

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Matthew 5:38-48

Intro: We began our consideration of this Sermon on the Mount with what our Lord had to say about *the character of a child of God*. This, of course, is expanded in greater detail as we go on through the teaching of the NT, but some of the most basic characteristics of a child of God are given in the Beatitudes. And the Lord concluded His teaching of the Beatitudes by telling His disciples that they were “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” And He meant by this that when we manifest the characteristics that our Lord mentioned in the Beatitudes, we will have a positive and valuable influence on the people of this world who by nature live in an entirely different way.

The second thing that the Lord did was to mention that He did not come to destroy the Law which God had given to Moses, but He came to fulfill it. You will see this in Matt. 5:17. But, as I explained when we came to that verse, the Lord did not just say “law,” but He said, “the law, or the prophets.” And this was an expression, common among the Jews, which meant *all of the Old Testament*.

But let me take you for a moment back to that word “fulfill” which the Lord used in Matt. 5:17. What did He mean when He used that word.

There is a very interesting use of this word in the passage from Romans which we had in our SS lesson last Sunday. Please turn with me to Rom. 15:18-20. It is there that the Apostle Paul used this same word which our Lord used. Let me read those three verses to you, and then I will point out where Paul used this word “fulfill.” (Read.)

18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,

19 Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

20 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.

The word “fulfill” is found in the last statement of verse 19, but here it is translated, “fully preached.” *This is exactly what our Lord was doing. He was explaining more fully the true meaning of the Old Testament.* The scribes and Pharisees sought to enforce the letter of the teaching of the

OT, but they knew little or nothing about the true meaning of Scripture. For example, they felt very smug if they had not actually killed someone, but they paid no attention to feelings of anger and hatred which were in their hearts, apparently unaware that these are the feelings that lead to murder. And you will remember that it was these scribes and Pharisees who had no hesitation about killing our Lord, and our Bibles tell us that even Pilate knew that it was because of the envy in their hearts that they wanted to have the Lord crucified. After he had asked whether they wanted Christ or Barabbas to be set free, and they wanted Barabbas, we read this about Pilate: “For he knew that for envy they had delivered him” (Matt. 27:18). The Jews had no concern for the envy that was in their hearts, but it was their envy which led to their murder of the Lord Jesus.

That is why the Lord was explaining various matter in the Old Testament to His disciples, and informing them that their righteousness had to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if they expected to be saved. It was not that they were saved by works, but he meant that a truly saved person will not only be concerned about certain sins, but also with the sins which lead to greater sins. So our Lord was *fully preaching* the message of the Old Testament.

Now let us turn to our text for today.

We have seen that there are *six times* in this chapter that the Lord said something like this: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,” and then He followed that with, “But I say unto you.” You will see this in:

- 1) Vv. 21, 22.
- 2) Vv. 27, 28.
- 3) Vv. 31, 32.
- 4) Vv. 33, 34.
- 5) Where we are today: vv. 38, 39.
- 6) Vv. 43,44.

Today I am going to take us the last two, as I did with 2) and 3) because they have a relationship with each other. Vv. 38-42 have to do with getting even with those who do something wrong against us, and vv. 43-48 have to do with the way we are to treat our enemies. Actually, verse 48 has to do not only with this last matter that the Lord took up, but with all that He had said from the beginning of this message. But we will come to that at the end of the message today. Now let us look at this fifth section which we have in verses 38 to 42. And you can be sure that the disciples would not find what our Lord was teaching here exemplified in the lives or the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. The first of these last two has to do with the OT command:

I. “AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH (Matt. 5:38-42).

The command to which the Lord was referring is found in Ex. 21:24-25:

- 24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

The purpose of laws like this was twofold:

- 1) It was to help the people understand what sin was.
- 2) It was given for the purpose of restraining sin by declaring what the consequences, or punishment, would be.

As far as the scribes and Pharisees were concerned, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that they made two mistakes. They tended to forget that decisions of this nature were to be decided by judges, and not by individuals for themselves. And, secondly, they were insistent that this be observed to the letter. They were like many people today who insist on having their own rights. They were not interested at all in restraining people from taking full advantage of the Law. And that was one major point where our Lord differed from the scribes and Pharisees.

We need to be careful about making more of this than our Lord intended. When the Lord said, “Resist not evil,” He was not saying that nations should not have armies, nor that cities should not have police. He was not saying that parents should not protect their children. Instead, He was speaking of personal offences which we all experience at one time or another.

Furthermore, the Lord was seeking to teach His disciples to be unselfish. There is such a tendency for all of us to forget that we don’t have anything that the Lord has not given us. And more than that, what He gives to us is not really ours, but it still belongs to Him, and we are to use what He gives us for His glory by doing with it what will be pleasing to the Lord. Even our time belongs to the Lord.

In our Bible reading for yesterday we concluded reading 1 Chronicles. In those chapters we see how the people of Israel gave for the construction of the temple. They brought an abundance of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and even their precious stones. And they all gave willingly! This is what is so pleasing to the Lord. After the offering was made, David led in a prayer of praise, and, among other things, this is a part of his prayer:

- 11 Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven

and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

12 Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.

