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Loving the Hard to Love

Matthew 5:43-45

Prayer: *Father, just again, I thank you for this day, I thank you for the joy that we can experience and lift up to you in song and I just thank you for the freedom that we have to sit and gather as we do. And Father, this is not a freedom that everyone around the world has and we know that, and we just pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world as they are gathering as well. We pray for your Holy Spirit, we pray that you would be here guiding us as we open up your book, that you would give us again the ability to see it, to hear it and to understand it and to make it a permanent part of our lives. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are back to our series on the Sermon on the Mount, and as we've seen, it's far more than just a recipe for how to live that so many folks think that this sermon is. In fact the sermon served as a templet for Jesus to systematically take apart the false and the legalistic way of the Pharisees that had settled into the culture as the final say of what the will of God was. Jesus had

one huge advantage in arguing with the Pharisees over that very point and that is Jesus happened to be God. I mean, I'm often struck with the absurdity of the conflicts that Jesus engaged in with the Pharisees for that very reason. And it says something about the incredible humility and patience of God that he would even engage these pretenders at all. I mean, these folks were religious frauds who made a career out of claiming that they were the middlemen who really knew who God was and how to work with God. Jesus stated on more than one occasion what he really thought of these charlatans. *Matthew 23* says this: *Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'"*

This blistering observation of Jesus is where we get the phrase: "Do as I say, not as I do." And it sums up basically every bit of the hypocrisy that the Pharisees stood for. And they of course

viewed Jesus as this outlier, this threat, and so their response to him grew from one of indifference through scorn at the idea that this carpenter son would have anything to do with God to the place where they recognized him as an existential threat and plotted -- eventually successfully -- to have him killed. And time and again we see these interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees, and in each case Jesus states his position and their position, their position and his position. Six times he uses the phrase: "You have heard it said" and then he follows it up with: "But I say." Again, this is the format we see this morning. We're in *Matthew 45:43-45*. It says -- and again, here's the format -- Jesus is saying: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."*

Well we know right from the start that God has much to say about treating our enemies and in this final section on the Sermon on the Mount he is basically going to be teaching us about the old ways of looking at enemies, about his way of looking at them and his command to us about how we are to live out our ways of looking at out enemies, at our way of understanding what justice really is. And when it comes to treating our enemies, we see old ways, his

ways and our ways.

So first let's look at the old ways. You know, we looked last time at this idea of retributive justice. That's the belief that God gives everyone what is their due. You know, retribution sounds like something bad but it is not. It's really the belief that God who -- a God who passionately loves truth and honor and justice, that same God also must hate lies, dishonor and injustice. A God who is truly just must delight in rewarding what is truly good and in punishing that which is truly evil. And this is what God says in *Romans 2:9-11*. It says: *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.* God is saying retribution is the driving force in the entire universe, but retribution unchecked quickly becomes vengeance. The whole idea of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was to establish proper boundaries where retributive justice was necessary. We saw right in the beginning of mankind, right there in the book of Genesis that men were exacting far more in retribution than the offenses against them required. I mean, if you go all the way back to Genesis 4, there's this discussion about Lamech, and it says: *Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have*

killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."

And as I said last time, we don't know much about this man Lamech other than he was wicked, that he had plural wives and that he was not looking for justice but for vengeance. He says: *If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, well Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold*, and we quickly see where this is going. I mean, far better to have a law that limits retaliation to something that matches the original offense, which is exactly what an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was designed to do. It was a mercy.

We address the inevitable question then of how it is that Christians are the ones who seem to escape justice. They're the ones who have their sins placed on Jesus who pays for them at the cross, and we point out that that really is partially true, Christians in a sense escape justice. It doesn't mean that justice isn't served. What it means is that it's served not on the heads of believers themselves but on the head of Jesus Christ who came to earth to rescue them. Jesus came to glorify his Father by taking the punishment of his sheep onto himself at the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ received our justice so that we could receive his mercy. *2 Corinthians* says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* So what is unique about the cross of Christ is that God

justly declared every single one of us guilty and worthy of the death penalty -- which spiritually speaking is hell -- but that his mercy reached down with an offer of salvation to those who would put their faith in him, and it was for someone else to pay the price of that justice. That someone else was Jesus Christ. He came to earth to live the exact same kind of life that we all have to live and he lived it perfectly. And then he offered up his own life as God in the flesh as a substitute for our sinful lives exchanging his righteousness for our sin, satisfying justice and mercy at the same time.

