



Matthew 5:38-48 - ³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ ³⁹But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. ⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons 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. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We are Christs...We are Christ's



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

“We are Christ[']s with and without the apostrophe.” A helpful quote from our old friend Martin Luther. So, if it’s been a while since your last grammar class, let’s review. A simple “s” at the end of a word makes it a plural noun. An “apostrophe and s” denotes possession. So Luther says, “We are Christs” and “We are Christ’s.” We walk in the way our Savior walked – we are Christs, but only because we first belong to him – we are Christ’s. Hasn’t this been the thrust of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount for the past several Sundays? We are Christs – with and without the apostrophe. We ourselves, as believing children of God, function as Christ -as light in a dark world. We are Christs – living as salt in a decaying society. We are Christs – those who take God’s Word seriously, both law and gospel. We are Christs – living as people who know our blessed status even when the world wants to label us as poor, meek mourners. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount challenges us to think about what it means to be all the things he says we are: God-blessed-salt-and-light-people-who-take-God’s-Word-seriously Christians.

Perhaps this section of Jesus’ sermon presents that challenge in the most pointed way. Much like last week, when Jesus called on us to examine our hearts in the light of God’s law, Jesus again calls on us to take a closer look at how we function as Christs to the world. He calls on us to examine the foundation for every one of God’s commands – love. Jesus said, **You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.”** That’s a quote from God. He’s not telling people to get even when they’re hurt by others. Instead, he’s setting limits for the government to carry out a punishment that fits the crime – so you won’t get the death penalty for jaywalking. Jesus continued, **You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”** The “love your neighbor” part? That’s another quote from God. The “hate your enemy” part – that’s an addition of man. Isn’t that an insightful statement from the human commentary on love? Jesus said as much, **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 brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?** If I love only those who love me, Jesus essentially says, *You don’t look any different from an unbeliever.*

In my human mind, the only people who are deserving of love are those who readily, freely, and abundantly show love to me. It’s easy to love the person who is cut from the same cloth as me; to love the fellow believer in church who shares the same interests as me; to love the neighbor who helps me out. It’s not so easy to love those who resist me or even actively oppose me – whether it’s real or only in my mind. It’s not so easy to love those people who don’t share my interests. It’s not so easy to love that neighbor who, instead of patting me on the back, tries to stab me in the back. In my human mind, love is something that’s first earned and then *maybe* given. But when I love that way, am I being “Christ” to the world? Remember, “We are Christs – with and without the apostrophe,” but by nature, I’m more ready to demonstrate selfish love rather than selfless love.

So what direction does Jesus give us in how to show *selfless* love rather than *selfish* love? He said, **I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.** But Jesus, this sounds like an instruction manual for how to be a total pushover! LOVE my enemies? *Maybe if I want to get walked all over.* Turn the other cheek? *Then I’ll be a target forever.* Give freely to the one who asks, no matter who it is? *Then I’ll be a mark for people to take advantage of me.* Do you see how quickly even the Christian mind forgets what it means to be a Christ to the



world? Jesus isn't giving us worldly advice on self-defense, legal procedure, or financial management. He's teaching us a lesson of love. When I see those opportunities to forgive, to give, to be generous, ultimately to show love – my question shouldn't be, *How can I avoid being taken advantage of, scammed, or walked on?* When I see those opportunities – even with my “enemies,” my question is always, *“How can I be Christ to this person?”* “We are Christs – with and without the apostrophe.”

For every time we fail to be Christ to the world, remember Christ first came for you. Jesus tells us to love our enemies and he knew a thing or two about it. **Father, forgive them!** was his prayer for those who drove nails into his hands and feet. Jesus didn't avoid those who were different from him or even those who, at the time, were at odds with God. **This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.** Jesus loved everyone. In fact, Jesus loved one of the worst enemies of all – Jesus loved this enemy, the one who was born into this world completely hostile to him. Jesus loved this enemy – the one who was blind and in the dark with no desire to come to the light. Jesus loved this enemy – the one whose every sin and rebellion was shaking the fist of defiance against God. Jesus loved this enemy – the blind, dead, hostile sinner – it was you and me. **God demonstrates his own love for us in this – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** And now, grace upon grace, God puts you into this world as a husband or a wife; a mother or a father; a son or a daughter – and calls on you to show that same kind of love to everyone. God calls us to show a love that reflects *who* we are and *whose* we are – a love that seeks, saves, and serves.

This portion of the Sermon on the Mount really isn't all about you and me – it's about Jesus and his unfailing love for people. From his unfailing love, he allows the rain to fall on the righteous and the wicked alike. From his unfailing love, he calls and equips sinners like you and me to be what he has declared us to be – holy and blameless in his sight. Jesus' unfailing, radical, even reckless love to you and me equips us and enables us to be “Christ's – with and without the apostrophe.”

Amen

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)