

**Rob Mathis**  
**Sermon: “What if Jesus was Serious?”**  
**-Love in Action-**  
**Rose Hill Church**  
**5.2.21**

**Prayer:**

**Brief Overview:**

**Here at Rose Hill Church, we are in the middle of a sermon series that springboards off the book, “What if Jesus Was Serious?” by author, speaker, and pastor Skye Jethani.**

**What Jethani does is take us through The Sermon on the Mount, found in Chapters 5 to 7 in the Gospel according to Matthew. For those just getting on board, Jethani’s book chapters are short and laser-focused, with lots of food for thought. The book itself is also not lengthy nor complicated to read or understand. However, what the book does have is plenty of opportunity for the reader (and hearer) to ponder how one’s own life is being lived out in relation to how Jesus tells His followers in the Galilean Hills to live.**

Today we will be looking at Part 4, called “Love in Action”.

Listen while I read from the Gospel According to Matthew, Chapter 5:38 to 48 in the New International Version:

<sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>39</sup> But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup> If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor<sup>[b]</sup> and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> 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. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you

**doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

**We have heard: Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth**

**Jesus Says: Do not resist an evil person. Do not retaliate. Do not lash out at those who hurt you; and do not hold yourself up to be more important or valuable than another.**

- **If anyone slaps you turn the other cheek**
- **If someone sues you and takes your shirt, give them your coat**
- **If anyone forces you to go one mile, go two**
- **Give to those who ask, loan to others**

**Jesus is speaking rhetorically, using hyperbole**

**Hyperbole is when you use language to exaggerate what you mean or to emphasize a point.**

**I do not believe Jesus is saying that we must let others abuse us; steal from us, and wholesale injure our person or be abusive.**

**Please, let me make this perfectly clear. For those in the hearing of my voice who are in or have been in an abusive relationship,**

**physically, emotionally, spiritually, and so on, this Sermon from Jesus cannot and must not be used to lure one back into harm's way. No. No. No. It is never right for someone to abuse another; to mistreat another, to treat another in ways we would not ourselves want to be treated. So, please. Let me make it crystal clear that mistreatment of another is never God's way, and we are not called to remain in abusive situations "for God's glory".**

**However, Jesus is here putting what we hold up as most valuable back in our faces. I believe He is asking us to put Him first, and in turn that means to yield ourselves completely to Him and to His life in us.**

**He is showing all of humanity that His Kingdom completely tosses out the ways of the world:**

**You see, this is the essence of the human condition:**

- **Humans are selfish**
- **We want retribution**
- **We want power**

- **We want possessions**
- **We want recognition**
- **We want other's possessions**
- **And on and on and on and on...**

**Now, this is an age-old problem. Many today seem to think that “If we could just go back in time” ...go back to a simpler time. One where we didn't have all the conflicts and chaos and problems. But I don't believe that is the real problem.**

**But I do feel we must go way backwards in time, just for a few moments; way back, and peek at where our problems really stem from, because it is NOT simply from “this modern age”, where many of us feel overwhelmed and that our world is out of control.**

**Let us briefly go back to Genesis, to the Garden of Eden:**

**Genesis 3:1-5**

**The Fall**

**3 Now the serpent was craftier than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”**

**2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”**

**4 “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will *be like God*, knowing good and evil.”**

**Now, therein lies the fundamental problem for all of humanity. The Creator God designed us, designed the entire universe, set things up to run perfectly, beautifully, safely, and every other positive ly you could think of. But we humans, we messed up. We messed up bigtime. We were not willing to take God at His Word. We wanted and still want to run our own lives! In fact, at the heart**

**of human sinfulness is that we have made ourselves, each one of us, the Center of the Universe!! As if we were the meaning of life.**

**And we want the complete say over our own lives and say over those of everyone else we disagree with in many cases.**

**But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is turning our views on how we are to live on their heads!**

**He is saying:**

- **here are your traditions**
- **here is how you have lived your lives**
- **and here is what God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit commands of us.**

**The essence of what Jesus is preaching is what the Apostle Paul later taught so clearly; to live in and for and by God's Kingdom means to die to self; to die to our desires to be on the top of the heap. To do so we must ask this simple question:**

**Who sits on the throne of your life today?**

**Who runs your life?**

**Who owns your possessions?**

**Who do YOU answer to?**

- **Do you answer to no one?**
- **To yourself?**
- **To an “inner circle” of people ‘like’ you**
- **Do you exclude others? Despise them? Ridicule them even if only in your own heart?**
- **Keep them at a safe distance?**
- **Do you hold those you deem “less than” at arm’s length?**
- **Or do you simply completely cut off all contact with those “others”? Acting as if they did not exist?**



**So, let us really drill down into the nitty gritty of what I think Jesus said here, in this part of The Sermon on the Mount, and what I think He is still saying today.**

