

Love Your Enemies

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Preacher: Danny Saunders

[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 2nd of June 2002. The preacher is Danny Saunders.

His sermon is entitled Love Your Enemies and is based on Luke chapter 6 verses 27 to 36.

Well you might like to leave your Bibles open. It's about pages when you look through it together tonight. Some men were stationed in Korea during the Korean War.

While they were there they hired a local boy to cook and clean for them. And being a bunch of pranksters they soon took advantage of this young boy's seeming naivety.

So they played a few jokes on him. They smeared Vaseline on the stove handles so that when he turned on the stove in the morning he would get grease all over his fingers. They put little water buckets over the door so that he would get drenched when he opened the door.

[1 : 0 3] They even nailed his shoes to the floor during the night. So day after day this little guy took the bunt of their practical jokes without saying anything, without retaliating.

No blame, no self pity, no temper tantrums. And finally the men felt guilty about what they were doing. So they sat down with the young Korean and they said, Look, we know these pranks aren't funny anymore and we're sorry.

We're never going to take advantage of you again. It seemed too good to be true for the house boy. No more sticky on stove, he asked. Nope. No more water on door. Nope.

No more nailed shoes to the floor. Nope, never again. OK, the boy said with a smile. No more spit in soup. Revenge is one of those things.

As Paul said earlier, tonight's topic is very challenging. We're going to continue to look at the Sermon of Jesus to his disciples as recorded in Luke's Gospel. and a few weeks back you might recall poor Dudley began this series by taking us through the introduction to Jesus' sermon what the Sermon on the Plain or the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel and Jesus in these sermons turns things upside down and he spoke and he taught like no one else and the words we're looking at tonight are just as challenging for us Jesus asks his disciples to lead a radical way of life to be different from the crowd to love in a way that is rarely seen in the world and ultimately to live in a way that expresses the mercy and the grace that we as Christians have received from God in what Jesus has achieved for us on the cross Christians are called to love in a way that shows they have received God's love and that reflects God's mercy Christians are called to love in a way that shows they have received God's love and that reflects God's mercy

[3 : 07] Christians are called to an uncompromising indiscriminate unprejudiced unconditional love well of course we're going to need God's help to love in this way and we're going to need God's help to really understand and apply this passage tonight so let's just pray together dear Lord thank you for your words to us tonight help us to understand them help us to understand what it means to love our enemies and help us to learn to apply these passages in response to the grace and the love that you've given us I pray that you would open up our hearts tonight to understand those things in Jesus name Amen what does Christ expect of us as Christians as his children how are we to live we know that we have to love each other but here Jesus raises the bar even further we're not only to love each other but we must also love our enemies in verse 27 but I say to you that listen love your enemies do good to those that hate you at the heart of the words of Jesus is the need for love we must love those that we don't like as well as those that appeal to us you see people in Jesus' time have been ready to love their neighbours and to hate their enemies but Jesus goes beyond all of that a follower of Jesus can't be selective in their love a Christian must be ready to love all people whoever they are now love here is not an affectionate romantic sort of love it's not about being in love it implies an attitude and an action more than an emotion so remember it's not an affectionate romantic sort of in love type of thing it implies an attitude a decision an action more than an emotion as difficult as it sounds

