

Love in the Kingdom

Kingdom Living #7 - Pastor Gary Combs - May 11, 2025 Mother's Day - Matthew 5:38-48

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing our sermon series today entitled, KINGDOM LIVING. It's an expositional study of Christ's Sermon On the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Many have described it as the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived. It describes what life looks like in His kingdom—a kingdom that is radically different from the culture of this world.

Today, we'll be focusing on Matthew 5:38-48. We've titled this sermon: LOVE IN THE KINGDOM because it addresses King Jesus' call to a love that is greater than the world's kind of love.

Need: Have you ever been wronged so deeply that your first instinct was to strike back? Maybe it was a harsh word, a betrayal, or someone who simply made your life miserable. The world teaches us to stand our ground, defend our rights, and get even. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers us a different way—a kingdom way.

Trans: Jesus calls His followers not to live by the law of retaliation but by the law of love. Kingdom love doesn't play by the world's rules. It refuses revenge. It reaches across enemy lines. And it reflects the heart of God. What does love in the kingdom look like according to Jesus?

BODY: In the gospel of Matthew 5:31-37, Jesus taught His disciples that true righteousness in the kingdom of heaven required a greater love than what was taught by the religious leaders of that day. As Kingdom citizens, we can answer Christ's call to live according to His greater love. How can we answer Christ's call to this greater love? The text gives three ways we can answer Christ's call to a greater love.

Read text: Matthew 5:38-48 (ESV) ³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

CHRIST CALLS US TO A GREATER LOVE THAT...

1. Responds with grace, not retaliation.

EXP: (38-42) This greater kind of love, God's kind of love, shows grace and mercy, rather than retaliation.

"You have heard" (38) - This is the 5th of 6 antitheses that Jesus declared.

"Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" (38) Refers to the law of retaliation, whereby a punishment resembles the offense committed in kind and degree. In Latin, *Lex Talionis*.

"I say to you" (39) (ἐγὼ λέγω, *egō legō*) - emphatic use of "I" again. "I, I say." Jesus redefines the law of retaliation—this wasn't permission for personal vengeance but civil justice in the OT. See Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 19:18-21 (ESV) ¹⁸ The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, ¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. ²⁰ And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. ²¹ Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

"Resist" (39) (ἀνθίστημι, *anthistēmi*) - to set one's self against, to withstand, resist, oppose; retaliate.

"One who is evil" (39) (πονηρός, *ponēros*) - evil, wicked one. What does this look like? 4 examples:

1) **"Slaps..right cheek" (39)** (δεξιὰν σου σιαγόνα, *dexian sou siagona*) - Why the right cheek? In the context of ancient social customs, striking someone on the right cheek implied a backhanded slap, a more insulting act than an open-handed slap. This act was considered a form of public affront and disrespect.

"Turn to him the other" (39) (στρέφω, *strophō*) - Turn to them the left cheek. "We are to be as the anvil when bad men are the hammers" (Spurgeon). "Depicts the strong man whose control of himself and love for others is so powerful that he rejects absolutely every imaginable form of retaliation" (Stott, *Sermon*, 116).

2) **"Sue you and take your tunic" (40)** (κρίνω, *krinō*) - to judge; to sue. Take tunic as collateral until repaid.

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"Have your cloak as well" (40) (ἱμάτιον, *himation*) - the upper garment, the cloak or mantle. If he takes your inner garment then give him your outer one as well. "The more costly garment of the two ... it is wise rather to surrender more than is demanded." (Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers)

3) **"Forces you" (41)** (ἀγγαρεύω, *angareuō*) - to press into public service, compel to go. "A word of Persian origin. Something the Jews would have experienced through both Persian and Roman rule.

"Go one mile" (41) (μίλιον, *milion*) - Lit., "1000 paces." The standard that Roman soldiers could demand.

"Go ... two miles" (41) - "Go the extra mile."