Well, in our teaching this morning, Jesus is going to start out looking at the old ways saying in *Matthew 5:43*: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* And what Jesus is doing, he's addressing a teaching that had already been very well established by the Pharisees. It's a teaching that made perfect sense to its hearers because it mirrored their history and it fed into their predispositions, but it's a teaching that could be found no where in the Bible. In fact when you look, you'll find the exact opposite. It's clearly stated in the Old Testament. If you look at *Leviticus 19*, it says: *"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people,*

but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." So when Jesus is saying and he starts out: *"You have heard that it was said,"* he could have just as easily said, *"but certainly not from me."* What had been established as fact was in fact something that God never even suggested. And as opposed to the error of the old ways, Jesus begins to unpack his way and Jesus's counter response goes in the exact opposite direction. He says: *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."* What Jesus is suggesting is radically different from what the Pharisees had been teaching but it's absolutely part and parcel of the very nature of God. And Jesus is suggesting here three different ways to love your enemies. He says first, bless those who curse you; secondly, do good to those who hate you; and third, pray for those who use you and persecute you. Jesus goes on to say that acting in that way demonstrates to the world that you're just like your Father in heaven.

Now Jesus had much to say about dealing with enemies and I think it's safe to say that the Pharisees were his enemies. I also know that Jesus spoke at great length about their hypocrisy which would often demand of others what they themselves would never do. Again he says in *Matthew 23*: *"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in*

Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."

So let me raise this question. Here's my question. Jesus's enemy is the Pharisees. And so the question I raise is did Jesus do as I say and not as I do when it came to his enemies, the Pharisees? Did Jesus bless those who cursed him? Well, let's examine the record. Did Jesus bless when he was confronted and cursed out literally? Well, if you recall, there was a time when Jesus cast out a demon and instead of being blessed for that, he was literally cursed. It occurs in Matthew 12. *Matthew 12:22*, it says: *Then one was brought to him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the son of David?" Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."*

Now insulting doesn't even begin to describe a response like this. And I want you to first picture what kind of state this man was in. You know, he's blind, he's mute, he is demon-possessed, and at the command of Jesus his tongue is loosened, his eyes are now seeing and obviously the demon has been exorcised. And so the Pharisees

have no choice but to acknowledge that only a spectacular supernatural power alone could do this. But their fear and their hatred of Jesus couldn't possibly allow them to attribute that power to God working within him. So they willingly chose to give the glory of what had just taken place to Satan rather than attribute it to God. I mean, the arrogance that refused to acknowledge the miraculous power of Christ chose instead to attribute this miracle to Satan. It was one of the vilest forms of blasphemy and cursing. And you know, it's clear the Pharisees didn't even have the guts to confront Jesus to his face. They were happy to say this only behind his back, because it says in verse 25: *But Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you."*

I maintain to you that Jesus' response to them cursing him is for him to bless them. I mean he blesses them by patiently explaining why their understanding wouldn't even work within the confines of Satan's own kingdom. You know, he tells them in verse 25: *Every*

city or house divided against itself will not stand. And then he goes on to describe the judgment that awaits this evil, unbelieving generation, but his response is reasoned and it's even hopeful considering that they had just attributed his work to Satan. But Luke's account of this incident gives us another piece of information that shows just how far Jesus was willing to go to bless those who wanted to curse him. You see, he spoke the truth in love with them, and then he responded in love as well. This is from Luke's account of the same instance. This is *Luke 11:37*, it's describing this conversation that's been taking place and it says: *And as he spoke, a certain Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So he went in and sat down to eat.* Now you got to understand, this is not somebody saying, "Hey, Jesus, let's go grab a burger somewhere." Sharing a meal with someone in this culture meant far more than just eating together. It meant a serious effort to kind of communicate and fellowship with that person that you were eating with. The scribes and the Pharisees understood that well and we read in *Mark 2:16*, it says: *When the scribes and the Pharisees saw him -- that's Jesus -- eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to his disciples, "How is it that he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"* They couldn't believe that he would do that and yet he's doing that with the Pharisees. And the Pharisees see a meal not as a chance for fellowship but as a chance to gather information, as a chance to gather some kind of data that