13 Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

14 But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee (1 Chron. 29:11-14).

What a happy day it is in all of our lives when we learn this! Of course, we are to take care of the things that the Lord gives us, but all that we have is the Lord's, and all that we have is to be used for His glory.

One of the most self-destructive practices of this present day is the way we are taught to insist upon our rights. It makes people even more selfish, and if we live this way it makes us demand our rights even when we are making it hard for other people for us to take what we want. But let us remember this concerning the Sermon on the Mount: The Lord was speaking to His disciples, and He was teaching them how believers are to live. No unbeliever is going to find it in his heart to live according to Scripture. It is only after we are saved that we see the wisdom of doing God's will even when it causes us to make ourselves the servants of others.

We still need our armies, and we certainly need our policemen and firemen. And we must defend our homes against all intruders. There is nothing wrong with having a burglar alarm in your home, and even on your car. But, as the same time, where legitimate needs exist in the lives of others, it is for us to help where we can. People don't always go to the extremes that are mentioned in this passage, but if they do, we need to consider going even beyond their requests. It is from verse 21 that the expression comes, *going the second mile*.

But now let us go on to the second part of our text: verses 43-48.

II. "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES" (Matt. 5:43-48).

The scribes and Pharisees taught that the Jews were to hate their enemies, and there was certain justification for this from the Old Testament although there is no such commandment given in the OT – that they were to love their neighbors, but hate their enemies. Now the scribes and Pharisees taught that other Jews were their neighbors, and that all Gentiles were

their enemies.

You can see how they would feel this way living under Rome, and because of the way the Jews had suffered throughout their history under Gentile nations, *e.g.*, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, etc. Also they were told in Deut. 23 some strong words about the Ammonites and the Moabites.

Listen to these words:

3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever:

4 Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.

5 Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.

6 Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever (Deut. 23:3-6).

Also, when the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they were told to kill everyone.

So there was much evidence for what the scribes and Pharisees taught, but they took a truth that applied to certain circumstances, and made a general law out of it – which the Lord never intended to be done!

But what did the Lord say? See verse 44. (Read.)

What would be the objective? It would be to make friends out of those who were enemies. But it was not to make friends just to have friends. It was to make friends for their own benefit, that through the kindness of those who believe, those who formerly were enemies might be saved!

But how does this come about? Verse 45 tells us. “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” The verb “be” which our Lord used here lit. means *to become*. It does not mean that we become the children of God by what we do toward our enemies, *but that this is what we become in their eyes because this is not the usual way that enemies treat each other*. So again we see how different the life of a child of God is from the people of the world.

The Apostle Paul picked up on this truth in his letter to the church at

Rome when he wrote the words we find in Rom. 12:19-21:

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

But the Lord Jesus made another point, and this is what covers all that we have learned from Matthew 5. I am referring to verse 48. (Read.)

You see, the kind of a life that our Lord was portraying was descriptive of God Himself – and we know that if it described our heavenly Father, it is descriptive also of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 45 with what it says about the sun and the rain, is partial evidence of the character of God. And so are verses like Rom. 5:7-10:

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

And what about praying for our enemies? Could we have any greater illustration that our Lord's prayer from the Cross as He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). That was surely a prayer for His enemies.

Concl: Such behavior as our Lord was describing in these two sections we have been considering today, is only possible by the grace of God. It is completely foreign to what man is by nature. When people do things to us which we don't like, it is only natural for us to get back at them in the same way, or even worse. And we are inclined to be glad when something bad happens to someone who has been our enemy. But all of that is apart from the grace of God. When we are saved, we begin to have an eternal perspective to what we think and what we do. We see people as eternal souls, doomed to spend eternity in hell, of rescued by the grace of God, and destined for heaven. God knows what He is doing in every life, but it is a part of His plan to use those who have been saved to reach those

whom He intends to save. And the more our lives show that God is our heavenly Father, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior, the greater our effectiveness will be as *the children of our Father Who is in heaven.*

So verse 48 tells us what Matthew 5 is saying to each one of us. We need to be “perfect” as our Father in heaven is “perfect.”

The tense of the verb “be” in this last verse of the chapter is future. And so lit. it could be translated, *And ye [emphatic] shall be perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is now perfect.*

Some day we will be completely perfect as God is, but until that day we are to be making daily progress in that direction. We will never make perfection in this life, but the work of God in our hearts will be complete the moment we see our blessed Lord. Until then, we must say what the Apostle said to the Philippian church in the epistle he wrote to them:

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing (Phil.3:12-16).

God never asks us to do anything but what He will enable us to do what He says. And so, as difficult and even impossible as this life seems from what we have already learned in this Sermon on the Mount, let us take our Lord at His Word, and believe that by His grace we can be what He tells us to be, and that our lives can show His glory even in this sinful world.