

Sermon Series: “Teach Us to Pray”—Lord of Life Lutheran Church—Westfield, IN—3/10/2002

Title: “Pray for Your Enemies”

Text: Matthew 5: 43-48

Introduction: *Ills.: A new appreciation for praying*

Theme: We can come up with a list of reasons for why we can't and won't pray for our enemies; yet, Jesus gives us one for why we should----because he asks us to pray for them.

Top seven reasons why you don't pray for your enemies

- **Number 7:** You've been taught: “Don't get mad—get even!” (43)
 1. As in Jesus' day “revenge 101” is taught and caught in many of our homes/communities
 2. **Ills.: Neighborly Feuds**
- **Number 6:** “What goes around, comes around!” (44)
 1. “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.” 1 Cor. 13:6
- **Number 5:** “They don't deserve it!” (45a,b)
 1. This begs the question, “So do you?”
 2. Jesus teaches that God always cares for us out of mercy and grace not from a position of rewarding the deserving
- **Number 4:** “They don't believe in God, anyway!” (45c—righteousness = faith)
 1. Avoiding the “we/they syndrom”
 2. **Ills.: Belief in the power of prayer**
- **Number 3:** “I take care of my own” (46)
 1. Selfishness cloaked in religiosity is detestable to God
- **Number 2:** “I've prayed for my neighbors, my community, and even my country, before” (47)
 1. Jesus states that our feigned “civil righteousness” counts for nothing before God
 2. **Ills.: Obedience is majoring in the minors, too!**
 3. Praying for our enemies is not what we do for God but what he does in us
- **Number 1:** “Nobody's perfect!” (48)
 1. We play that game when it is convenient and it is to our advantage
 2. An appreciation for our sin-fallen-ness will give us a greater appreciation for ***prayer fellowship — fellows in the same ship***

Living out a higher motivation in my prayer life

- The Bible tells me so (vs. 44---*But I tell you this: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.*)
 1. Jesus loved me while I was an “enemy”
 - “For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” Romans 5:10
 2. I can love/pray for my enemy without being loved first
 - “We love because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:19
- It describes who you are (vs. 45---*In this way you show that you are children of your Father in heaven.*)
 1. Who we are (children of the Heavenly Father in Jesus) should define what we do—not the other way around
 - Praying for my enemies comes from an understanding of my own grace relationship through Jesus
 - Praying for my enemies involves disappearing into Jesus and letting his thoughts capture mine
 2. Because Jesus has redeemed us from the old way of life and is within us we can take on this role of intercessor
 - “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” 2 Cor. 10:5
- The Father calls us to higher ground (vs. 48---*That is why you must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*)

•

1. Not a new law of condemnation

- *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.” Romans 8:1-4*

2. God wants us to experience the same pleasure He does in imitating his unconditional love

- *“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Eph. 5:1-2*
- **Ills.: When Loving isn’t easy**

A new appreciation for praying

A bus driver and a minister were standing in line to get into heaven. The bus driver approached the gate and St. Peter said, "Welcome, I understand you were a bus driver. Since I'm in charge of housing, I believe I have found the perfect place for you. See that mansion over the hilltop? It's yours. The minister heard all this and began to stand a little taller. He said to himself, "If a bus driver got a place like that, just think what I'll get." The minister approached the gate and St. Peter said, "Welcome, I understand you were a minister. See that shack in the valley?" St. Peter had hardly gotten the words out of his mouth when the shocked minister said, "I was a minister, I preached the gospel, I helped teach people about God. Why does that bus driver get a mansion, and I get a shack?" Sadly St. Peter responded, "Well, it seems when you preached, people slept. When the bus driver drove, people prayed."

Neighborly Feuds

Belief in the power of prayer

There was a small Oklahoma town that had two churches and one distillery. Members of both churches complained that the distillery was giving the community a bad imagine. And to make matters worse the owner of the distillery was an out spoken atheist. He didn't believe in God one bit. The church people had tried unsuccessfully for years to shut down the distillery. So finally they decided to hold a joint Saturday night prayer meeting. They were going to ask God to intervene and settle the matter.

The church folks gathered on Saturday night and there was a horrible thunderstorm raging outside and to the delight of the church members lightning hit that old brewery and it burned to the ground. The next morning the sermons in both churches was on the power of prayer. But the insurance adjusters promptly notified the distillery owner that they were not going to pay for the damages because the fire was an act of God and that was an exclusion in the policy. The distillery owner was furious and he sued both churches claiming that they had conspired with God to destroy his business. But the churches denied that they had anything to do with the cause of the fire. The presiding judge opened the trial with theses words: “ I find one thing in this cause most perplexing-we have a situation here where the plaintiff, an atheist is professing his belief in the power of prayer,

and the defendants all faithful church members are denying the very same power.”

Obedience is Majoring in the Minors, too!

Agatho, a desert monk of fourth-century Egypt put it this way: "If an angry man raises the dead, God is still displeased with his anger."

When Loving Isn't Easy

I know two law partners who used to hate each other. When one became a Christian, he asked me, "Now that I'm a Christian, what should I do?" I said, "Why not ask him to forgive you and tell him you love him?" "I could never do that!" he said, "because I don't love him." That lawyer had put his finger squarely on one of the great challenges of the Christian life: On the one hand, everybody wants to be loved, but on the other hand, many people never experience it. That's why we need to learn to love as Christ loves--unconditionally. We can't manufacture that kind of love. It only comes from God; and it's a love that draws people to Christ. I prayed with that attorney. The next morning, he told his partner, "I've become a Christian, and I want to ask you to forgive me for all I've done to hurt you, and to tell you that I love you." The partner was so surprised and convicted that he, too, asked for forgiveness and said, "I would like to become a Christian. Would you tell me how?" See what love can do? *Citation: Bill Bright, founder and president, Campus Crusade for Christ*

Matthew 5:43-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I tell you this: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.⁴⁵ In this way you show that you are children of your Father in heaven. He makes his sun rise on people whether they are good or evil. He lets rain fall on them whether they are just or unjust.⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, do you deserve a reward? Even the tax collectors do that!⁴⁷ Are you doing anything remarkable if you welcome only your friends? Everyone does that!⁴⁸ That is why you must be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.[GW]