4) **"Beggars from you... do not refuse" (42)** (ἀποστρέφω, *apostrophō*) - to turn away; refuse.

ARG: Christ is our example to follow:

1 Peter 2:21-23 (NIV) ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Paul says that we are to overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:9-21 (ESV) Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good... Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ...Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

ILL:

Corrie Ten Boom forgave concentration camp guard: In 1947, while speaking at a church in Munich, Corrie encountered a man who had been one of the cruelest guards at Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she and her sister Betsie had been imprisoned. After her talk, the man approached her, expressing that he had become a Christian and sought her forgiveness for the atrocities he had committed. Corrie was initially overwhelmed with anger and pain, recalling the immense suffering she and her sister endured. She described the moment as one of the most challenging she had ever faced. She prayed silently, asking Jesus for help, and then extended her hand to the former guard. As she did, she felt a surge of warmth and peace, leading her to say, "I forgive you, brother! With all my heart!"



APP:

This is Christ's call to His kingdom citizens: Love responds with grace, not retaliation. But you ask, "What about when we might be called to be soldiers or police?" Or what about the calling to protect our families?

Romans 13:1-8 (ESV) Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ...For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

So there are exceptions where God calls us to take up "the sword" under His ordained authority, but as individuals we are called to self-denial. Who has wronged you recently? A co-worker? Family member? Spouse? Don't repay evil with evil. Choose grace. Extend mercy. That's the greater love of the kingdom!

2. Reaches beyond friends to enemies.

EXP: (43-47) The command to love neighbors was twisted by the Pharisees into permission to hate enemies. Jesus rejects that. Instead, He calls us to love our enemies.

"You have heard...but I say" (43) - This is the 6th of 6 antitheses that Jesus declared.

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"Love your neighbor" (43) (ἀγαπάω, *agapaō*) - unconditional love (πλησίον, *plēsion*) a neighbor.

"Hate your enemy" (43) (μισέω, *miseō*) - to hate, (ἐχθρός, *echthros*) enemy. "The scribes made an interpretive step and drew a faulty conclusion. To love your neighbor, they argue, has the natural corollary of hating your enemy. What could be more logical? On the contrary, what could be more unlike God?" (Akin).

"Love your enemies" (44) - Jesus completely flips the teaching of the rabbis. "Jesus, in essence, transforms our enemies into neighbors, something the Word of God always intended" (Akin, 85).

"Pray for those who persecute" (44) (προσεύχομαι, *proseuchomai*) - to offer prayers (διώκω, *diōkō*) to persecute. As Jesus hung on the cross, he prayed, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

"Love those who love you" (46) - Loving like the Father means not only loving those who love you back.

"Tax collectors" (46) (τελώνης, *telōnēs*) - publicans; a tax gatherer. "Tax collectors were despised and hated in Jesus's day. They were viewed as traitors to their own people in their service to Rome" (Akin, 88).

"Greet only your brothers" (47) (ἀσπάζομαι, *aspazomai*) - to salute one, greet. Only welcome brothers?

"Gentiles" (47) (ἐθνικοὶ, *ethnikoi*) - the nations, the Gentiles, those outside the Hebrew faith.

ARG: In Luke's parallel passage, Jesus is recorded saying:

Luke 6:27-28 (ESV) "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ...And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."

ILL: **Stephen prayed for those who stoned him.** Acts 7:59-60 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

APP: Who do you consider your enemy right now? Is it someone who disagrees with your faith? A former friend? A political opponent? Pray for them. Bless them. That is the radical love of the kingdom.

3. Reflects the perfect character of our Father.

EXP: (45, 48) Why should we love this way? Why not just act like everyone else? Jesus answers that: because this is how our Father loves. His love is impartial, generous, and undeserved.

"Sons of your Father" (45) (υἱός, *huios*) - those whom God esteems as sons. children of God.

"Makes the sun rise" (45) - an example of God's unconditional mercy and love.