they can later use to trap him. You see, it's stunning to me to realize that Jesus is readily accepting invitations to sit down and eat a meal with the very people he's castigating. The people who would use the very circumstance of that meal to trap him. In fact *Luke 14* describes another incident this way, it says: *Now it happened, as he went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched him closely.* We all know eventually all of that observation would pay off. You know, when the Pharisees felt they had just enough information to arrest him, they bribed Judas to provide them with an opportunity and Judas sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. So did Jesus bless those who had cursed him? I say yes, he did. When they attributed his miraculous power to Satan, he blessed them with a response that was helpful, hopeful and absolutely truthful. *"A kingdom divided against itself will not stand."* And yet in spite of the miserable treatment he received at their hand, he readily responded to an invitation to dine, knowing that the invitation was filled with wicked intent.

Have you ever been cursed out by somebody? I mean, have you ever been publicly dressed down, humiliated, made to feel like a fool by someone? How did you respond? Chances are the last thing on your mind at that time was to bless that person back. Jesus says that true sons of the Father, those who have the very Spirit of the

living God within them will respond with a blessing for a curse, and they do that because they're following Christ who's following his Father. And the scripture tells us why in *1 Peter*, it says: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* This is the key right here. This is the answer to how we can do this. You see, Jesus could bless when cursed and do good when hated because he knew the God of perfect justice had his back. He could let go of his personal need for vengeance because he knew he could *entrust himself to him who judges justly*. Love your neighbor and hate your enemy was the standard way of doing business and Jesus was showing a better way. And his strength came from trusting that his heavenly Father would make all things right.

Secondly, Jesus said: Do good to those who hate you. And just to stick for a moment with the idea of sharing a meal as a means of doing good for those who hate you, consider the last meal that Jesus shared with the one who would betray him. I mean no one understood better than Jesus who up to the very end responded to the hatred of Judas by sitting down one last time, warning and pleading with him over a meal. Jesus knew perfectly well that

Judas after sharing that meal fully intended to betray him for thirty pieces of silver, but it didn't dissuade Jesus from trying. Jesus not only did good for Judas who hated him in return but he also did good for the masses who showed no love whatsoever for him. And again, this example involves a meal. You know, we've all heard the story of the loaves and the fishes. It's a story really of good done for people who have no love at all for Jesus. This is *John 6:9*, it says: *"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"* You know the story. Then Jesus said, *"Make the people sit down."* Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

Understand, Jesus knew with absolute certainty that many of those that he was feeding had no interest in him whatsoever. I mean, they were there for the free food. That was it. In fact the very next day the scripture describes Jesus going to the other side of the lake and the crowds looking for him, looking for this new source of meals and they finally find him and he says this to them in *John 6:26*, he says: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for*

the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set his seal on him."

Jesus of course is speaking about himself. He says I'm the food that endures forever. This other food is only temporary. But the crowd's only interested in a miracle that's going to be able to feed them consistently and they make that clear to Jesus. In *John 6:34* it says: *Then they said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out."*

Now Jesus, he's saying these words to a crowd that wants to worship him, but they only want to worship him for all the wrong reasons. Then Jesus was determined to do good to those who would later betray him, and so he calls out the crowd right then and right there. In *John 6:64* Jesus says: *But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray him. And he said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father." From that time many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more. See, Jesus knew that there were many in that crowd who would wind up later shouting, "crucify*

him!" and yet he did good, yet he did good to those who hated him. Why? Simply, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly, and he is our example.

So how do you and I respond to those who hate us? Well, if we truly believe in him who judges justly, that will guarantee -- and that he will guarantee that in the end justice will be served, it changes everything. I mean if I truly believe that, then I really am freed up to respond in a way that breaks the cycle of "love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

Let me start out explaining with an extreme example. This may give clarity to the less extreme situations that all of us have to deal with to see God's wisdom applied in circumstances that we can barely imagine. Miroslaf Volf is a theologian who lived through the horror of the war in Kosovo in the late 1990's. This was a conflict that was filled with all kinds of ethnic cleansings that included rape, murder, arson and terror. And Volf demonstrated that the only ones who were capable of acting in a Christ-like manner were those who knew that "him who judges justly" would in the end be the only one capable of making certain that justice was would be done. Believing in that God freed them up to act as Christ would have them act in the most amazingly awful circumstances. This comes from Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*. Many

of you might recognize it from any number of Tim Keller's talks, but listen to what Volf says. He says: "My thesis that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West. To the person who is inclined to dismiss it, I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war zone. Among your listeners are people whose cities and villages have first been plundered, then burned and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit. The topic of the lecture: A Christian attitude toward violence. The thesis: We should not retaliate since God is perfect noncoercive love. Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind."