Jesus is urging us to have a humble servant attitude towards people we may not like even if they don't have that same attitude towards us and this sort of love isn't given because of anything special or good in a particular person it's given because you choose to be a loving person so this is an attitude of love or a choice that you will make rather than an emotion that you might feel and it's not enough just to be polite so as not to be hostile or rude to our enemies Jesus takes this loving attitude a step further and he says that we must also do good to those that hate you so the love that Jesus wants from us requires action not just words we must show by our actions that we have compassion and to do this we'll have to look for ways and opportunities to do good to our enemies this might mean working harder to show you respect your boss it might mean offering to help when you know that help is needed it might mean being nice to your teachers it might mean talking to someone that you wouldn't normally talk to it's going to mean whatever it takes for you to put on this attitude of love an attitude of kindness respect compassion and humility towards your enemies now this would have been incredibly radical for the disciples it was easy for them to see their enemies they were living under Roman occupation and there were many Jews who wrongly thought that the Messiah was going to come and be off the Romans through military conquest but here we've got the Messiah saying not eye for an eye or tooth for a tooth but love your enemies and do good to those that hate you well we're not living under Roman occupation of course so how do we apply these verses today who are your enemies in Australia we don't have armed terrorists about to set fire to the church no our church burning down only happens on neighbours but to one degree or another we all have rivals or opponents there's people that towards whom you might feel animosity people you might not be fond of or you don't like simply because they might rub you up the wrong way or you don't get along very well your enemy might be a competing business person stealing your best clients or someone you work with getting all the credit and promotions when you're doing all the work it might be your boss it might be your employees not doing what they're asked to do and not working hard enough an enemy for you might be someone who holds an opposing view on issues in society like the refugee crisis or stem cell research or homosexuality or what about divisive issues in the church baptism women in ministry speaking in tongues or even liturgical dancing you might not think that you have any enemies but ask yourself have you gone beyond disagreeing with a person's opinions or their lifestyle or their sexuality have you gone beyond merely disagreeing with the person to despising and hating them because of their views an enemy for you might be a teacher or a student at school it might be a friend who's more popular than you might be someone who broke your heart or what about a friend or neighbour who has more material possessions than you and likes to flaunt it and show it off and what about your family what about your spouse your parents or a brother or sister that you barely talk to who are your enemies

will I have an enemy at work we're not openly hostile towards each other and we do get along okay but we have different values we have different beliefs and we have different priorities in life and this makes it difficult for us to see eye to eye I feel that this person can be two-faced hypocritical and uncaring and sometimes I just cringe when I have to speak with this person and I guess that's what most of you might think of a typical lawyer but I have to work with this person and so I have to work hard at loving and respecting him even though I don't really like him or agree with his views and attitudes I have to watch that I don't participate into criticising and bagging this person with other work colleagues and I have to decide to put into practice the attitudes and actions of love that Jesus refers to in this passage and these things don't come naturally and it's a real struggle to love like this when you're faced with someone that makes you feel this way so ask yourself who are your enemies let's not just think about hypothetical situations tonight let's talk about real people real relationships and real conflict and then let's ask how do we apply the kind of love that Jesus requires to these hurtful situations these hurtful relationships and these hurtful people how can we do what Jesus asks and love our enemies when it goes against all our human nature well Jesus has already told us that we have to take action to love our enemies by doing good to those that hate us and in verse 28

Jesus tells us that we must also show our love in words when he says bless those who curse you pray for those who abuse you so you might be cursed sworn at or abused but you must do the opposite of what the world expects in the same situation the world meets abuse with abuse but Jesus again raises the standard for Christians he says that we must pray and bless those that torment us now I play basketball each Thursday night and I'm sure anyone who's played with me or against me would say that I play like the opposing team and my enemies and that's not to say that I'm a bad sport or I lose my temper or that I'm violent but I'm sure that in the heat and the adrenaline and the passion of the game I've often met abuse with abuse I remember one match recently I drove hard to the basket a la Michael Jordan not quite and I was met solidly by an opposing player and the foul was caught on him hitting me but he sort of yelled at me sarcastically you know good charge at which I automatically responded yeah good on you mate or something like that worse to that effect and so there we were continued taunting and abusing each other for the rest of the game so there I was a Christian and I was not meeting abuse with blessing or showing love by my actions and my attitude well what was I to do in that situation we'd like to justify this sort of behaviour by calling it sledging and saying it's all part of the game or it's all psychological but Jesus calls on us to be radically different he tells us to bless those that curse us not to repay evil for evil but to overcome evil with good so this means that it's up to us to call a ceasefire in the war of words if someone says something nasty or bitter towards you you must fight the urge to retaliate and lash out and instead respond with kind considerate language and this also means resisting that temptation to take part in gossip rumour or unfair criticism fighting a war of words will only make matters worse and add to the barriers of hurt and animosity between people now you can see this as two parties pulling on the ends of a rope in which there's been tied this big knot of conflict and the harder each party pulls on the rope the tighter that knot will become and a time may come when that knot is so tight and the parties are pulling so hard against it that it can't be undone and then the rope has to get cut and relationships are forever damaged when you trade insults with insults accusations with accusations this knot of conflict gets tighter and tighter until all hope of resolution is broken and what's left is just a painful hopeless mess so Jesus tells us here don't let this be the pattern of your life don't trade insults with insults and shoot off words of accusation let go of the rope of conflict and meet insults with gentleness kindness and compassion

