



TIME OF GRACE®

What Is Love? I'm Supposed to Love "Those" People?

Study Notes

Summary

We live in a world of us-them, a culture of our people-their people. Such divisions are often the line where love stops, even among those who confess Jesus as their Lord and their Savior. Yet Jesus himself urged his first disciples to love not only one another but also the “other,” the enemy, the outsider, and the unlike-us people in their lives. Our Lord does the same thing today, encouraging us to treat them like our Father has first treated us.

- **Matthew 5:43** You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor^[a] and hate your enemy.’
- **Matthew 5:44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
- **Matthew 5:45** ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
- **Matthew 5:46,47** ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?
- **Matthew 5:48** ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
- Love _____ ” _____ ”.

Points to Ponder

1. Reflect on the past three church services you attended. Were the messages both tough and tender towards Christians and non-Christians, Republicans and Democrats, the rich and the poor, etc.? Read Romans 1-3 and consider how Paul spoke the truth to the different groups of people who attended the church at Rome.
2. How diverse is the group of people you do life with? How does diversity both test and prove your ability to love other people?
3. Meditate on the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37). What connections do you see with today's message on love?

Homework for Next Week

Read Revelation 1:9-20

Time of Grace Ministry
What Is Love? I'm Supposed to Love 'Those' People?
Matthew 5:43 - 48
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For the past few weeks here at church, we have been talking about what love looks like in the Bible. I am not going to re-preach all three of those messages to you. You can find them online. But basically, we have talked about how love, in the biblical sense, is both tough and it is tender, but it is much more tender than tough. We learned that Jesus himself is God in human flesh, and was both tough and tender, not just with his people, but with all people. We have talked about how so much of life is based on the priority of the things you love most, and second, and third on your list. But the one thing we really have not dug into is "them", the way that we treat "those" people who are much different than our people. You know, those people who do not behave like we behave. They do not believe the same things that we believe. The order of their priorities and loves is very different than ours. Their priorities, their values, are way different. We have not talked about that just yet. So, if I gave you a second to think about it, and asked - who are those people for you? Who are the people that, as soon as you hear their name or they walk into the room, like something immediately happens in your heart, that the blood pressure spikes, things get a little tense, the tone of your voice changes?

If I gave you a moment, could you think of those people? Now, those people might be a whole group of people, an entire demographic. Maybe you are passionate about your, kind of right-wing, Republican political views, and you know, whenever you see someone who is very liberal, and progressive, and talking about justice - like, before they even speak, you get a little bit nervous. Or, maybe it is just the opposite. You are on the progressive side of the political spectrum. Whenever someone waves the Donald Trump flag and posts about Republican values, you just feel it. It is tense, it is hard to be patient, it is hard to be kind.

Maybe it is a religious thing. When you meet people who do not care about church, they do not care about Jesus, they do not believe in anything - they are proud of it. They think church is bad, religion is toxic, it leads to oppression and injustice. Maybe when you are in the presence of those people, it is tough to relax. Maybe when you see the queer, questioning their gender - you know, a person who is loud, and proud, and out, and posting about it every single day, it happens. Or, maybe when you see a guy like me - straight, cisgender, white, middle class, religious.

Or, maybe "those" people for you are individual people. Can you think of a girl at your school that when you see her in the hallway, like, something happens in your heart? Or, maybe a member of your family that you just do not like to be in the same room with because things get heated really quickly? Is there that guy from work, right? That stops by your door and you are

suddenly very busy and you cannot be interrupted, when if someone else stopped by your door, you would close your laptop and give them your full attention?

See, we have been learning in the Bible that love is both tough and tender, that love is sometimes patient, and kind, and compassionate, and sometimes it is strong and unyielding, and it protects what is good and right. It calls out, it demands repentance. Love does both of those things and I think that is actually the logical problem. Because when you think about "those" people, there is probably something in their life that needs to be changed, that should be called out, that God would want to be corrected. And so, when you are tough with them, it is not necessarily biblically wrong. The problem, I would suggest, is when you are only tough with them and only tender with "your" people. Friends, today I want to tell you why that is such a dangerous thing for us. If you and I reserve our compassion, our tenderness, our kindness, our fully biblical love for "our" people, and "those" people do the same thing towards us - like, our culture, our world, our families, our church, will be ripped apart at the seams.

Even worse, we will think we are loving people because we give to some, and we helped that one friend move, and we gave that one gift to that person in need at church, and we were so patient, and so kind, and so generous with "our" people. And when we live with an us/them mentality, "our" people, "those" people, tender here and tough there, I think what happens is what we have seen happen too often recently. It is what we see in this country, it is what we see on our streets, it is what we see in the comments section, that real Christian love goes out the window, and what it is replaced with is an incredibly inferior substitute.

And that is why today, Jesus wants to talk to you about "those" people. You know, 2,000 years ago, Jesus knew all about "my" people and "those" people. There were Jews, there were Gentiles, there were Pharisees, there were Sadducees. There were good, church-going folks, and then there were sinners, and tax collectors, and prostitutes. People drew hard lines and they picked and chose who they would love, and into that culture, Jesus spoke words that blew up the whole system. They were so shocking, people did not know what to do with them. But it was not just the way that Jesus spoke, it was the thing that he would later go on to do that would give the Christian church, and Christian people like me, and many of you, the chance to be bright lights in a very dark world.

