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Intro:

We all know that almost every hero has an arch-enemy, a nemesis. (include pictures) For Superman, it was Lex Luther. For Sherlock Holmes, it was Professor Moriarty. For the Road Runner, it was Coyote. For Ahab, it was the White Whale, Moby Dick. For Frodo, it was Sauron.

love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. But I tell you,

Enemies:

But we do not live in books, movies, or television, so most of us don't have an arch-enemy or arch-nemesis. But in Matthew 5 :43, Jesus says"

We receive this

command, but often times, when we hear this word "enemy," we think, "Melodramatic, much? I don't have *enemies*." So before we look more closely at this passage, let's start with-do we have enemies? Who are they? We begin by scaling it back. Let's start with, who are the people you don't really like? A comedian, Mark Lowery, described them as the people who "you would cry at their funeral, but you don't want to go to their birthday party." Those people. That changes things.

- You know, acquaintance to talks too much about themselves, and it secretly drives you crazy.
- The person who cuts you off while driving and then drives 10 mph below the speed limit. At that moment, that person *feels* like my enemy. (I don't know about you, but I often feel MOST convicted by the Holy Spirit when I am driving).
- Then there's the neighbor who never picks up after his dog, and the dog really seems to love your yard.
- The person who has different political views than you and posts them all over Facebook.
- There's the person you've invested in, who later comes back and betrays your trust.

- The coworker who always seems to be picking a fight with you or mocking you in front of your other coworkers because of your faith.
- It might even be a family member or family-member-in-law who you just cannot seem to get along with.
- Just standing for what's right in your family, work and community will sometimes prompt animosity towards you.

For some of us, it's obvious there are people in our lives who treat us like enemies. But for others of us, these people, while we may not come right out and say it, can feel like enemies to us.

An enemy is any person who would do us harm. This can also include any person who, *in our perception*, we think they'll do us harm. If we THINK they'll do us

harm, that can be enough. And it's with these people we find it challenging to pray for them and truly love them not just in our words, but in our heart, in our actions.

So now that we've adjusted our view of the word "enemy", we can truly admit that there are people in our lives who would persecute us, who would do us harm.

Now we can move forward with the passage:

Matthew 5:43-48

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

Calling:

- That's quite the command-to be perfect. Is this even possible? We'll get back to that at the end.
- So, we know we have enemies, so what is our attitude toward them?
- Jesus didn't come to abolish the law, but complete it. The completion of this statement is:
- We LOVE our enemies and PRAY for those who persecute us.

Purpose:

This passage gives us two reasons why we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us:

⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

3. We are God's children and we follow His example.
Just like He gives sunlight and rain to all, He gives salvation to all. His grace and His love extend to all people. Who are we to say otherwise? There are no levels of sin. You and I are no more deserving of grace than our enemies, and those people that we dislike are beloved by God. It says in Romans, ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. I don't deserve rain or

sunshine more than anyone else, but God gives it to me freely. The same
with love. He gives it to all freely, with no expectation of compensation.
If you choose to not love, you choose to not be a part of that process, and
only you are missing out.

4.

⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax
collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more
than others? Do not even pagans do that?

As we act like the Father, we deepen our fellowship with Him. He loved the people unconditionally who considered Him an enemy, and prayed for those who persecuted him. When we do the same, when we act as He continues to act, we get to share with his experience. Act like the Father and give grace to all.

1. Loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you will yield more results.

These results are made manifest in a few ways.

- a. First, we know that in Heaven there is reward for the works that we do in this life. More than crowns of silver and gold, we do look forward with expectation to the day when we can hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." This is the eternal reward.
- b. But while we are here, we are taken up with this calling to minister the Gospel, to help bring people into a right relationship with Jesus, all to His glory, and we should hope to take advantage of every opportunity we have. We will be more productive, more fruitful, encounter more results for our work if our love knows no bounds. We are the salt and light of the earth; is our love defining and driving our ministry?
 - It's easy to love your buddies at work, but everyone does that. Wouldn't it have a greater reward in your marketplace evangelism if you love the boss that everyone hates? Example: Mom at work
 - It was during the persecution of the Jews that God's love and Good News spread throughout the Roman Empire.

This requires that we push ourselves. I think it's interesting that it mentions not just who we love, but who we stop and greet. Perhaps we think we love everyone, but who do you greet when you walk in the doors here at church? Who do you stop and say hello to at school or at work?

Maybe the better question is-who are you not greeting? Who are you avoiding? Maybe that person in your family that you aren't calling-Why should you call, when they haven't called you? Maybe that person who volunteers here with you and they just rub you the wrong way. You'd rather not get into a discussion with them. And then there's that neighbor-they know what they did.

Sometimes, this is how we treat our enemies. We don't get in fights, we just don't talk to them anymore. We avoid eye contact. We don't sincerely greet them anymore.

To demonstrate love to someone, it starts with greeting them, which acknowledges their presence and their importance to you. Sometimes, the most important evangelism you can do, the greatest way you can show love, is simply by greeting someone. Talk to the person you are intentionally not talking to!

How do we love everyone?

There are many teachings in the Bible on love:

1 Corinthians 13

1 John 3

Agape love-

- First use of this word in the New Testament. Same word used in John 3: 16
- **is the kind of love that cannot be compensated (Jerry Cook)**
 - It is selfless. It keeps on giving. Day after trying day.
 - We have our reasons for not loving, and usually they're found somewhere in our past. We did that once. We gave someone a second chance, and it backfired. We loved someone, and they betrayed us.
 - "Of all arguments against love none makes so strong an appeal to my nature as "Careful! This might lead you to suffering".
To my nature, my temperament, yes. Not to my conscience. When I respond to that appeal I seem to myself to be a thousand miles away from Christ. If I am sure of anything I am sure that His teaching was never meant to confirm my congenital preference for safe investments and limited liabilities. I doubt whether there is anything in me that pleases Him less.
"There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell." C. S. Lewis

- To love, especially to love your enemies, to love the people who actively want to harm you, to love the people you would love to avoid, is to risk vulnerability and possible pain. It's risky to be the first to apologize. It's risky to forgive, to open yourself up. But the alternative-not loving-is infinitely worse.
- Loving people who want to harm us doesn't mean we have to put ourselves in harm's way. Still have boundaries.
- The passage tells us not to hate our enemies. The word "hate" means rejection-turning your face against someone. Your rejection of someone is hating them. Remember: we have only one Enemy!
- Find ways to love people in your direct community. Look around you- your enemies have needs you can meet. Have stories you can listen to. Have problems you can pray for.

Love does not mean approval of everything. Love means giving of oneself.

Example: Christians in Egypt forming circle around praying Muslims.

⁴⁶ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect

This seems like a daunting command. But when it really comes down to it, what is this passage asking us to do? It asks us to love and to pray, so perfection isn't about following the rules; it's about love, God's love. Being perfect is about completely loving in the maturity of Christ. And while we don't ever perfectly love in this life, because we will never be fully complete, we are to strive for this perfection, not through the completion of rules (that's what the Jewish teachers were trying to do), but through loving everyone and praying for everyone, which includes your enemies. Ultimately, we cannot accomplish this perfect love outside of Christ. It is impossible for us to do, which is why we daily rely on Jesus. He matures us and brings us to completion.

Prayer: Salvation, Forgiveness