

Several years ago, the book **Unbroken** by Laura Hillenbrand, became a **NY Times** bestseller, and then a few years later it was made into a widely successful film. *Unbroken* tells the amazing true story of **Louis Zamperini**, a man who was not only an **Olympic-level distance runner**, but also an **incredible survivor**: He survived when his **B-24 Liberator** crashed in the Pacific Ocean during WWII; he survived **drifting at sea on a lifeboat for 47 days**; and most amazingly of all, Zamperini survived **after enduring two horrible years in two P.O.W. camps in Japan** where he was **tortured and beaten** by Japanese military personnel—**specifically at the brutal hands of a maniacal guard nicknamed “The Bird.”** Even after he was liberated and returned home as a war hero, Zamperini was utterly consumed and ensnared in **another kind of war: a war of inexhaustible hatred for his enemy.**

This morning we continue in our studies of the Gospel according to Luke. Please open your Bibles to **Luke 6:27-36**. In this passage, Jesus continues His “**Sermon on the Plain,**” where He defines for us **what it means to be a true disciple of the Messiah**. And just like He did in His Beatitudes, Jesus prepares His followers to meet the **intense hostility of the world**. If you follow Christ, you will face hatred, mockery, opposition, and rejection, just as He did. In other words: **if you are His disciple, you will face enemies.**

How must we respond to our enemies as followers of Christ? Jesus tells us how beginning in **Verse 27**: “*But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. 31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. 32 If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*”

In this passage, we come face-to-face with perhaps the most difficult of all of Christ’s commandments: **Love your enemies (27-31), not like the world loves (32-34), but like God loves you (35-36).**

My prayer to God is that we would know the unsurpassable love of Christ and so be empowered by His Spirit to do the impossible: to love the unlovable.

I. Love your enemies (Verses 27-31)

The heart of Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain is a summons to love the unlovable. **In Verses 27-31, Jesus commands His followers to love in a radical, other-worldly way, those who are the most unlovable: namely, our enemies.**

Jesus begins by telling us whom we are to love. What Jesus says here is profoundly counter-cultural. What Jesus says here flies in the face of what our natural instincts tell us to do. Because of our fallen human nature, we are inclined to hate our enemies. Loving the unlovable does not come naturally to us. We tend to love those who love us back.

It's hard enough to love our neighbor... but why would we give the gift of our love to those who are our enemies, those who hate us and curse us and mistreat us and strike us and steal from us? From a worldly point of view, this command, "**Love your enemies,**" seems to be upside down and backwards.

But Jesus isn't interested in seeker-friendly recruitment; Jesus isn't calling His disciples to an easy life. Jesus is calling all those who would be His followers, His disciples, to be marked off from the world... by our love. We are commanded by Christ to love those who are unlovable, even those who are our enemies. We are to endure hardship, and even humiliation, for His sake, as we walk the path of love.

One commentator put it this way: "*Jesus encourages weakness in the face of hostility, vulnerability in the face of opposition, generosity in the face of need, and readiness to lose even our possessions.*"¹

Jesus widens the scope of our love from our family, to our neighbor, to even our enemies. Before we consider who our enemies might be, we need at the outset to notice what the Lord Jesus assumes about the nature of love itself.

Did you notice that in the span of five verses, **Jesus issues 9 commands, 9 calls to action.** After contrasting the "woes" of **Verses 24-26**, Jesus summons His disciples to love: "**Love your enemies.**" (**Verse 27**) But Jesus doesn't want His hearers to confuse "love" with mere "feelings." We live in a very emotionally-fragile age; we live in the age of the therapeutic where we constantly express ourselves in emotive language.

I imagine if you asked someone these days, "**what is love?**," the most common answer you would receive would be a description of love in solely **emotional** terms: *Love is a feeling that you get deep down in your heart, love is sense of desire, love is intense affection.*

None of these answers is **wrong**; but they are utterly **incomplete**. Jesus teaches us that the love we owe to our enemies is a love that takes the form of **concrete action**. Love makes demands. **Love speaks and love acts!**

What does it mean to love your enemies in practice? "**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse (mistreated; reviled; maligned; disparaged) you. 29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and**

¹ William Taylor, *Read, Mark, Learn: Luke, Vol. 1* (St. Helen's Bishopgate, UK: Christian Focus, 2019), 119.

from one who takes away your cloak **do not withhold** your tunic either. 30 **Give** to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods **do not demand** them back.

Love does good, love blesses, love speaks, love prays, love gives, love acts! Jesus is describing in the most extreme terms the kind of attitude His followers are to have towards those who are unlovable. Jesus is saying: “Don’t seek revenge; don’t retaliate in kind.” Jesus is saying: “Be ready to pray, and serve, and give.”

