

**Series:** From Israel to Everyone: Disciples who Demonstrate God's Presence (a study of Matthew).

**Sermon Text:** 5:38-48 Supernatural Love  
(to ask questions)

(See App for lesson, slides, and

### **From Natural Instinct to Supernatural Love**

Imagine traveling miles and miles by foot to stand on a country hillside in Galilee. You are part of this melting pot of many diverse groups, huddled close and crowded by people you don't necessarily like, to listen to a young Rabbi who speaks unlike anyone you have ever heard. Up until this moment, life has been defined by legalistic lines that confined them to these fractured groups. But they knew exactly who they were, because they knew exactly who to hate. Hate the Roman soldiers who can legally humiliate you, rip you from your business, and force you to carry their heavy military gear. Hate the tax collector. Hate the Samaritans. And if we see correctly, it was easy to carry quite the resentment toward their own religious leaders, who had turned God's holy laws into a sterile, exhausting game of the moral elite-versus-everyone-else.

The oppressed came to this mountain, some hungry for relief and some hungry for a revolution. The crowd is restless with anticipation. Jesus stands up looking at all of them and says exactly what their eager hearts want to hear: ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Yes! Finally! Justice is coming.*** He tells them that they are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and that **He** has come to fulfill every single promise of the law. I imagine they're on the edge of their seats. But then, Jesus begins to pull back the curtain on what His revolution actually looks like. And now the crowd is really listening. He looks at the anger that's harboring in our chests and says it's the same as murder. He looks at the hidden, secret desires of our eyes and says it's the same as adultery. He calls for absolute truth in our speech, demanding a transparency that strips away our masks. **Piece by piece, Jesus is not changing the rules; He is entirely dismantling our defense mechanisms.** He is showing us that a righteousness that *"surpasses the Pharisees"* isn't about trying harder; it's about a completely transformed heart by the Holy Spirit. And right when the tension on that hillside reaches a boiling point, Jesus takes all this internal theology, this deep, hidden heart-work, and walks it right out into the messy and

cruel reality of their lives. He looks at a crowd of oppressed, bruised, and angry people, and he points directly at the Roman occupiers, their perceived enemy, and addresses the one thing every human heart naturally screams for when it has been wronged: **retaliation**.

Let's read beginning at *verse 38: You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* *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. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.* Turning the other cheek, relinquishing your belongings, and absorbing the violence of hostile neighbors, these are radical Christ following ethics, not only for Jesus' audience in their time, but also for us in ours. Jesus' "*but I say to you*" statements completely reframe the entire battlefield of human relationships. He asks us to refuse retaliation against flesh-and-blood oppressors. How incredibly difficult is that? It's difficult because, just like ancient Israel, we easily become blind to our true covenant enemy, Satan, and the hidden realities of spiritual warfare. We trick ourselves into thinking the real enemy is across the backyard fence, or on the opposite side of the political aisle. Real transformation requires transitioning away from this defensive, worldly error that weaponizes neighborliness into horizontal hostility. We see this exact defensive blind spot exposed in Luke 10, when an expert in the law tries to corner Jesus by asking, "*And who is my neighbor?*" The lawyer wanted a line drawn to justify himself. But by demanding that we absorb abuse without striking back, Jesus reveals that a neighbor isn't someone who qualifies for our affection. A neighbor is simply anyone created in God's image who is standing in front of us, even the one acting like an enemy.

To see how this cross-shaped perspective changes everything, let's read **what Jesus said about being children of our heavenly Father** in *verses 43-48: You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Our human nature instinctually divides the world into an “us” and a “them.” And if we are completely honest, our egos secretly love having an enemy. It kind of serves a purpose, doesn't it? We see it in every stage of life: Our kids **pick sides on the playground**, they **leave someone out at the lunch table**, our older kids might talk **about the other group on social media**. For our sports fans, it's a **bitter rivalry. For my wife, Lisa, that's Michigan**. From where do we genuinely learn to detest people? It doesn't stop when we grow up, does it? For adults, it turns into **hating that annoying coworker, seething over a toxic ex-spouse, or dividing over political parties and adults turn it into wars**. Whether it's an online troll hiding behind a keyboard or a family member who relentlessly ridicules you at the family gathering, someone who betrayed you, having an enemy makes us feel self-righteous--justified. It lets us draw a circle around our group and look down on everyone outside of it. Sometimes that circle is just around you. Having an opponent gives our ego a false sense of superiority, a false sense of satisfaction.

In Matthew 5, Jesus completely flips our worldly script. He invites us into a radical lifestyle that loves the very people who push our buttons. His audience had weaponized Leviticus 19:18. By taking advantage of the commandment's silence on defining who a “**neighbor**” actually is, Israel had orally manufactured a convenient loophole, adding: “**and hate your enemy**.” In Luke 10 after Jesus answers the lawyer's question with the greatest 2 commandments, that religious lawyer asks Jesus, “*And who is my neighbor?*” He wanted that boundary line drawn; he wanted justification for hating an enemy and his shallow moralism so he could check a box in his lawfulness. When Jesus commanded his followers to love their enemies, His audience immediately thought of their bitter geopolitical rivals: Rome and Samaria. But we see in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, it forces line-drawers to admit that a despised outsider is the one actually mirroring the Father's heart.