Do you hear what he is saying? This is experience speaking, and what he's saying is that it is only within the confines of a safe, protected place such as we enjoy could this silly idea of a God who is unwilling to practice retributive justice ever even be entertained. You got to live in the suburbs and have no problems

to believe that is what he's saying. In a place where your daughter is raped and your father and your brother have their throats slit, you had better believe there's a God who's going to make things right or you're going to spend all of your time looking for other daughters to rape and other brothers and fathers throats to slit. The reason why Jesus could break the cycle of "love your neighbor and hate your enemies" is because he knew his Father could be trusted to judge all things justly. Knowing that freed him up from ever having to seek a vengeance that he knew his Father would always deliver. That's why Peter says Christ is our example. Again: *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* We are nowhere near living in the horror of Kosovo, and our enemy's attacks are mainly on our reputations and egos instead of our families and possessions, but the principles remain the same. And God expects us to fight our enemies exactly the way Jesus fought his. You know, we're not used to being hated and attacked for believing that marriage should be between a man and a woman and that babies should be safe in the womb but attacking that has become the new cultural norm. Add to that Christ's teaching as to how we are to respond to personal attacks and we recognize that we still have much to learn about loving our enemies.

I remember a few years back, remember the height of the controversy with Chick-fil-A and all of that brouhaha over the fact that the owner of Chick-fil-A -- I think his name is Dan Cathy -- he came out in favor of traditional marriage and people just went nuts. And there was all kinds of protests. And one of the restaurant parking lots filled up with people who were protesting the owner's stand on traditional marriage, and it was a hot August day and the response of the restaurant was to send their waitress -- waiter's staff out to the parking lot with cold water for the protesters. The protesters were absolutely flabbergasted. I mean, they believed like everyone else that they should only love their neighbors in the gay community and hate their enemies in the Chick-fil-A community. That's SOP, standard operating procedure, that's the way you do it. I mean all of us have been taught from day one almost the exact opposite of what Jesus is teaching. If someone hits you, hit them back. I mean we grow up, we put away the hitting but the principle remains the same, if somebody hurts you, make sure you figure out a way to hurt them back. All of us are far more comfortable with flight or fight than love your enemies. I tell folks all the time that God's way to approaching conflict is radically different from what all of us are used to, and I know we all hate conflict and we hate fighting, but it's what we're used to and it's what we're actually quite comfortable with. It's cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, good guys and bad guys. You know,

when we get into conflict, we figuratively put up our dukes or we take off running. It's usually one or the other. And what Jesus is telling us to do is absolutely counterintuitive. Jesus invites us to come into the ring with our hands down, trusting that him who judges justly will see to it that justice eventually will be done. I'm not suggesting that Christians are to be so naive and pacifistic as to invite conflict. I'm simply saying that Jesus is instructing us on a new and different way to view conflict. And when you attempt to do things God's way, I can tell you, people don't know how to react. I mean they come in with their dukes up and they expect you to have your dukes up and when you don't, they're absolutely mystified. I mean the folks at the Chick-fil-A parking lot, they didn't know what to do when their enemies treated them with love and respect instead of hate. That's God's secret weapon. And when we deploy it, God's power is unleashed. Listen to what God says in *Romans 12:18*. He says: *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 doing so you will heap burning coals on his head."* Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Trust me, I've seen what those burning coals look like. And sometimes folks react to those coals by being even more aggressive

and even more difficult and sometimes they're completely unnerved and sometimes it's somewhere in the middle. God says the key to all of this is to trust in a sovereign Lord. Again: *Leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* You don't do vengeance well, God tells us. I do it perfectly. God also says in *Romans 12:18*: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* And what God is saying there, he said, you know you're only responsible for your side of the street. You can't control what goes on on the other side but you can control what's on yours. And all that God asks of us is that we trust him enough to let him decide the outcome. Jesus was able to do good to those who hated him because he trusted his Father implicitly and he is our example.

