

## Love Matters to the Master

From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells us About the King of the Universe"

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### Introduction

I'm going to talk about a topic today that I've spoken about many times since I've been at Trinity Church. The reason I've spoken about it many times is that it's a major theme in the Bible. It's not always the main topic when we speak about it, but sometimes it is. The topic is "love". It always comes up during the Advent season, because those Advent themes are Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love.

Something happens every time we talk about love in the Bible - We have to compare it to the way that the world thinks about love. Valentine's day is coming up soon, so we often think of images like the one on this antique Valentine card. Little cherubs and a big heart. It's very cute. Surely, it would have meant something to someone back in the early 1900's.



Probably one of the best-known songs about love came from the Beatles in 1967. "All You Need is Love" Here's the chorus:

All you need is love  
All you need is love  
All you need is love, love  
Love is all you need

Whether it's a Valentine card, or the Beatles, most people think of love as something very heart-warming - **a feeling**.

I can't help but stop by the dictionary at times like this. If you look in the Oxford Language web site, this is the definition they give for love.

noun

1. an intense feeling of deep affection.  
"babies fill parents with feelings of love"

2. a great interest and pleasure in something.  
"his love for football"

That's the noun – let's look at love when it's used as a verb.

verb

1. feel deep affection for (someone).

"he loved his sister dearly"

2. like or enjoy very much.

"I just love dancing"

So, the highest authorities of the English language tell us that love is a feeling. But, inside of us, we can't help but feel that there is something more. According to the Bible, there certainly *is* something more. Today, we'll learn what that is.

We're working our way through the book of Matthew and we're in chapters 5 through 7 - A section we're calling, "The Christian Manifesto". Part of this section involves learning "What Matters to the Master" Today, we learn that Love matters to the Master.

Let's read:

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? (Matthew 5:43-47)

Recall the pattern we're following in this series:

We learn that something is important to the Master.

It has come under attack.

We look at:

1) How it has come under attack in the past.

2) How it was attacked in Jesus' day and

3) how it is under attack today.

Let's look at the first point:

## I. Love and how it came under attack.

What is love, and how did it come under attack in the past? A moment ago we looked at definition of love provided by a major dictionary. In the Bible, there is really no standard definition of love. Instead, in the Bible, we tend to see love defined by what it produces. Look at this example:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.  
5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails... (I Corinthians 13:4-8)

Notice two important things here: Each of these statements involves actions or attitudes. Those actions and attitudes in a person in relationship to others. Love causes a person to be patient with others. Love causes a person to be kind to others. Love does not envy others. Etc.

Based on what we've just said, let me suggest a Biblical definition of Love:

Love is a force.

- It impels a person to assign value to another.
- It often causes pleasant feelings in the process.

So, love is a **force**, not a **feeling**. Compare this to the way that the world feels love. We say, "I love ice cream." That means, I have a want for ice cream. I want to get and possess ice cream. When I get ice cream, the ice cream causes me to have pleasant feelings.

As it turns out, worldly love is also I kind of force. However, unlike biblical love, worldly love makes us assign value only when we get something from the object of our love. Ice cream is valuable because of the pleasing feelings it produces. If it didn't produce a pleasant experience, it would have no value.

This is understandable when you're talking about inanimate objects. However, it's a big problem when it involves people. Worldly love says, "I want another person because they do something for me." They're beautiful, so they give me a pleasant feeling. They give me things I want, so they're useful. Therefore, I want them. Those who do not possess beauty are thought to be less valuable. Those who cannot give us things are treated the same way.

Biblical love assigns value to others. So, rather than want things from others, this love impels a person to give. This love seeks good for others.

The Bible scholars who are reading this know that the original Greek language used in the New Testament has three words for love: Philia: Friendship or family love. Eros: The love that is enjoyed between a man and a woman in marriage. Then there is Agape: the kind of love we're discussing. This love is a force that impels us to value others with nothing in return.

That love, Agape love, is the kind of love that exists in the heart of God. One statement about this was given to Moses one time when God appeared to him:

6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. (Ex 34:6-7)

God expressed this love when he created the world and gave it to humans. Understand, God can have anything he wants. He can speak, and worlds come into existence. So, he doesn't need anything from anything in his creation. He created a world and gave it to us just because he loved us.

God values us. You know what we've been saying – the English word "love" doesn't quite describe God's attitude towards us. Instead, we say, God cherishes us.

And God didn't stop when he gave us a world. He created us in his image. He wanted to share something of himself with us. He put it inside of us. He wants us to be like him. Here's why that's important with love: God wants us to love like his does.

So now we get to the question: How did love come under attack?

Again, we go back to the garden of Eden. God puts Adam and Eve into the garden. He puts that tree: The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He tells them they can eat from any tree in the garden, but not that one.

