

Matthew 5:43-48 "The Crux of It All"

Read Matthew 5:17-20, 43-48.

1. Verses 43-48 mark the conclusion of this section of the Sermon on the Mount (from Matt 5:17-48). What do you think Jesus meant by saying that he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets? How does his teaching on anger, lust, divorce, etc support that?

This question is setting this perichope in context: what does Matt 5:43-48 have to do with the rest of the section? Jesus is showing a much bigger picture of what the Law is trying to accomplish – showing us the way to be truly human.

Read Leviticus 19:9-18.

2. What does God say about love of neighbour in this passage? Who constitutes a neighbour in this passage?

In this context, 'neighbour' refers to a hired servant (v13), the poor and the great (v15), your people (v16), your brother (v17), the sons of your own people (v18).

3. How did the Israelite people understand 'neighbour'? Do you think that was justified given their context?

The Israelites understood neighbour primarily to be those who followed God's commands; i.e. the Israelite nation. Whether or not it was justified is an interesting question, especially considering v 18!

4. How have you felt about the verses mentioning 'enemies' or 'hatred' in the Psalms? (e.g. Psalm 139:21-22; all of Psalm 59) What have you done with these verses in the past?

The so-called "imprecatory psalms" have caused a lot of anxiety for readers who don't know what to do with them. One way of approaching them is simply appreciation for the honesty they depict. Another is noticing that in every instance, the psalmist is taking his hatred to God in prayer. A third (creative!) approach is to think of them as the sins that beset us.

5. Why does Jesus say that we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us? Why is this important?

So that we might be the children of God, who makes his rain shine on the just and the unjust. This verse gets at the heart of what it means to be a Christian: to forgive as we have been forgiven; to love as we have been loved.

6. In her sermon Karen described the process of forgiving and loving our enemies as one that involves dying to self, and that it feels like death. Can you relate to this? Would you agree with this description?

This topic has the potential of becoming very personal and very painful. As a leader, make as much space as possible for people in whatever they are going through. If they are struggling with forgiveness and feelings of hatred, allow them that space without judging. Try to protect the space so that it remains safe for whatever people need to share, regardless of how 'shocking' it might be.

7. Karen spoke of entrusting our pain to God, knowing that he will hold it carefully, and deal justly with all sins, both those done to us and those we have done. Is this a comforting thought? Why or why not?

The topic of the justice and mercy of God is huge, and again requires care as the leader. The point of the sermon was that we can trust in the justice of God, and at the same time lean on his mercy.

8. Have you had any positive experiences in praying for your enemy and seeing either yourself, or them, or the situation transformed? Share as you feel comfortable.

This will hopefully bring the conversation to an encouraging place as you wrap up!

“The rock that Jesus is shoving us against is himself - it is his love that we lean on and shelter under. There is honey in the rock that is Christ that will ease our pain (Ps 81). There is water in the rock that is Christ that will quench any thirst for revenge (1 Cor 10). Press against him, shelter under him, and let him comfort you.”