And third and finally, Jesus says pray for those who use you and persecute you. Well, now we know that Jesus blessed those who cursed him because we saw how he responded when he was blasphemed. And we also know that Jesus routinely did good for those who hated him because we saw him constantly feeding, healing and ministering to those who would eventually betray and execute him. And the answer to the third question: Did Jesus really pray for those who persecuted him? Well, the answer to that is yet another statement from Jesus that has become a cliché. And again what we can see in the most extreme of circumstances is what we need to translate into

our everyday life as Christians, and there's no more extreme circumstance than the one that Jesus found himself in in *Luke 23:33* which says this: *And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* And they cast lots to divide his garments. Who knows what would have happened if Jesus had not uttered that prayer. Who knows if that wasn't the prayer that stopped his Father's wrath from just exploding. I mean, God the Father was beholding his son stripped, beaten, bloodied and mocked, now splayed out on the ground about to have his hands and his feet nailed to a cross. I mean the soldiers thought this was simply a routine execution of a criminal. And as they positioned the nail and the hammer, they were about to spike the living God to a tree. I mean, the very God who would give them life and breath, the creator of the very planet that they were standing on they were humiliating. There will never be a more extreme example of Jesus doing not just what he said but what he did when he prayed for them. Jesus did it because he knew he could place his absolute and complete trust in his Father and he knew that because *he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* Just imagine what would have happened if Jesus had

ascribed to the Pharisees' teaching of love your neighbor and hate your enemies. I can guarantee you one thing, we wouldn't be standing here, sitting here. We'd be obliterated to some part of the universe. And Jesus knew full well that the world that he came into hated him. He said this in *John 15*, he said, *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* Jesus freely admitted that the world hated him and hated his disciples, I mean, that was a given. Nothing's changed in the last 2,000 years. The world still hates God because *"This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."* That's the given. But Jesus' response to this hatred is *Luke 6:22*: *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven: For so their fathers did to the prophets."* You see, our brothers and sisters in the Middle East have seen that hate translated into brutality and rape and murder. I mean, we only see it as social resistance and push back, but the way we should respond should be exactly the same. I mean, God's way is radically different and often times it works radically. Jesus challenged the old ways of treating our enemies,

he not only spoke of his ways, he exemplified them. He challenges us to make his ways our ways. We do that first by blessing those who curse us, secondly by doing good to those who hate us, and third by praying for those who use and persecute us. And you know what? That's an impossible task unless and until we have our eyes fixed on the kingdom of God. And until we truly believe that him who judges justly has our back, we will forever be desperately trying somehow to even the score on our own power. That is old, that is desperate, and that does not work.

Of course what's probably on the minds of many people today is all right, so how do we respond to the events that took place in Paris, France? Well, you got to know that killing these folks is not the answer. I mean, for everyone we kill, five more is going to take their place. And they want nothing more than for us to attack them so that thousands more will be attracted and become radicalized. We may be able to beat them back temporarily but it is only a change of heart that will change their intent and only God can do that. Jesus says, "Pray for those who curse you." Well, they certainly qualify as cursing us. He says, "Do good to them that hate you," and they certainly hate us, and prayer qualifies as that good; and finally he says, "Pray for them who persecute you." So I think our orders are clear. We need to pray for these people. I mean, the only way to completely eliminate a Muslim terrorist is to

kill him or convert him. God has converted many and they are on fire for the gospel. I mean, I could tell you stories. There's all kinds of stories that are out there now. Maybe next week. We don't have the time this week but my personal answer to Paris, France, is to pray for the victims and their perpetrators, 'cause God's way is the only way that's going to work.

By God's grace we reject the old ways of the Pharisees, by that same grace we learn from Jesus and imitate his way, by faith and by practice we make his ways our ways. He said in *Matthew 5:43*: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." Let's pray.

Father God, we are just astounded at what we see and those of us who saw the horror of what took place in Paris, France, my first reaction is kill them all. My first reaction is just annihilate them. And Lord, that's exactly what the Pharisees taught. Love your neighbors, hate your enemies. Lord, that's exactly the opposite of what you teach. Father, give us the ability, the wisdom, the power by your Holy Spirit to translate what is an extreme circumstance into our circumstance, into our every day

life. Give us the ability to see and to understand not the old ways, not the new way but your way. Lord, give us the ability to do your will your way, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.