Jesus then summarizes what He means by love your enemies in **Verse 31**: “*And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*”

App.: Children, you’ve heard this before: It’s often called the **Golden Rule: do for others what you wish they would do for you**. Love, Jesus says, puts us in the place of our enemies. Love calls us to imagine that we are in their shoes. Love demands of us to behave accordingly. **Love doesn’t say:** “*Give them what they deserve.*” **Love says:** “*Do for them what you would want done for yourself.*”

A popular saying among the rabbis in Jesus’ day was this: “**What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: this is the whole Torah.**” But Jesus states His Golden Rule in a **positive** form: It’s not enough to abstain from evil toward your neighbor; we must, as His followers, be actively pursuing to do good... to our neighbor... even to our enemies... even to the unlovable. In other words, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

App.: I do need to make two brief but important pastoral observations and clarifications. First, in this passage Jesus is not teaching pacifism, namely, that it is wrong for nation-states to go to war. If you want a wise and cogent understanding of **just war theory from an Augustinian perspective**, speak to Dr. Paul Miller after the service... and buy his new book! Jesus is speaking on the level of individuals, not nation-states, when He says: “Love your enemies.” Second, when Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to pray for those who abuse/malign/mistreat us, this does not mean that if we find ourselves in a situation where we are facing the threat of abuse (physical, sexual, or verbal), that all you are supposed to do is pray for the perpetrator. Let me be clear, if you are facing that kind of situation, speak to someone... you can trust. Speak to one of the elders or their wives. Speak to a fellow church member. Speak up... and let us help.

Who are the “enemies” Jesus has in mind? To this first-century Jewish audience that had traveled all the way from from both northern and southern Palestine in order to hear Jesus... the word “enemies” was synonymous with the word “Romans.” The Romans, the Gentile pagans, were a cruel occupying force. Shouldn’t the Romans be opposed, hated, and hurt? Jesus says it’s not enough to simply restrain from hostile acts; He calls His followers to do good to those who hate them.

Illus.: I am not surprised that right after this Sermon on the Plain concludes, the very next passage is about... the commendable faith of a Roman Centurion!

Who are your enemies? Perhaps, you're thinking to yourself, "I don't think I have any enemies!" Jesus assumes that if you believe His teaching, if you uphold the Scriptures as your final rule and authority, if you faithfully seek to live for Him in this world, you will be hated by the world.

That little contrasting word, "**But**," in **Verse 27** is connecting us back to what Jesus already said to His disciples in **Verse 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!***"

So in context, Jesus defines "**enemies**" as those who mistreat us **because we follow Christ**. Period.

Many of us, perhaps, have enemies of our own making. We've sinned against others and caused a rift in the relationship. If that's the case you need to confess and forsake your sin, and ask for forgiveness, and seek reconciliation, if possible. "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*" (**Rom. 12:18**)

How loving of Jesus at the very outset of this sermon, to level-set: to put the bottom-line up front; to tell us right at the beginning what it will cost us to follow Him faithfully in this world.

App.: The love Jesus is calling each one of us to is otherworldly: **Love returns good for evil**. When people hate us, we do them good. When people curse us, we bless them. When people revile us, we pray for them. When people beg from us, we give until it hurts. The world says, "Love your friends and hate your enemies."

In other words, love your enemies, not like the world loves!

II. Love your enemies, not like the world loves (Verses 32-34)...

In Verses 32-34, Jesus clarifies the love of His disciples with the ways in which the world loves.

Verse 32: *If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For **even sinners** love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For **even sinners** do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? **Even sinners** lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.*

Do you see that phrase, "**even sinners**," repeated by Jesus **three times**? Jesus is referring to the way or the manner in which the world loves.

The world teaches us to love those who love us. The world teaches us to do good to those who do good to us. The world teaches us to lend to those who will pay us back.

This kind of love is natural in our fallen world. Even those who don't know God in Christ can "love" in this way and in this manner. Love for people who treat us well is a love born from purely self-interest. There is nothing supernatural, nothing sacrificial, nothing other-worldly about this kind of love.

Jesus is not calling us to a worldly selfish love; Jesus is calling us to radically selfless love, a love that sacrifices, a love that serves, a love that gives, a love that showers even the unlovable, even our enemies, with blessing, rather than cursing.

We are called to love, but **not** like the world loves. We are called to demonstrate, to show, to put on display for all to see, a genuinely supernatural, other-worldly, Christian love that surpasses the love that the world shows to their enemies.

"Jesus' demand that we love our enemies... assumes that there are people who are hard to love. People are hard to love in different ways. Jesus calls some people our "enemies," which means they are against us. They want to see us fail. Love them, Jesus says (Luke 6:27, 35).

*Others may not be our **personal enemies**, but simply people whose **character** or **personality** or **condition** makes them **unattractive** or even **repulsive**. Be merciful to them, Jesus says (Luke 10:37). Don't base your treatment of them on what they attract or deserve, but on mercy.*

Others may be our relatives or friends who have taken offense at something we have done—rightly or wrongly—and the relationship is cold or non-existent. Strive to be reconciled to them, Jesus says (Matt. 5:23–26).

Others may or may not have anything against you, but you do against them. Love them by forgiving them, Jesus says (Matt. 6:14–15)."²

Illus.: Do you remember what Jesus said in Luke 10 in the Parable of the Good Samaritan? Jesus explains once again what God's law of love demands, and what His justice requires, and what we all owe to our neighbor. You'll remember that the Jews hated, despised, and avoided at all costs, those whom they deemed to be half-breeds, namely, the Samaritans. So in typical Jesus-fashion, our Lord makes the despised Samaritan into the hero of the parable of the Good Samaritan. And what Jesus is saying in that parable is that loving our **neighbors** must of necessity include loving our **enemies**. **We are called by Christ to love the unlovable.**

App.: Who are your Samaritans? Who are the untouchables in your life? Who are the people you despise? Who are you people who you seek to avoid? Who are the people in your life that you find most difficult to love? Who are those you deem to be unlovable?

App.: We live in an age of identity politics, constant divisive public discourse; we are saturated with expressive individualism, fomented in the echo-chamber of social media,

² John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 212–213.

coupled with main-stream networks that thrive on sound-bites and tribalism. All of this is catechizing you all the time.

We are all, in some measure, the products of our times. Therefore, the tendency of most of us is to **deify** those with whom we already agree and **demonize** those with whom we disagree. When Jesus says, "Love your enemies," He has in view the people that you are tempted to demonize.

Here's the amazing thing: ***we are called to love those who demonize us.*** The command isn't don't demonize; it's: love your enemies, love those who demonize you. If you claim to be a follower of Christ, His command on your life from this text is: "***Love your enemies.***"

Brothers and sisters, how must this command shape the way you treat and speak to and speak about those with whom you have serious disagreements? "*Use very hard arguments, but use very soft words.*" "*A gentle tongue is a tree of life.*" (**Prov. 15:4**) Even when we correct our opponents, we are to do so with gentleness. (**2 Tim. 2:25**)

There are several public disagreements currently happening among brothers and sisters in Christ that have led to a kind of polemic that labels the other side as "heretical" or as "an enemy of the faith," without the patient and loving work required to give the opposing side a fair and charitable hearing.

John Newton once wrote to a young pastor who was zealously engaging in fiery polemics with another pastor with whom he disagreed: "*Remember, the Lord loves him and bears with him, just as He does with you; so you must not despise him, or treat him harshly. Because in a little while you will meet in heaven; and he will be dearer to you then than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now.*"³

Don't love as the world loves. Instead, love the way God loves us in Christ!

III. Love your enemies, not like the world loves, but like God loves you (Verses 35-36)

In **Verses 35-36**, Jesus grounds this otherworldly kind of love upon the lavish love and mercy God has for sinners... sinners just like you and me.

In these final two verses we discover both the Christian's fuel and foundation of love.

First, notice the *fuel of love.* Jesus repeats and summarizes His previous commands: "***35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return...***"

Here comes the fuel. What fuel does Jesus provide to empower this otherworldly love for our enemies? Notice, the **two future tense verbs**, the **two result clauses** that are intended to motivate us to love our enemies in this way: "***and your reward will be great,***

³ John Newton, "Letter XIX: On Controversy," *The Works of John Newton, Volume 1* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2015), 1: 268-270.

and you will be sons of the Most High..."

Notice, Jesus promises that if you love your enemies your future reward, your heavenly reward, will be great. When we love our enemies in this world, we may receive more scorn and hatred. We may not see any acts of gratitude for such love in this life. But Jesus promises, that in the life to come, we will receive ample reward. Jesus uses the same kind of logic in **Luke 14:13**: "*When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*" In other words, live and love today, by looking to the Last Day. **Let the promise of eternal life and future reward motivate a life of otherworldly love for the unlovable today.**

Notice, also, that Jesus promises that if you love your enemies, you will be, that is, you show yourself to be "sons of the Most High God." In other words, as Calvin says, love for our enemies is a "***sure mark of our adoption.***" We evidence that we are children of God when we love our enemies like this. When we love this way we live out our family resemblance. **Let your identity as an adopted child of God, motivate you to love your enemies knowing that such otherworldly love points even your enemies to the lavish love of your Father who is in Heaven.**

Second, notice the *foundation of love.* Right in the middle of **Verse 35**, Jesus grounds our love as sons of the Most High in the gracious character of the Most High God Himself: "***for*** *He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*"

In other words, the foundational reason we ought to love our enemies and do good to them and lend to them, expecting nothing in return, is because that is precisely the way our Father in heaven graciously loves undeserving sinners: He is kind to sinners; He is kind to those who are ungrateful; He is kind to those who are evil. He is kind and merciful to those who are His enemies.