Jesus also tells us to pray for those that abuse us if you're having trouble letting go of your hostility your resentment and your anger if you can't let go of that rope talk to God about it ask God to help you deal with it ask God to help you love the person that you don't like confess to God the ways that you might have contributed to the problem and then pray for your enemies ask God to give them good health to keep their families safe to help them see their own need for God Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Christian leader who suffered under the Nazis and was eventually executed by them he said of this passage this is the supreme command through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy we stand by their side and we plead for them to God when you spend time praying for someone your attitude towards that person has to change you can't pray for someone over a long period of time and continue to resent them instead you'll start to see that person from God's perspective a person that is made in the image of God someone that matters to God a person that God loves even if they are tainted and distorted by sin so in having an attitude of love towards our enemies we don't have to approve or condone of what people are or what they might have done or said but we are to love them for who they are and we can't forget that they are people who are made in the image of God and who matter to God so we are to love our enemies with both words and actions we can't trade insults but rather we should respond by doing good and with kind words and by praying for our enemies well if you thought this was hard enough

[16 : 12] Jesus goes even further he again raises the standard our attitude of love must be our reaction to both verbal and physical abuse so in verse 29 Jesus says if anyone strikes you on the cheek offer the other also and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt this is a radical teaching that makes a mockery of the world's values the world says if you're abused abuse back if you're struck in the face if you're insulted seek revenge punch back get even sue even a few years ago I played my last season of football it hadn't been a good year I had no motivation at all I'd hardly trained during the pre-season and I struggled with injuries because of that quite honestly I wasn't enjoying the football club atmosphere and I couldn't wait for the year to be over now don't worry I'm not going to pull out a pair of football shorts a skimpy pair of football shorts like Steve's running gear last week it's been enough having nightmares all week over that so I'll leave that to Steve but anyway it was the last training session of the season after the training session the teams would be picked it was going to be a really big day for the club both the seniors and the reserves were in the grand final and Doug

Barwick the former Collingwood Premiership player from 1957 was it no last Collingwood Premiership anyway he was my coach and he called me aside and he said you've been dropped for the game dropped from the reserves so this meant I wasn't going to get picked I wasn't going to play at all I'd miss out in playing in the grand final but he then said something to me that I've always found really strange I probably did look quite devastated at the time and he said to me do you want to punch me now the thought had never entered my head quite honestly it never had entered my head sure I was disappointed and I was a bit upset but look it was only a football match and his expectation must have been that I might want to punch him because I was going to miss out or somehow I held him responsible or I was personally insulted and I hated him for that decision now this isn't a story about to show how good I am after all I've already admitted to trading insults on the basketball court no what I'm trying to show is that the world does expect insults to be repaid with insults it is a natural reaction for people to want to get even or seek revenge or to hold a grudge women's magazines and TV soap is full of this sort of gossip insults and revenge it's all the rage and they call it intrigue to justify it but Jesus is calling us to do the exact opposite