So, today, I want to open the Bible to Matthew 5 and see what Jesus said about you, and me, and those people that we find tough to love. Here is what he said in Matthew 5:43. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Apparently, that is what people said in the first century. "Well, sure! I love my neighbor, my Jewish neighbor. He believes what I believe. He behaves how I behave. The yard sign in his Galilean yard is the same as my Galilean yard. Of course!

But those people? You have heard it said, "Hate your enemy." Verse 44, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Okay. Jesus chooses hard, stark, black and white words. "Your enemy - the word "enemy" in Greek means someone who is hostile towards you. "Those who persecute" - the word "persecute" means to go after. It is like someone will not leave me alone with their criticism. It is like, relentless. They keep coming.

And I want to say that Jesus - Jesus, I do not really like the guy that forwards me too many e-mails. You want me to love and pray for those people? In a similar teaching in Luke 6, Jesus said, "Oh yeah, and not just that. Be kind to them, lend to them without expecting anything in return, be merciful to them, serve them, do good to them." And I want to ask Jesus - why? "So that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Everyone, take your phones out real fast. All right, we have got some phones. Can you open your phone as fast as you can to the weather app? Go ahead. Do not check Facebook or Instagram, okay? Just the weather app, all right? Once you have got it, hold up your phone if you have got the weather app open. I can see a bunch of them. Anyone here who is like, an official member of our church, can you tell me what the temperature is right now if you are an official member of our church in Appleton, Wisconsin? 68, 67 degrees? Okay, if you are one of our guests here today, you are not an official member of the CORE, could you please tell me what the temperature is in Appleton, Wisconsin? 67, 68 degrees? If you are in your teens or your 20s, you do not have many grey hairs on your head just yet, could you tell me what the temperature is in Appleton, Wisconsin? It is 68? Interesting. If you are a veteran member of our congregation, if you have got a few greys up top like I do, can you tell me what the temperature is? Yes, 68. You get the point, too. And I will not ask you to shout this out, but if you were not into church, if you believed the Bible is a man-made book, if you are an atheist who denies the existence of God, can you guess what the temperature would be? 68.

And that is Jesus' point. If you want to be a small glimpse of your Father who is in heaven, the God who causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, if you struggle to love "that" person or be tender with "those" people, according to Jesus, you should probably check your weather app. Look what he says next in Verses 46 and 47. "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" That is a hard word from Jesus, but it is pretty logical, right? Like, ooh, you are nice to your people. Do you know who else does that? Registered sex offenders, terrorists, gangsters, adulterers. Everyone is nice to their people - pagans, tax collectors, people that you consider moral monsters send memes to each other. It does not make them good people.

What makes us good is not loving our own, according to Jesus. To be like God, to be godly, to be like Christ, or Christ-like, means to cross the line and love the other. This is the high, holy, challenging, almost impossible calling that God has given to his children, which is why Jesus summarizes it like this in Verse 48. He says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Your Father in heaven just loves people, all kinds of people, your people and "those" people. If you want to be like him, a chip off the old block of your holy Father in heaven, then love them, too. If I was going to summarize all of Jesus' teaching, if you want to take notes in your program, here is how I would put it. I would say love one another. Jesus taught us to love one another, with the emphasis on "other." No, they are not like me. No, I would never do that. I do not get why they believe that. But that has nothing to do with the way I treat them, because

Jesus has called me to love just like his Father - to love my neighbor, whoever that neighbor is and however that neighbor lives.

My wife, Kim, and I had the chance to do this very thing about a week ago. I got to speak at this wedding, and it was by far the most diverse gathering of people that I have ever been a part of. The friends and family of the bride and groom came from all different walks of life. I mean, it was noticeable when you walked into the room that people were very, very different. There were the very, very religious, the very, very conservative, like work full time in Christian ministry, the very, kind of right-wing political tables of people. And, there was the very, very not conservative - very, very not religious - could not stand that side of the political spectrum tables of people. I met the one person who was very conservative, who literally whispered to me, "I do not normally hang out in places like this." And then, I talked to the very kind and hospitable gay man who was there with his husband, who, as we were dialoging, everyone could see that he was wearing high-heeled shoes, a leopard print velour suit cut from shoulders to belly button, nothing underneath, full makeup, giant eyelashes - all kinds of people.

Which meant in that room, my wife and I had an amazing opportunity to be like God. I mean, you have been to a wedding. You know. You can sit at your table with your people. You can hang out in your corner, or stand at the bar with one friend and nurse a drink all night. Or, you can dance with them, and with them, and you can introduce yourself at this table, and that one. You can love, and be kind, and patient, and hospitable with your people and with "those" people. It was an incredible challenge and an amazing evening. Because being like God, or at least trying your best to, is kind of amazing.