**“Love (not hate) your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”**

**First, the word LOVE here is not simply to tolerate or to just withhold retribution or mistreatment from**

**It comes from the Ancient Greek word agapaho. “To love dearly”; “to treasure”**

**Hate: mis eh o Means to pursue with hatred; to detest and even to persecute**

**Both the love and hate Jesus gives us are extremes, “the most”**

**But if there were any doubt about Jesus’ meaning here, let us go on.**

**When Jesus uses the word “enemy” (the one we are to love dearly by treasuring), He is using the Greek word**

## **Ech thros**

**This is not just your run of the mill, “I don’t like this guy”. “I hate how they do such and such.” No, this is talking about someone who is odious to you; they are hostile; and they evoke deep and likely painful feelings; In fact, this enemy word that Jesus uses has the same meaning as when one says that someone hates God; has enmity toward God. This is an extreme again.**

**Jesus not only says we are to love these people. That would be a tall order for any of us. But Jesus then piles it on in terms of His command to His followers, telling us we are to PRAY for these enemies; these people who persecute you. Persecute here means another extreme; “one who pursues you in a hostile manner to cause harassment and trouble. It actually runs the gamut of trouble to a person. And you guessed it; this kind of prayer also is in the extreme; to pray earnestly to God for the welfare of these people.**

**Are you getting the picture here? We are told by Jesus Christ, our God and King, to love those we find difficult perhaps to even acknowledge their existence. We are to look at these people, these difficult, hurtful, irritating, repugnant...you fill in the descriptors. We are to love them AND we are to pray for their well-being.**

**Bring this down to our lives today:**

- **First, as Skye Jethani makes very clear in his book, Jesus IS SERIOUS. Jesus is holding His people to the highest of standards**
- **And His demands, these standards, are in fact impossible.**
- **I will repeat; what Jesus is saying to do is impossible; well, impossible on our own.**

**Okay, so we are given these impossible commandments**

**(Remember Jesus has elsewhere in Matthew told His followers that the whole Law of God can be summed up in this Supreme Commandment; “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”)**

**Matthew 22:37**

**How on earth are we supposed to do this?**

- **Jesus Himself has told us that what is impossible with humans is possible with God (Luke 18:27)**
- **The Apostle Paul has told us that “the love of God has been poured out into our hearts (Romans 5:5)**
- **Ephesians 5:18 Be filled with the Spirit**
- **There are dozens of references to being baptized in the Holy Spirit, filled with the Spirit, having the Holy Spirit indwell the believer. Just like Jesus’ admonition to ask, seek and knock (Matthew 7:7). These verbs are not a one-time deal. They are actions of pursuit, persistence, eagerness, and perhaps even desperation, especially the asking and seeking.**

- **2 Chronicles 16:9<sup>9</sup> For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.**

**We can only walk as He walked and do what He has commanded by turning toward Him, not away. Just like in Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son. Though we can only do so by His Grace and His Grace alone, He has given us the ability to do so; to push in, relinquish, choose this day, as Joshua says, whom you will follow. Easy? No. Eternally and massively life-changing? Absolutely!**

**I want to share something beautiful I recently heard from one of our own parishioners here at Rose Hill Church. This is a story of how Jesus led one person to find love, forgiveness and freedom through Jesus' teachings in The Sermon on the Mount.**

**I am paraphrasing her words here. Let's take a listen:**

**Dealing with Walter, my boss, was from the start an experience like dragging my nails down a chalkboard. He was not an evil man, but he was rude, demanding, thoughtless and I came to hate him. When he was hired, I tried to find other work but looking back I**

**feel the Lord kept me there to teach me His purposes over my own. I had been complaining about Walter and asking for prayer about my work situation in my small group and one day a Christian sister said, “Everything you’ve said about Walter qualifies him to be your enemy. And the Bible is quite clear about how we are to treat our enemies.” We looked up references in Jesus’ teachings and found that we are indeed to love our enemies, pray for them and bless them. This friend admonished me that I was to love my enemy. She was telling me to love Walter, to bless him, AND to pray for him! Real prayers! With sincerity.**

**And you know what? As I stepped into what Jesus commanded me to do in the Sermon on the Mount, I found release! I realized that in order to love Walter as Jesus loves him, I did not have to like him!! Or his behavior. I began to pray real prayers of grace over Walter. I began to serve him as if I were doing so unto Jesus. The Lord showed me that if I would in fact do it for Jesus then I must do it for this man. Now, keep in mind that as I began living into this new way of living and loving I still would get stuck in Walter**

**making me angry. But I had chosen to love, not hate, and to pray for him instead of cursing him.**

**As things went along the Lord began to give me insight in how to better deal with Difficult Walter. I began to realize that the Lord is my shield. I could love Walter and pray earnestly for Walter. But the Lord taught me that I could in fact refuse to let Walter's toxicity be mine. I stopped his negativity and meanness at the door. I was, by God's grace, able to grow and learn that Walter's problems were Walter's, not mine. And finally, after several years of working for Walter, God led me to leave that job. But only once I had learned the invaluable rich lessons God had purposed for me to learn working for him. A final point: when the door did open for me to leave, Walter announced my resignation from my position to the Board of Directors by saying, "We started out enemies, but ended up friends."**

**Thank you, Linda Holbrook, for allowing me to share this grace-filled life-change story with our congregation.**

**Let us pray:**