Jesus is illustrating an attitude of love that doesn't take insults personally and doesn't worry about putting up a defence so when we're injured whether it be physically or verbally we should not hold a grudge become bitter and twisted and look for ways to seek revenge this is how the world operates if we're injured we should endure the insult and be ready to accept another injury love doesn't keep a record of wrongs and so we shouldn't store up insults waiting for an appropriate time to return the favour or deciding that we won't go near a certain person again Jesus doesn't give us this option the option Jesus gives us requires action on our part we must do good to those that hurt us pray for them and bless them we must forgive insults and even violence and show love as our reaction if we forgive outwardly but really on the inside we're just fuming and we're not ready to forget then we haven't reached that standard that Jesus requires of his disciples

Jesus is looking for real loving forgiveness in words and in actions and this is what Jesus refers to with the coat and the shirt he's saying don't react with anger don't seek revenge but be willing to accept further injury if someone takes your coat let them have your shirt as well if you're struck on the face don't get even be ready for more injury and this might sound crazy in comparison to the world's values but it's only in turning the other cheek that you'll ever be able to respond to a person insulting you with the attitude of love that Jesus requires it's only in turning the other cheek that you'll be able to respond with this attitude of love now let me just say at this point that I don't believe Jesus is saying that we should simply take any physical abuse or violence and nor should we excuse theft and corruption that would be inconsistent with the rest of scripture in John chapter 18

Jesus protests against the actions of a soldier hitting him in the face for no just reason but in this example Jesus is not insisting on his personal rights in the protest he rebukes the soldier for breaking the law so he doesn't say why are you insulting me he doesn't lose his temper or take it personally or get angry or punch back what Jesus is concerned about here is upholding the law when the law is broken we can and we should protest if we do this we're not acting in personal interest or for revenge we're acting as believers in God who believe that all law and authority are ultimately given by God and so should be upheld the governing authorities are there to uphold the law and exercise justice on wrongdoers we know this from Romans 13 the Christian therefore must believe in observing the public laws and in upholding truth and justice as well as having an attitude of love towards those who break the law and in this way we can seek to hold justice and mercy together so if a drunken lunatic breaks into your house and punches you in the face and seeks to assault your family and take all your possessions

[22:13] I don't believe you must turn the other cheek and give the robber your pin number to your savings account this would be a ridiculous interpretation of this passage now what is really happening here is that this person has lost control of his faculties and needs our help Jesus is concerned about our attitude to such a person in this situation you're not getting personally insulted the drunken lunatic could quite have easily broken into the house over the road this example is of a person doing harm to himself to you and probably to others in the community it's necessary that this person is restrained given the appropriate treatment and care and that the law is upheld the teaching that Jesus gives us tonight is about personal insults and our reaction to our personal enemies and our reaction and our behaviour towards those and verse 30 is another verse that we need to consider very carefully when it says give to everyone who begs from you and if anyone takes away your goods do not ask for them again again Jesus is encouraging us to help frauds or professional beggars or even drug addicts you may have seen such people asking for money in the city or elsewhere a drug addict begging in the city might say that they need money for food but if they just go and use that money to buy more heroin then how have we responded to them in love the point of what Jesus is saying in the context of the rest of the passage is that love itself should decide not our greed or selfishness so Jesus does want his followers to have an attitude of giving that is never stopped or limited by love of wealth or possessions

Jesus is teaching against a tendency within us not to help people in real need because of our own self centred attitudes or selfishness so Christians should always be ready and willing to help those who are in need and if we choose not to help it should only be because of a distrust of what the real motivation is of the person who's asking it must never be because we're simply too greedy or too selfish to share we should be holding all that we have loosely and realise that everything we have comes from God and so be ready to use our wealth or our possessions for God's kingdom if someone tells you that they haven't eaten for days and this is their reason for begging take them to McDonald's and buy them a meal and use the opportunity to talk to that person about Jesus I'll never forget a time that I was in the city with a friend and this friend saw an old man looking through a bin and she went up to him and said come on

I'll come and buy you something to eat you don't have to look through the bin I'll buy you something to eat this girl was a Christian and she went and did this and she went and she bought this man something to eat nothing happened to her that was it but she did she put this into action so Christians should always seek to have a giving attitude and this shouldn't just be a one off impulse or an occasional good work as great as those impulses might be we should give in a continuous sense and the best place to do this is right here in church if we are Christians then we should tithe we should give back to God of what he gives us and we should consider ourselves stewards of everything God provides to us giving is the best way to guard your hearts against a wrongful attitude towards your wealth and possessions how does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help let us love not in word or speech only but also in truth and action