Friends, what would it look like if you tried to do the same? We will all fall short in many ways. What would it look like for you to be perfect like your Father and to love the other? To be kind to him, to be hospitable to her, to be not just tough with those people who hold that position, but to be tough and tender, and perhaps a lot more tender? What would it look like if you and I, and our entire church, and more Christian churches, imitated the kind of love that Jesus talks about in Matthew 5? You and I have heard enough of loving our neighbors and hating our enemies, "But I tell you," Jesus said, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Because this is the kind of love that changes the world.

I know that because it already did. I am going to ask my friends back in the tech booth to help me. Do you know that 2,000 years ago, when Jesus walked into this world, it was a very dark place? Like, people back in the day, they did not love unconditionally. There were strings attached to the love based on what you believed and how you behaved, and the shadows and the gloom of the father of lies started to descend on the good world that God had made. Few people loved; most people hated.

Until, in the little town of Bethlehem, the light of the world was born. And Jesus, by his very nature, had his people - Jewish people, Middle Eastern people, religious people. But study the life of Jesus and you know that he loved these people and "those" people. He did miracles for Jewish neighbors and he healed the servants of Roman soldiers. He was tough with the Jewish religious leaders and the Samaritan woman he met at the well. He offered eternal life,

forgiveness, and salvation to these people and to "those" people, and the greatest proof - "For God so loved the world," the world, "that he gave his one and only son." "Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of?" "The world." "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

For you. If you know that you are forgiven, saved, loved by God, it is because this kind of love came into your life, and came into mine. The fact that we see a loving, compassionate heavenly Father is the proof that God does not just love his people. If you were saved and born into sin, it is because God did not just love, he loved the other. He loved his enemies. He prayed for those who would persecute him. Those who did not prioritize God in their lives, he decided to prioritize them in his. This is the perfect love of our Father. It is why we are forgiven. It is why we are clean. It is why we live without guilt or shame, because God does not reserve or restrict his love. He throws open the floodgates of heaven and he loves us all.

So, brothers and sisters, I want to challenge you today to love the other. Start to pray, if nothing else, for those who persecute you. "God, soften my heart, and change theirs. Help them to correct their sinful ways, and God, please help me to correct mine. Show me how to love them as you first loved me." Oh, man, I hope that you and I can do that because if we could show the world this kind of love, I do not know if they would know what to do with it.

Back in the summer of 2020, I saw an example of this and I am not sure if I will ever forget it. You know, the summer of 2020 was when racial tension, and black and blue, and protests in big cities felt like they were tearing apart the very fabric of this country. In fact, right here in Appleton, Wisconsin, where I live, frequent protests were held where hundreds, and then up to a thousand people gathered in our downtown square. And so, being naive about such social issues, I decided to go down, and to listen and to try to learn. I took a picture of when I was there. I brought my daughters the first time I went, so that we could read the signs, talk about race, injustice, the difficult work of policing, the long, ugly, toxic history of America for minorities. The policemen standing on the edges of the crowd, I imagine feeling very on edge.

But then, just feet from me, a young black man grabbed the microphone, a man who was leading the protest, and he turned back to his friend, who was controlling the music through the sound system. He said, "I do not care who you are. I do not care how you voted. I do not care the color of your skin. I need one cop to come up right here and to dance with us." I looked to my left. I saw these two barrel-chested white cops, like whispering to each other. There was a crowd. It was emotional. They had their weapons on them. I am thinking, "Which guy, if any guy, is going to come?" And they whispered to each other, and they looked back at the young black man. They both smiled, and they both came walking through the crowd. I took a picture of that moment, too. Those two cops in the middle, despite being in this sea of emotional black and brown people, of all of the protestors of all different backgrounds, these two men danced like no one was watching.

Brothers and sisters, it is easy to love your people, but it is so much more beautiful to love all people. Father in heaven, help us to do it.

Let us pray.

Dear Jesus, for all of eternity, you were unlike us. You existed with your Father and the Holy Spirit, perfect creator and not part of this creation, and yet, you came into our world to become like us - to love those who are not like you.

And Lord Jesus, you did not just love people, you loved all people. You loved Nicodemus and you loved Zacchaeus. You loved the woman at the well and doubting Thomas. You loved demon-possessed Mary Magdalene, and James, and John, and Peter. You loved all of them, Jesus, and that is why we love you. Because it means no matter who we are, it means no matter what we have done, it means no matter where we have been or what has been done to us, that we can know for sure that we are loved by God.

Thank you, Father, that when the sun came up today, it was proof that you still love us. Thank you that when the forecast has rain, it is proof that you still love us. Thank you for giving us daily reminders as this earth spins that we are loved by you.

And now we pray to you, Holy Spirit, for the fruit of love. Change our hearts. Help us to let bitterness go. Help us to turn the other cheek. Help us to forgive that person for the 77th time. Help us to go the extra mile. Help us to treat them, Father, as you first treated us. When we fall short, forgive us, and when we try again, empower us.

And Jesus, you once said that we are the light of the world. If people could see this kind of love in a very dark time in our culture, they would notice it and they would praise you, the brilliant light of heaven. That is what we want for your glory, for our healing, and for our good. We pray this, Jesus, in your powerful name. And all God's people said Amen.