"Evil and good" (45) - these mercies of God are impartial.

"Sends rain" (45) (βρέχω, *brechō*) - to water with rain. God is active in His creation, sending rain on all.

"Just and unjust" (45) (δίκαιος, *dikaïos*) - again the impartiality of God's work

"Perfect" (48) (τέλειος, *teleios*) - brought to its end, finished, completeness; perfect. "In us that attainment implies growth... In God the perfection is not something attained, but exists eternally, but we draw near to it and become partakers of the divine nature when we love as He loves." (Ellicott)

ARG: What is the first mark of God's perfect character? Love. God is love.

1 John 4:7-8 (ESV) ⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

ILL: In 2017 on a mission trip to Uganda, I was able to work with with five pastors from one of the United Nations refugee camps located there. One of the refugee pastors was Emmanuel. He was a refugee from the genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994. Nearly his entire family was murdered when the Hutu majority systematically killed over 800,000 Rwandans from the Tutsi and Pygmy Batwa people groups.



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After hearing his story, I asked him to write it down for me:

"I was six years old when the 1994 genocide that took place in Rwanda. My entire family was murdered, my grandfather, aunts, uncles, everyone... but my mother, sister, and myself who hid. My mother struggled with mental problems and I grew up wanting revenge. As I grew, I planned to join the army so I could have a weapon to revenge those neighbors who had murdered my family. But before I could join, I received a sponsorship to attend school in Kampala, Uganda. When I reached Kampala, it was only then that I realized it was a Bible school. I found my self studying God's word which was not even in my thoughts.

Day by day transformation took place in my life. After reading Romans 3:23, I was convicted that not only those who killed my relatives are sinners but even me too am a terrible sinner and again the Bible tells us even to love our enemies. To understand this was very hard for me but slowly by slowly, God changed me.

I spent there 3 years in the Bible school and I went back to Rwanda. I called my mother and sister and I began to teach and tell them how God had transformed my life. They were amazed because they saw me with a heart of forgiving others. I preached to them and told them how Jesus took away our sins and put them on the cross so that we can get eternal life. They received the message and believed what the Bible says but when I told them to forgive those who killed our relatives, to understand what I was telling them became hard for them. So I kept on praying so that God can change their hearts.

Later, they came to believe what I told them, so I called those who had killed our family to our home so that we could forgive them. Even though it was not their request of forgiveness but I called them and cooked for them and we shared food and drinks with them and I opened Romans 3:23, we all started crying and we forgave them and we also asked them forgiveness because we were in the process of revenging to them and on their children.

We embraced each other and I prayed for them. Since then my Mum has been sharing with our so-called enemies what ever they have and I am going on preaching the Gospel to those who are suffering in sin.

I thank the almighty God who sent Jesus Christ to save me. By now I am a child of God, a new creation, no judgement is on me and I believe that Jesus Christ will not leave me. Glory be to Jesus who saved me and He has given me a beautiful wife and a daughter.

My hope is that Jesus Christ who saved me while I was a terrible sinner will not fail to save others through his powerful blood." – Pastor Byamungu Emmanuel, August 2, 2017 at Rutare, Uganda

APP: Ask yourself: Does my love reflect the heart of my Father? Do I show mercy, grace, and kindness to others the way He does to me? This kind of love is evidence that we truly belong to Him.

CONCLUSION: God's kind of love isn't natural. It goes against every instinct we have. But it's the very kind of love Jesus showed us. He responded with grace to His accusers. He loved His enemies. He reflected the Father perfectly. And now He calls us to follow in His footsteps.

So how can you answer Christ's call to greater love?

- Respond with grace, not retaliation.
- Reach beyond friends to enemies.
- Reflect the perfect character of your heavenly Father.

Let's ask the Lord to so transform our hearts that we are truly able to love one another as God loves us. Christlike love. The kind of love that changes the world.

Let's pray.