Jesus sums up the attitude that he wants to see in his disciples by what is known as the golden rule in verse 31 do to others as you would have them do to you this is the principle that should cover the whole of your life and relationships this is the summary of the entire passage do to others as you would have them do to you treat people the way you'd like to be treated this is an active positive statement this idea is found in other religions but it's only Jesus who puts this in the active positive sense Jesus is saying do good to others and treat them well the way you would like to be treated as opposed to don't do to others what you wouldn't like to do wouldn't like happen to you so it's not enough simply to stop doing bad things to people this isn't what Jesus says he's telling us to be active in our well-doing to do good to people in the way we like the good things done to us so we're not meant to wait until someone earns our respect and then we can decide to treat them well we can't hold off being nice to someone until we decide if we like them or not we're to treat people well whether we like them or not whether they have wronged us or not whether they are our enemies or not it shouldn't matter who the person is what they have done what colour they are what language they speak what job they have or where they live or even what car they drive right from the beginning we should treat people with love respect and kindness and not with suspicion and distrust my sister went on exchange to

America for a year and she lived in a suburb in Chicago with a family who went to church every Sunday she brought home a friend from school to meet her host family but the friend didn't get past the front door you see he was an African American and he wasn't allowed in the house now how can these people call themselves Christians with this attitude of prejudice discrimination and hatred if you believe you are a Christian then there's no room for such attitudes Jesus tells us do to others as you would have them do to you what Jesus expects from his followers must be radically different to the values that are seen in the world today and this is made clear in verses 32 to 34 if you love those who love you what credit is that to you for even sinners love those who love them if you do good to those who do good to you what credit is that to you for even sinners do the same if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive what credit is that to you even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much you gain again

[28 : 58] Jesus is raising the standard for us Jesus requires that we go beyond the standard of the world's good works he expects us to be far better than even the good that we see in society he gives us three practical examples of how Christians must be different even sinners people who owe nothing to God people who are living in rebellion to God practice some virtues they love those that love them they repay good deeds done to them they lend if they know they'll get their money back or they can call on a favour in the future if Christians do these things then they're doing no more than what the world does we often congratulate ourselves for some good work we've done or some special quality we might think we have but before you think you're reaching the mark ask whether what you're doing is anything more than what sinners might do in a similar situation I saw a great example of this at work recently there were two work colleagues they weren't

Christians they were hugging in the middle of the kitchen one of them had borrowed a book from the other one it was a hardcover novel that had been ripped to shreds by the woman's dog now what would you do in this situation you're minding Maggie and Ziggy for the weekend the browns and the reeds have gone away together and the dogs go crazy and destroy a book that you borrowed from poor Dudley it's not your fault that the dogs destroyed the book and after all if you borrowed it from Paul well he's a Christian and they're not meant to value their possessions anyway are they so he won't mind if the book's been destroyed will he is this how we think this isn't a question of valuing material possessions this is a question of respect and love for others and doing to them as you would have them do to you what happened in this story was that the person whose dog had destroyed the book had reordered the book and was now giving a brand new book back to the person who it was borrowed from and there they were hugging in the kitchen because they were acknowledging the mutual respect and love that they had for each other as shown in this gesture of good will now you might not think that this is much of a big deal but if you think about it this person had gone to some effort so that the person who loaned the book would have it returned it wasn't just a sorry the dogs destroyed your book bad luck such as life sort of an attitude there was an attitude of real love and respect for the other person and for their things christians should be trying to outdo each other in doing good deeds this is what Jesus is saying your good deeds must be better than what is already being done in the world if you don't reach the standard of sinners or you only do as much as they do and no more then what good is that how are you being any different let's not hide behind the excuse that we're all sinful people Jesus isn't saying that Jesus isn't giving us that option he's setting a standard that he expects us to strive for as hard as it might be so we should seek to outdo one another in doing good works as Christians as God's children we have to live up to higher standards and the fact that we're God's children should be all the motivation that we need to live lives that are this is expressed in the final verses of this passage but love your enemies do good and lend expecting nothing in return your reward will be great and you will be children of the most high for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked so again Jesus repeats the positive attitude and the actions that we are to have we are first to love our enemies and do good and lend favor from someone or to have them owe you something in the future if you lend hoping to be owed a favor then you would be expecting something in return but we should lend our time our money and our good works to all people that are in need and we should do so without reluctance or regret and not for the sake of getting something back and although we shouldn't expect reward so that we don't become proud and self righteous