Question: Did you ever wonder why he did that? Here is what I think. In our last session, we said that the image of God has two parts. One is just who we are. The other part though involves action. It can grow. It's dynamic.

One of the qualities of God involves choices. God is able to make true choices. That's one of the things that he gave to us when he created us in his image. Here's what God wants for us: He wants us to be like him by making choices the way that he makes choices. He makes choices based on his character. He has qualities like humility, wisdom, and love.

In our last session, we spoke about humility and how it matters to the Master (If you want to review you can find that on our web site and look up “Humility Matters to the Master”). To quickly summarize: Humility is an accurate view of who we are in relation to God and others. An accurate view of ourselves says we are very important. We’re important because God thinks we’re important. However, as important as we are, God is more important - Vastly so. That means we serve and obey God.

So, here’s Adam and Eve standing in the garden. The Serpent comes to tempt them to eat the fruit. He tells them that they can be like God. They can be as important as he. They can have his power.

Humility would say, “God is much more important than us.” “So, we will respect what he says.”

Love assigns value to others. Love seeks the good of others. Love wants to see others happy. If Adam and Eve loved God, they would have said, “If we eat that fruit, it will surely make God unhappy.”

If Adam and Eve made their decisions based on love and humility, they would have turned away from the Serpent. If they did that, the image of God in them would have sprung into action. They would have immediately begun to relate to God and to receive the benefits of being made in his image.

Instead, they made a bad choice. They chose to deny humility. They bought the idea that they could be as important as God. They chose to deny love. They chose to ignore that this would be displeasing to God and cause him pain. Instead of growing closer to God, they pushed him away. Their terrible choice brought death into the world.

But here’s a very important quality of biblical love; Agape love: We said that love seeks to give. Love seeks the good of another. Agape love does that when it gets nothing back. In fact, love assigns value even when the object of love cause pain.

Because God loves humans, he has never given up on them. He still offers us the ability to make choices the way he does - To make choices based on humility and love - And some other qualities that we can’t get to today. When we make those choices, the image of God in us grows.

When God gave the Law to Moses, he brought this all together with this command:

18 “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:18)

“Love your neighbor as yourself”. Before we discuss that, let’s be reminded about the context here. Again, in our last session we spoke about humility. We learned in that session that the humble person does not immediately retaliate when they’re hurt. The humble person says, “The person who hurt me is made in the image of God. Therefore, they have value.”

Notice the similarity. Humility assigns value to others. Love assigns value to others. Humility assigns value to others because of an accurate sense of one’s importance. Love doesn’t really think about self. As we said, it’s a force that impels us to give value to others. Humility and Love are like siblings. They’re at their best when they’re together. Maybe that’s why the Master, Jesus, spoke about them right next to each other in Matthew 5?

At any rate, Moses gave the command to love your neighbor as yourself. He had to say that because the people of the world didn’t act that way. The opposite of humility is arrogance. The opposite of love is hatred. That’s how people were acting throughout the centuries.

Last week we met two men in Genesis 4. We met Cain and Lamech. Cain, in the first major act of arrogance and hatred murdered his brother Abel. The next major act of arrogance and hatred came when Lamech killed a man who had only wounded him. He took revenge in multiples of how he was hurt.

So, people had to be reminded. Don’t hate your neighbor. Don’t take revenge on your neighbor. Instead, love you neighbor as yourself.

So, we’ve just learned about love. We learned that love came under attack in the garden. It was under attack ever since. That’s why Moses had to give the command to love your neighbor as yourself.

Let’s learn now how Love came under attack in the days of Jesus.

## **II. How Love came under attack in the days of Jesus.**

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44  
But I tell you... (Matthew 5:43)

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day got a lot of things wrong. The problem was, they got a few things right, so it was confusing. In this case, people were taught the right thing: Love your neighbor as yourself. Unfortunately, they were also taught the wrong thing. It doesn’t say anywhere in the writings of Moses and the Prophets that you should hate your enemy.

Is it a logical assumption to say that when you love your neighbor you should hate your enemy? It might be, **if you don't know God**. It might be, if you have ignored the teachings of Moses and the Prophets. It might be, if you've studied the Law and the Prophets, but you're blinded by unbelief. If you know God, and you've studied his word, you know that God does not instruct us to hate our enemies - He never did. This was the product of a perverse and unbelieving group of religious leaders in Israel.

So, Jesus returns to a formula that he's used several times in this group of teachings. He starts by saying, "You have heard...". In other words, "You have heard wrongly". Then he says, "But I tell you..." Now, Jesus is going to give the correct teaching.

