants to Sue in court over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well.
  - In Jewish culture, nakedness was considered a grave humiliation, especially for the one who caused another's nakedness.
  - So, if someone makes an unreasonable demand for your tunic, Jesus tells them to give their inner garments as well. This would mean stripping off their clothing and marching out of court stark naked!
  - Leaving the accuser, embarrassed with your outer garment in one hand, your underwear in the other. You have suddenly turned the tables on him and perhaps causing him to repent for his actions.
3. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles.
  - A Roman soldier could compel anyone to carry his pack for one mile, and no more. To force a civilian to go further carried with it severe penalties under military law.
  - By going the second mile on your own, Jesus teaches, you're making the Roman treat you as an equal.

When you love someone in response to their hatred, you confuse and confound them, taking away the very energy that feeds their hatred.

Then Jesus says:

**Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**

In these passages, Jesus calls His followers to a higher standard – than was contained in the Old Testament.

Someone once said to Abraham Lincoln, "Mr. President. I cannot understand you. You treat your enemies with such kindness. It seems that you should want to destroy them." Lincoln answered, "I destroy my enemy when I make him my friend."

Jesus is asking us to Love our Enemies. He is really saying in these times of Trial - Bring My Love and My Mercy to the situation.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Jesus wants us to embrace His love.

Not a superficial huggy-feely love, not an all-accepting generic love that fails to ask anything of us or the other.

A new kind of Love – one that is so deep that it leads all the way to the Cross.

A love so powerful that it can transform not only us as individuals, but even the whole world.

So how do we love someone we do not like. We are not to wish the worst for the person, but the best.

What is the Best – To know God's Love and to have eternal life. Pray that they come to know God's love in their hearts.

Overcome evil with a double dose of good. An evil response only creates even more evil.

The only real, lasting, long term antidote to the violence and evil in our world is the love, mercy, and forgiveness of God – as expressed by those of us who believe in Him.

What do we do, when confronted by someone who dislikes us or says something against what we believe? Do we show mercy and love, or do we engage in confrontation or gossip behind their backs?

Can we give a little more to those in need, forgive a little more those who hurt us, love a little more?

Jesus says today, "You have followed me this far; now join me for the extra mile."

### **Story:**

Two friends were walking through the desert. They had an argument; and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

Later they came to an oasis, where they took a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone: "Today my best friend saved my life."

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "after I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?"

The friend replied "when someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away.

But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

We need to learn to write our hurts in the sand and to carve our blessings in stone.

Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

God is calling us to be Perfected in His Love.

We need to give God permission to perfect us in His Love.

The goal after we die is not gold, it is not silver, it is not cabins or fine cars – IT IS HIM! And this is how we obtain Him.

God Loves You – So you should Love other people.

God Sacrificed everything for you – So you too should sacrifice.

Praise Be Jesus Christ, Now and Forever, Amen!