Jesus does tell us that reward will come with living and acting with this attitude of love and again this is not reward in the world's eyes what we win is the reward of peace of love of joy and all the other fruits of the Holy Spirit that come when we do live a life as God intended in a relationship with him in service for him and in the unity and fellowship that we have as believers on a practical level there are huge rewards in living with an attitude of love towards all people we can heal our minds and our emotions from bitter and angry thoughts that otherwise could lead to us becoming bitter and angry people forgiveness and responding in love allows us to rid ourselves of bitterness and anger there's also relational benefits if you stop yanking on that rope of conflict you're loosening the tension you're letting go and you're preserving the possibility of reconciliation of broken relationships this maintains hope that somehow those knots of conflict might be untied there's also spiritual benefits

Jesus said to the disciples after teaching them the Lord's prayer that if they forgive the sins of others God would forgive them but if they didn't forgive others then God wouldn't forgive them so people will know that we are Christians by the way we love and forgive others and this will attract people into the kingdom of God and the greatest reward of all is that in living in this way we fulfill our calling as members of God's family and Jesus says we will be children of the most high so we have the qualities of Jesus and the character of God and we are told what these qualities are at the end of this passage he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked be merciful just as your father is merciful this is our motivation to live like this our motivation to live a life of love is not for our own reward it's not to earn God's favour or for our salvation we don't earn salvation by loving our enemies and doing good works if you are a

Christian if you have salvation then you've already been shown God's mercy and you've already received God's love and forgiveness even though you were once God's enemy only Christians can live like this in verse 27 Jesus says that he's only talking to those who are listening and he compares the attitude that he wants in his disciples with the actions of sinners so it's quite clear that the standards in this passage are only meant for the disciples of Jesus but this attitude of love can only come as a response and in gratitude of receiving the grace and mercy of God God gives us his grace and mercy in sending Jesus into the world to die on a cross to remove God's judgment for our sin and then to rise from death to defeat the consequences of sin we've all sinned and fallen short of God's standards there's no one who is righteous there is no one who shows kindness our mouths are full of cursing and bitterness we don't know the way of peace and there's no fear of

[37 : 02] God before our eyes we've all failed to live up to these standards the truth is that we are the ones that are ungrateful and wicked and God has been merciful to us this is all the more reason for us to treat people with love and respect but you can't possibly live like this unless you've been born again as a child of God and have received God's salvation in Christ and the Holy Spirit that gives us love and peace unless you've experienced the forgiveness and grace that comes from Jesus removing your barrier of sin so that you are in a relationship with God you won't be able to love your enemies our greatest example of this loving attitude is God himself in asking us to love our enemies Jesus is asking us to do exactly what God does we were once

God's enemies we cursed and abused God we shook our fist at God we expected everything but we gave nothing in return we were wicked and ungrateful we deserved to be punished but yet God loves us and sent his son to die in our place and to take our judgment so that we could once again become God's friends that's the good news God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us while we were enemies of God we were reconciled to God through the death of his son this is the reason that we can love our enemies God loved us while we were his enemies this is our motivation to love our enemies we are God's children and must be kind and merciful as he is kind and merciful this is our supreme example he's scoffing and gloating enemies all around him

Jesus nailed to a cross says father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing