

Matthew 5:43-48 Resembling God

The Church are those people who have been entrusted with the gospel because they themselves have trusted in the gospel. Think about that for just a moment. In a world full of bad news, God has given the Church some really great news. This great news if for all men. The great news is that a God of infinite majesty, who cannot be likened to anything on this earth, a God that we turned from and forsook, has come seeking and saving lost ones. Lost ones: murders, thieves, adulterers, addicts, those without hope, the depressed, the lonely, idolaters; you and me.

God's holiness had been infinitely transgressed against, yet he came to his enemies with a word - FORGIVENESS. This is infinitely good news, by that I mean not only is it GREAT news, but this news, if received by faith, lasts forever. Wouldn't you like to be forgiven for eternity? Wouldn't you like to have the love of God overshadow you forever? There is an alternative - be recipients of the wrath of God, the abhorrence, the hatred of God forever. The difference between the two - the Cross of Jesus Christ. The Bible says, *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* (Romans 1:18)

Never forget that the subject of God's love is the Son of God, the spotless and perfect Lamb of God on a cruel cross. At the cross of Christ, we see the judgment and mercy of God intersect to show us the love of God. When we say God loves you it is never outside of a Cross. When we say God loves you, we are calling men to embrace forgiveness over wrath. If they do not embrace God's love for them displayed through the cross they get the cross instead of the Son on the Cross. That is, they get the judgment without the one who took the judgment for them.

God has called us to love, called us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, even right now he is calling you to be forgiven. God has given his people, the Church, a wonderful message of salvation in Jesus name to proclaim until he comes. This is our message, to live our lives as salt and light in this world that is darkened and decaying. One of the most difficult callings that the Church has is found in these verses at the end of chapter 5 of Matthew. Let's hear the Word of the Lord:

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It is one thing to not retaliate, its another thing to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. But in our doing so, we show the world that we have a family resemblance, we show the world that we resemble our Father who is in heaven. Look at verses 45 and 48. 45) *So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven* and 48) *You Therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Now I think that 48 is a summary of the entire Sermon on the Mount and I plan to treat it as such when we finish chapter 7, but there is something about our call to be like God that is intricately tied to forgiveness. This point of forgiveness is repeated again and again by our Lord so

that we will get it and live in light of what he said, so that we will experience forgiveness and be forgiven.

Today from this text I want to talk to you about our resembling God.

Remember what Jesus said of his disciples, the world would know that we are his because of our love. He was referring to our love for one another, and we should, but that love that we have for one another spills over into our love for those who are lost in the world. Not a love for the world, but a love for those who are lost in the world. We love those who are vile offenders of God, those who are aligned with the all the evils of hell that are aligned against God and his people. When we love them, we resemble God.

1. Our God is a God of Love

Where do we first get to see that love on display? What would you say? We get to see God's love on display in the very beginning as God chose to lovingly create and make himself a God of revelation. Why did God create? There is only one answer that will do, and the answer will probably not satisfy everyone, but it is the best answer there is. God created because he wanted to. It was not out of some necessity that he created, God as creator is not an essential attribute. God is creator but he didn't have to create to be God. God lovingly and graciously chose to create, to bring us into existence, not out of necessity but simply because, for reasons known to him, he wanted to. The early church, specifically Athanasius, referred to this as God's *philanthropia*. That's a Greek word (sounds Greek doesn't it) but you hear a root to one of our words in it - philanthropy. If someone engages in philanthropy they are being generous. I can't think of anything more generous than God creating the world (*ex nihilo*).

But God just didn't spin things up and then forget about the world (deism), he created us with the capacity to relate with him. You and I, finite created beings, in some way get to participate in his very life. We were created to know God. God created the world and gave us the capacity for relating with him. Every person on the planet has this capacity, because every person is made in the image of God. That doesn't mean that everyone is in relationship with God but it means that everyone has the capacity of relating with God.

Let's think just a moment about the way that we relate with God. How do we enter into relationship with God? The way that we enter into relationship with God is by repentance. Repentance is a turning from and a turning towards. Turning from self and sin and turning towards the Son - Jesus. This teaches us a great deal about the love of our God. This teaches us that though God loves all his love for all is not the same.

We have a message to the world and the message is the love of God, but what do we mean when we say God loves you. Does God love everyone the same? I want you to think about that before you

answer to readily. We are being precise this morning but precision matters when you are dealing with eternity. After all, there is not many ways to God, there is one way, precision matters. So, does God love everyone the same? I think we get confused with the question in the way that we talk about God. For example, if I were to ask you if God is the Father of all, what would be the right answer? Look at this text in verse 45 - *your Father*. The Fatherhood of God is a privilege given to us in our adoptions as sons and daughters through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:11-15). *To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* (John 1:12-13)

Do you see the difference? God is the creator of all, every man is made in his image and has the capacity for relating with God, but not every man does nor will have a relationship with God. That is sobering reality, a reality of eternity that comes to bear on the way that we treat everyone. Let's think about this further. As Jesus is facing the cross he is in a garden praying. Listen to his prayer. *I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.* (John 17:9) God does not love everyone the same. He loves those who reject him one way and loves those who are his, a different way. With one the wrath of God remains forever, with the other, the satisfaction of God for eternity.

How does God love his enemies? Look at the text in verse 45. God sends rain upon the just and the unjust alike so the just can enjoy his bounty and the unjust can see his kindness and be moved to repentance. This is what Romans 2:4 says, the kindness of God is meant to lead men to repentance. *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* Today is the day of salvation. As long as you hear God's voice, today is the day to turn to him. What is God doing all over the world? Graciously giving men and women, boys and girls, space to repent and come to him. (David Lanier's prayer) Do not presume on his riches, let his kindness lead you to repentance.

Listen, there is coming a day when there will be no more rain. There is coming a day when those who are the enemies of God will no longer have a chance to repent. This whole idea that you can repent when you want to is false. You can't come to God on your terms, you come to him on his terms or you never come to him at all. On judgment day, as James Montgomery Boice once said, "God's judgment in the end will be so absolute perfect that the damned will agree with the rightness of their damnation."¹ But until then, on this day, God *makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain the just and on the unjust.* And he calls us to do the same. We go to the lost and say what a beautiful day, the day of salvation.

¹ Personal correspondence between Boice and Mohler related at 2007 Ligonier National Conference with Ravi Zacharias, Albert Mohler, R.C. Sproul, moderated by John Duncan.

2. Our God Calls Us to Display His Love

This is one of the toughest parts of being a follower of Jesus Christ. We are called to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. How do we love them? Praying for them and loving them go hand in hand because in our loving them we are loving them the way that God loved us as his enemies - calling us to repent. Listen to John Stott:

The truth is that evil men should be the object simultaneously of our ‘love’ and our ‘hatred’, as they are simultaneously the objects of God’s (although his ‘hatred’ is expressed as his ‘wrath’). To ‘love them is ardently to desire that they will repent and believe, and so be saved. To ‘hate’ them is to desire with equal ardor that, if they stubbornly refuse to repent and believe, they will incur God’s judgment. (116-117) So how do we love? We love others in such a way that we display the love of God to them. In other words, the reason that we love people, even our worse enemy is one reason:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)

The love of Christ is what compels us. We who are the recipients of God’s love express that love in the fiercest way - loving our enemies. As Jesus tells us, its easy to love those who love us, but when we love our enemies we resemble our Father the most.

On June 17, 2015 members of the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, were gathered for a Wednesday evening prayer meeting. They welcomed a guest from the streets, prayed with him, and then he turned a gun on them and began shooting, killing 9 members including the pastor. The reason he killed them, he was a white supremacist and they were black, he hated them. At his trial, the relatives of those that he killed were able to speak to him directly. One by one they all had the same message for him, I forgive you. Nadine Collider, the daughter of Mrs. Ethel who was a 70-year-old victim said to the killer in tears, “You took something very precious from me. I will never talk to her again. I will never, ever hold her again. But I forgive you. And have mercy on your soul.”²

What gave them the strength to forgive? They had been formed by the life of the Lord and remember that even the agonizing death on a cruel cross could not silence his prayers for his enemies as he said, “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:24)

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/19/i-forgive-you-relativesof-charleston-church-victims-address-dylann-roof/?utm_term=.6f8ccf052ff5

We were the ones who held the nails, we were in the crowd calling for his blood, we were the ones who hid from him in the garden, we were denying him with our lips, we have done things we wish we hadn't done, seen things we wish we hadn't seen, been places we shouldn't have been, but he looked at us with his arms wide open and said FORGIVEN! Forgiven, he has turned us from enemies to friends, from slaves to sons, forgiven. Our sin was great, his love was greater. Forgiveness can be yours if you will ask him, but you must come.