Jesus expands this statement in **Matthew 5:45**: "*For He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*" **The Most High God lavishes innumerable blessings of His kindness upon ungrateful and evil sinners who actively rebel against Him every day.** The sun rises and the rains fall and new mercies come, and even though He is "*a God who feels indignation every day,*" **Ps. 7:11**), He continues to love His enemies because He is kind, gracious, merciful, forbearing, and patient.

Friend, if you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, He wants you to know this morning from this passage that your life is full of countless gifts of His Father's grace to you... even though right now you are His enemy. All of us are born into this world as enemies of God by nature and we show ourselves to be enemies of God by the choices we make. We sin because we are sinners. We rebel because we are rebels. We have all sinned countless times against our good and gracious Creator. And yet, because of His mercy, He has sustained your life even to this day through His

kindness towards you. Friend, don't presume upon the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience towards you, not recognizing that His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. (**Rom. 2:4**)

You have orphaned yourself because of your treasonous rebellion but by turning and trusting in Jesus Christ, by receiving Him in the empty hands of faith, you may be adopted as a child of God through Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son. No matter how far you've run from God, He promises to be Father who receives prodigals with open arms of mercy and a feast of celebration. There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Turn and trust in Jesus Christ, the Righteous One!

Christian, as we've considered this otherworldly call to love our enemies from our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, have you pondered how Jesus Himself obeyed His own command?

In Christ, we see most clearly God's kindness to the ungrateful and the evil. The Lord Jesus, who only went around doing good (**Acts 10:38**), was crucified at the hands of His enemies. Some of the very ones who put Jesus to death were the very ones He came to save.

They mocked Him and abused Him. They struck Him on the face. They hated Him and cursed Him. And yet, "*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.*" (**1 Pet. 2:22-23**)

They stripped Him naked and they took His tunic and His robe. And Jesus prayed for them on the cross, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" (**Luke 23:34**)

When you were His enemy, the Son of the Most High God loved you. He died for sinners, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring us to God. We love Him because He first loved us.

And "*if while we were **enemies** we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*" (**Rom. 5:10**) **Nothing will help you love your enemies more than knowing that God loved you when you were His enemy.**

How do we respond to such lavish and undeserved mercy? Christian, *be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

Conclusion: When the movie version of Louis Zamperini's story was reviewed by the critics, few of them highlighted the ways in which the director departed from the conclusion of his biography. The filmmaker highlighted Zamperini's physical and emotional stamina, his self-determination, and his personal resolve and resilience... even

under the most extreme of circumstances. And in the closing of the film there is one fleeting reference to forgiveness. But Laura Hillenbrand's book concludes like this, which I found to be the most moving and the most vital paragraph in the book to truly understand Louis Zamperini. These are the words Zamperini wrote to the Bird, his arch-enemy, the Japanese guard who tortured him for two years:

*"As a result of my prisoner of war experience under your unwarranted and unreasonable punishment, my post-war life became a nightmare. It was not so much due to the pain and suffering as it was the tension of stress and humiliation that caused me to hate with a vengeance. Under your discipline, my rights, not only as a prisoner of war but also as a human being, were stripped from me. It was a struggle to maintain enough dignity and hope to live until the war's end. The post-war nightmares caused my life to crumble, but thanks to a confrontation with God, I committed my life to Christ. Love replaced the hate I had for you. Christ said, **"Forgive your enemies and pray for them."** As you probably know, I returned to Japan in 1952 and was graciously allowed to address all the Japanese war criminals at Sugamo Prison.... At that moment, like the others, I also forgave you and I now hope that you would also become a follower of Jesus Christ."*⁴

Later Hillenbrand writes: *"Zamperini felt something that he had never felt for his captor before. With a shiver of amazement, he realized that it was compassion. At that moment, something shifted sweetly inside him. It was forgiveness, beautiful and effortless and complete. For Louie Zamperini, **the war was finally over.**"*⁵

⁴ Hillenbrand, Laura. Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption (pp. 396-397). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Hillenbrand, Laura. Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption (p. 379). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.