Notice something important: He's not saying, "Now, let me give you the correct interpretation of Scripture." He's saying, "I tell you". He's saying that his words are equal to God's words in the Scripture. That's saying a lot. And that's important, because here he's going to give the religious leaders some put-downs.

Let's read what Jesus says:

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...  
(Matthew 5:44)

This must have been a big surprise. The people of Israel heard the wrong thing for a long time. Rather than hate your enemies, followers of Jesus are told to show love.

What does that look like? It looks like a lot of things. We start by praying for those who persecute us. Again, that's very counter-intuitive. It's tempting to curse our enemies. That's why Paul had to warn his friends in the book of Romans: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (Romans 12:14)"

To pray for enemies implies first that we want them to receive the blessings that we enjoy. That means we pray that God will open their eyes to be saved.

It's possible for God to turn the hearts of even the most impossible people. A good example of that is the apostle Paul. He was born with the name "Saul". Here's what Luke says about him in the book of Acts:

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.  
(Acts 9:1-2)

The Apostle Paul, before he met Jesus, hated all Christians. He wanted to murder them all. We just read that he was successful in obtaining the power to begin. But Israel was filling up with people who would certainly be praying for a man who persecuted them. Here's what happened next:

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. (Acts 9:3-5)

Jesus appeared personally to Saul and did a miracle in his heart. Because of this, a great enemy of God became an Apostle whose name was later changed to Paul. Powerful things happen when people pray. Jesus tells us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us.

Why should we do that? Jesus tells us the reason:

...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. (Matthew 5:45)

We should love others, even our enemies, because that's what God does.

And it's not just what he does: It's who he is (1 John 4:8, "God is love"). Love is at the core of God's being. And God wants us to be like him. He wants us to be his children. You've all heard the phrase, "Like father, like son." You've also heard, "The apple does not fall far from the tree." These are ways of saying that children tend to be like their parents. That's what God wants for his followers.

And it's not just that we are to do it. There is great reward for those who do this. At other times I've said that doing the things that God commands allows us to be more and more like him. The more we are like him, the more we can understand him. The more we understand him, the more we can enjoy him.

How much does God love humans? We're told that he sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. The implication is that, if we want to be like God, prayer is only the start. In the last session, we read the following:

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. (Proverbs 25:21)

If we see our enemies hurting, we are to help.



Here's an important note: Enemies can be people who are not in the Christian faith. But, sometimes, they are. Tragically, I've heard stories of people in churches who slander others in the church and cause all kinds of problems. We are told to treat all with kindness.

We said a few minutes back that, in the process of giving the correct teaching, there would be a put-down of the religious leaders. Here it comes.

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? (Matthew 5:46-47)

Love that only loves when it gets things back is worldly love. People whose love is limited in this way can expect no reward in heaven.

There was one quality of the religious leaders in the day of Jesus that stood out: They thought they were far superior to everyone.

We've discussed tax gatherers several times in this series. I've called them "legal criminals". They were despised by the ancient Jewish people. So of course, the religious leaders thought themselves better. Jesus said, if that's the limit of your love, you're no better than a tax gatherer. That must have stung.

The religious leaders believed they were better than gentiles, also known as "Pagans". Gentiles are everyone other than Jews. Gentiles were sometimes referred to as "dogs".

Sometimes, people get into little private groups. We call the names like "cliques". So, some people only say hello to those in their little group, their clique - People who are like them. Jesus said, if you do that, you're no better than gentiles.

So, love was under attack in the days of Jesus. How is it under attack today?

### **III. How is Love under attack today?**

Love under attack in lots of ways. Let's limit our discussion for this week to things mentioned in this passage.

We all have people who we don't like. In some cases, we don't like them for good reason. Maybe they've hurt us in some way. Maybe they've taken advantage of us or even stolen from us. It's tempting to shake our fist at them. It's tempting to try to hurt them by saying malicious things about them behind their backs.

But, we're given clear instruction here: We are to love those people. We are to pray for them. We are even to try to help them if they have a problem.

You say "this is hard." I say, "Yes, it is".

Here's what Paul said to his discouraged friends: "...God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

True love, Agape love, is something that requires supernatural help. If this is hard, ask for the Holy Spirit to help you. He has placed the love of God in your heart. Ask him to help bring it to life. Ask him to fan the flame. Ask him to energize what he's created in you.

And remember: If we fail, God forgives.

Let's pull this all together.

### **Conclusion**

We hear about love in lots of places: Songs, valentine cards, and all the rest.

Today, we've learned about a different love: Agape love. The love that's at the core of God's being. It's a love that gives value to others.

And it's not easy. Let's all ask God for help. Why? So that we can be his children - So that we can be like him – So that we can enjoy him.

Let's do as the Master commanded us. Let's love everyone – even our enemies.