

LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: AGAPE ATTITUDES

SERMON DISCUSSION FOR SUNDAY AUGUST 02, 2015 | SPEAKER: PASTOR BRIAN SCRAMLIN

SERMON DISCUSSION

Ice Breaker (Everyone): Share the name of someone who accepts you for who you are, even if you are being “a beast”

INTRO

A video was shown interviewing a woman whose son was murdered along with the man who committed the crime. Twelve years into the prison sentence the woman met Oshea Israel, her son’s killer. Through the power of the Lord and forgiveness, the two reconciled and eventually became very close. Actually, they literally live next door to each other. Mary Johnson-Roy and Oshea now travel the United States speaking to churches, prisons, and groups about the power of forgiveness, the consequences of our actions, and the hope for restored life.

What did the video stir up in your heart as you watched it?

Do you think you could do what Mary Johnson-Roy did? Why or why not?

Oshea said “looking in the mirror at myself takes a great strength” What is he referring to? Why would it take great strength?

PRINCES AND BEASTS

Pastor Brian shared the premise of *The Beauty and the Beast*, an old fairy tale:

A handsome prince who is cursed by an evil fairy and is transformed into a ferocious, ugly beast. The curse will become permanent upon the young prince unless he can find true love by a specific date. Beauty, a young woman ends up living with the beast and eventually, just before time runs out Beauty looks past the animalistic tendencies and coarse exterior into the heart of a prince. She weeps over him and as her tears touch his fur, he is transformed before her eyes.

Then he shared the “Beauty and the Beast Principle”: Before something is loveable, it must first be loved.

Do you agree with this principle? Yes, no, or somewhere in between? Why?

It is declared that every human was made as a “prince” in God’s image, but with the introduction of sin in the world, God’s image has turned us into “beasts”

From the sermon: *...while it breaks God’s heart to see the victims of murder, rape, theft, and deceit, it also breaks God’s heart to see the one’s He created to be a mirror of Himself becoming the beasts capable of these disgusting acts.*

Next Pastor Brian encouraged us to look into our own hearts. If our thoughts and deeds were laid bare, would we look more like a “prince” or a “beast”? Especially when we compare ourselves to God, in Whose image we are meant to reflect? From the sermon: *We find that every one of us has been affected by some hurt, habit, or hang-up, a mixture of pain done to us and pain we have chosen to participate in.*

SCRIPTURE; MATTHEW 5:43-48; LEVITICUS 19:18 ESV

Jesus continues to correct misinterpreted Scripture as He has done throughout Matthew 5. He is explaining the spirit of the Old Testament Law, fulfilling what God has desired all along—the restoration of the entire human race. For all of God’s children to become princes once again. Here today in the concluding passage we see the crown jewel of God’s New Kingdom commands—to love our neighbor.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus is confronting the Old Testament passage found in Leviticus 19:18, which reads: *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.* While the religious leaders were correct in understanding this to mean we must take care of our own people, they went to the other side of the spirit of the Law (love toward others) and added “...and hate your enemies” This phrase is never commanded by God **anywhere** in the Hebrew Bible!

While it is easy to peg the Pharisees as dull and hard-hearted, Pastor Brian encouraged us to think about our own hearts in this regard. When you read the word “neighbor” in “love your neighbor” how short or long is your list? Why is it tempting to make your list short?

THE CYCLE OF SIN

In this passage, Jesus is calling His Kingdom people to live above self-preservation, and instead live as healing agents of the world. From the sermon: *Somewhere along the line there has to be a mother who forgives her sons murderer. Somewhere true love has to enter into the equation and break the curse. If not, the cycle of sin will continue to breed corruption upon corruption.*

Pastor Brian outlines the life surrounding an imaginary man who was abused as a child. He takes out his angst on his girlfriend through ongoing physical abuse. The woman, having been neglected by her father, desires a relationship even if it isn’t a healthy one. To ease her pain she turns to popping prescription pain pills. This mellow high causes her to neglect her twelve-year old daughter who is now sneaking out to her boyfriend’s house at night because he gives her attention.

What is the balance of looking at someone as a *victim* versus a *sinner*?

A WRENCH IN THE SYSTEM

Jesus throws a wrench into the system of *sin, begetting sin, begetting sin*. He does this by introducing the two greatest commandments on which all the Law hangs: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.* Luke 10:27 ESV

Although as soon as Jesus shares this, someone yells out “Yeah, well who is my neighbor?”—Trying to find a way out of living a life of difficult loving. To which Jesus shares the famous Parable of the Good Samaritan.

If your group has time, read Luke 10:29-37.

A summary of what occurs: Jesus is talking with some Jewish teachers who really hate Samaritans because they are only half-Jewish. They are impure in their eyes. So in the story a man is beat up and left for dead. Many people walk on by. A Jewish priest, a Jewish Levite—holy men. But a Samaritan comes and takes care of him. Jesus asks, “Who was the better neighbor?” “The Samaritan” they answered. Go and be like that Samaritan.

It’s like in Matthew 5:43-47, only the example is God Himself who sends rain and sunshine on both the deserving and the undeserving.

Pastor Brian posits that here in Matthew 5 and in Luke 10 Jesus essentially asks “You want to know who your neighbor is? Start with this question: ‘Who do you hate?’ and move on from there.” Do you think this is an accurate conclusion from Jesus’ teachings? Why or why not?

KEYSTONE HABITS

Pulitzer Prize winner and investigative journalist Charles Duhigg outlines amazing insights regarding habits in his book [The Power of Habits](#). One of the sections concludes that there exist “Keystone Habits” which if employed will align many smaller habits underneath them. For instance, Pastor Craig Groeschel finds that for him, flossing is of utmost importance to align his sleep patterns, eating habits, hygiene, and attention to detail.

Loving your enemy (neighbor), blessing those who curse you, doing good to those who hate you, and praying for those who use you and persecute you are Keystone Habits which will transform your soul. Here are some spiritual habits which will be aligned by this one Keystone Habit:

- Loving people you like
- Forgiveness
- Letting Go of Bitterness
- Slow to Anger
- No Retaliation
- No Murder
- Giving to the poor
- Extending hospitality
- Bringing Salvation to others

Do you have any “Keystone Habits” you can think of? What other habits does this line up for you?

What other spiritual habits do you think would be affected by habitually loving, blessing, doing good toward, and praying for your enemies?

AN ILLUSTRATION OF LOVING YOUR ENEMY

Pastor Brian shares some excerpts from the book Tortured for Christ by Richard Wurmbrand. Take some time to read and discuss the passages.

...Christians are more than mere men; they are children of God, partakers of the divine nature. Therefore, tortures endured in Communist prisons have not made me hate Communists. They are God's creatures; how can I hate them?

What is the connection between Christians being “children of God” and “Therefore...tortures...have not made me hate Communists”

St. Macary said, "If a man loves all men passionately, but says only about one man that him he cannot love, the man who says this is no more a Christian, because his love is not allembicing."

Do you agree with St. Macary? Why or why not?

I have seen Christians in Communist prisons with fifty pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold-and praying with fervor for the Communists. This is humanly inexplicable! It is the love of Christ, which was poured out in our hearts.

What is the connection between “the love of Christ...poured out in our hearts” and “praying with fervor for the Communists”?

I have seen Christians give away their last slice of bread (we were given one slice a week) and the medicine that could save their lives to a sick Communist torturer, who was now a fellow prisoner.

Do you think you would do the same in this situation? Do believe God requires this sort of love? Explain.

Communists have committed and still commit horrors but [the Bible teaches] "love is as strong as death...Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it" (Song of Solomon 8:6-7). As the grave insists on having all-rich and poor; young and old; men of all races, nations, and political convictions; saints and criminals-so love is all-embracing. Christ, the Incarnate Love, wants all men to come to Him, including the Communists.

How can an understanding of God’s desire for human salvation aid you in your journey of loving your enemies?

A minister who had been horribly beaten was thrown into my cell. He was half-dead, with blood streaming from his face and body. We washed him. Some prisoners cursed the Communists. Groaning, he said, "Please, don't curse them! Keep silent! I wish to pray for them."

This sort of love doesn’t happen overnight. What is one step you can take toward greater love for others?

Consider fulfilling this week’s assignment to pray for your enemy neighbor whenever you think of them. It could be your keystone habit which aligns your soul with Jesus’ Kingdom ways and finally puts a stop to the cycle of sin in the world.