Human love is transactional; it rewards good behavior to maintain a sense of control. God's supernatural love is entirely different. In Christ, our source of love shifts from our easily exhausted human instincts to His infinite, indiscriminate grace. When Jesus commands, **"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"** In context, this isn't a demand for flawless performance to earn salvation. Brandon taught us this Greek word *"telos"* last week. This perfection is more of a destination of spiritual formation driven by an intentional purpose or final design. The old way of living looks at the person in front of us to see if they qualify for our kindness. The new way looks at the Cross behind us to remember that none of us qualified for the mercy God gave us while we were still His enemies. **So, when human ethics become grounded in a divine, vertical framework** love stops being a transaction based on merit and becomes an overflow of mercy based on grace.

### **Conclusion: The Kingdom Anchor and the True Enemy**

As we navigate this tension between our natural human instinct and supernatural ability to love our enemies (neighbor), we must avoid a dangerous misunderstanding. Loving your enemy is never an invitation, nor an obligation, to remain in abusive circumstances, nor does it mean abandoning biblical civil justice. In the kingdom of God, loving an adversary or even an abuser simply means relinquishing personal malice and actively desiring their ultimate restoration. But how is this supernatural lifestyle even possible without burning out? It requires the Holy Spirit, a real spiritual anchor. If you try to live out the horizontal commands of ***Matthew 5: turning the other cheek or loving people who hate you*** by raw human effort, it quickly devolves into exhausting moralism. You cannot give what you do not have. You can only live this supernatural lifestyle when you're anchored in the Heavenly Father's New Creation identity through Jesus, indwelt with the Holy Spirit who sanctifies your eternal safety.

We see the ultimate model of this anchor during the trial of Jesus. Standing before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, Christ perfectly embodied the divine perfection and radical non-retaliation of ***Matthew 5***. When falsely accused, struck in the face, and stripped of His clothing, the King of kings refused to summon legions of angels

to enforce His rights. Instead, He willingly walked the ultimate Roman mile to the cross, absorbing the physical violence of mankind to disarm our true covenant enemy, Satan. **Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and vertically anchored Himself in the Father's love and the Holy Spirit came upon Him so He could endure the horizontal horror of the cross.** He shows us that our earthly abusers are not the true enemy; they are captives of Satan, the true enemy. By refusing to strike back at flesh and blood, Jesus directed His warfare vertically, conquering the dark spiritual powers of the devil through the power of sacrificial grace horizontally. In short, your identity in Christ is the root; your love for your neighbor is the fruit. You cannot have one without the other.

By nature, we are wired to draw lines and fight battles. But the Gospel changes everything. When we realize how much mercy we've been given, when we hand our desire for payback over to a just God, and when we exercise our supernatural ability to love difficult people together as a church family, we don't look like the rest of the polarized, fragmented by hate world. We start looking like Jesus. And that is a witness this tired, fighting world desperately needs to see. Let's work on undrawing some of our boundary lines. But we don't do it alone do we? We take these steps together.

**Sunday to Monday Connection:** Jesus reminds us that loving people isn't just about trying harder; it flows from knowing how deeply we've been loved by God. We naturally draw lines: Who deserves my love? Who's my enemy? But the Gospel moves us from "Do they qualify?" to "How can I be a neighbor?" Because Christ loved us when we didn't qualify, we can extend that same grace to difficult people.

- **Question:** Who is someone I've quietly placed outside the circle of people I'm willing to love?
- **Next Step:** This week, pray for that person by name, asking God to replace your natural response with His supernatural love and then look for one simple way to be a neighbor to them.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to explore what all this might mean for you, please speak with someone you know here or one of our church leaders.

**Takeaways to discuss with your people** (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. Read Matthew 5:38-42. “An eye for an eye” was originally meant to limit revenge. How does Jesus push past mere restraint into active, non-retaliatory generosity?
2. The Extra Mile: Jesus mentions turning the cheek, giving your cloak, and walking the second mile. How do these actions reclaim dignity rather than accepting defeat? What does ‘walking the second mile’ look like in a culture where everyone is fiercely protective of their personal time, money, and rights?
3. The Extra Mile Action: Identify a situation this week where someone demands something of you, frustrates you, or takes advantage of your time. Instead of retaliating or complaining, choose to serve them with “second mile” generosity.
4. Read Matthew 5:43-45. Loving friends is easy; loving enemies is unique to God's family. Who are the “enemies” or difficult people in our culture or personal lives today that we struggle to love?
5. The Father's Example: Jesus points out that God sends rain and sunshine on both the good and the bad. What does this tell us about God’s posture toward those who actively reject Him?
6. Read Matthew 5:46-48. When Jesus commands us to be “perfect” (teleios), He is calling us to an undivided, mature love. How does praying for those who hurt or oppose us begin to heal and mature our own hearts?
7. The Enemy Prayer List: Write down the name of one person, group, or public figure whose actions or views trigger anger or hostility in you. Commit to praying daily for their blessing, heart transformation, and good this week.

### **Considerations for discussion leaders:**

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

**Other Articles/Songs/Videos:** Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- Bible Project - Gospel of the Kingdom [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Heaven and Earth [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Temple [Videos](#).
- Bible Project – Day of the Lord [Podcast episodes](#).

### **Quotes related to this passage:**

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