

## Where in the World is God? He is There – Loving You!

On September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2000, a wide receiver in the NFL for the San Francisco 49ers became the Dallas Cowboys' public enemy number 1. After scoring a touchdown in the second quarter, Terrell Owens ran to the star at the center of the field and stretched out his arms amidst boos from Cowboys fans. That on its own wouldn't have been enough, but the next possession Cowboys running back Emmitt Smith did the very same thing after scoring to "reclaim the star." After scoring another touchdown in the fourth quarter, Owens ran back to the star to repeat his celebration. However, this time one of the Cowboys' players had enough, and hit Owens off the star before he could finish the celebration.

This incident really highlights how the world wants us to react when someone acts like our enemy. Respond in kind! If they've slighted you, you need to get revenge! However, in our lesson for this morning, our Savior shows us how to treat our enemies as Christians.

For the last time in our series, but certainly not the last time in our lives, our Savior Jesus answers the question, "Where in the World is God?" He is right there, condemning self-serving love, and showing us selfless love!

### I. Our Self-Serving Love

Our sermon text today picks up right where last Sunday's left off. Jesus is continuing his sermon up on the mountainside. After reassuring and reminding his disciples that even in the midst of persecution they are blessed, he addresses the natural question that the disciples might have asked. If people were in fact going to mistreat them, how should they react? Jesus answer for them is direct and to the point. In verses 27 and 28, he says "**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.**" Love them! However, Jesus also anticipates the struggle they might have with the word "love," and so he goes into some very specific examples of loving an enemy. The love he speaks of isn't just an emotion or warm fuzzy feeling in a person's heart. It's actions! It's... (28-30)

But even with these examples that Jesus gives, he knows that those who heard him would still struggle with loving their enemy, and with the motivation behind those actions. Because of this he continues with vs. 32-34 (read). If his disciples were showing kindness simply because they wanted kindness back, then that's not the right motivation! As Jesus says in these verses, even a sinner can do that!

Did you notice how our lesson began? Jesus says, "**I tell you who hear me.**" Jesus wasn't just speaking to those standing in front of him on the mountain. He's speaking to us as well as we hear his words read. Jesus tells us that we should love our enemies too. But maybe you're asking, "Who is my enemy? I'm a pretty nice person to everyone I meet, and I avoid trying to make enemies." Well, Jesus tells us our enemies are those who curse us, mistreat us, even physically strike us. These aren't enemies that we make. Jesus is talking about loving people who have done evil to us for no apparent reason!

When someone does treat us this way, how are we tempted to respond? Our sinful nature wants us to respond in the same way that our enemies treat us! When someone cuts you off in traffic, the temptation is there to respond with some choice words, or to race ahead and slam on the brakes in front of them. If you go out Black Friday, and you've saved up your money for the perfect gift, only to watch someone cut in front of you and take the last one off the shelf, there's a temptation to shout and argue, and maybe even resort to physical aggression. But Jesus tells us to do what?! LOVE our enemies?

Maybe we see this command of Jesus and think, "Ok, I can do that." But even in this simple command of Jesus', there's a temptation to twist his words, to make this love transactional. "Sure, I can show kindness to my enemies, but they better show it back to me or it's not worth my time. Yeah, I can give my things away, but they 'd better give it all back! Look at how loving I am. I'm such a gracious person for showing this sinner kindness!" Jesus words on the mountain show us that this self-serving "love" is sinful. In fact, it's not really love at all. Instead, it becomes all about me. The world tells us you've gotta love yourself first!

This selfish love is really all about earning an earthly reward. God makes it clear that whenever we try to earn anything in his eyes, we will always fall short. His standard is perfection, even in love, and if we fail to meet that, then are will be judged and condemned. As we look through this list that Jesus gives, have we always loved selflessly? Or have we instead sought only earthly rewards like recognition, money, and the like? The

reward that this false love earns is death. Eternal separation from God in hell. Doesn't sound like a great reward, does it?

## II. Jesus' Selfless Love

Thankfully, Jesus didn't show us love in the same way that we are tempted to love our enemies. In verse 35 of our text, he says “[**God**] is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.” God shows love to those who hate him, simply because he wants to. We can certainly be thankful for that, because before we believed we were the “ungrateful and wicked” that Jesus is speaking about! We were his enemies! As St. Paul says in Romans 8:7, **The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** We didn't want anything to do with God!

As we heard before, our self-serving love should earn us death, but instead our Savior Jesus showed us love. He showed us love by keeping all of God's law in our place. He showed us love by standing silent in the temple courts when lies and insults were hurled at him. He loved us so much that he was willing to be nailed on a cross to take the punishment that was meant for us. None of that was done because we deserved it. As Romans 5:8 says, **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** The love of God is truly amazing, that he would give his life for us poor sinners to save us!

Only now that we see God's grace, his undeserved love towards us, can we understand how Jesus can tell us to love our enemies. The love that God first showed to us changes our hearts from desiring self-serving love, and instead becomes the very motivation for loving others, and especially our enemies! It's easy to love those who love us back, but it's tougher to love our enemies. The only way this is possible is by the undeserved love that Jesus first showed to us! That is how we are able to respond to hatred with kind words, to physical violence by turning the other cheek, etc... These things that Jesus highlights really are the exact opposite of how the world would react, and that's going to make you stand out. But even then, it's not about recognition or fame, or because we want our enemy to love us back. It's to demonstrate that selfless love that God showed us, to let our light shine so that others may come to know God's love as well!

Jesus uses an illustration for this selfless love that his disciples would have recognized right away. In verse 38 he says, **Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.** In Jesus day, when a merchant was selling grain he had a special jar that he would use to measure the amount that was sold. He would fill the jar, then push it down as much as he could. After doing this, he would shake the jar to make sure it was settled in tight, and then would pour more grain into the jar until it ran over the lip of it. We don't want to be skimpy or self-serving with the love that we show to others, because God's love that he showed to us is running over into our laps! It's more than we ever deserved, and so we want to show this same outpouring of love to our enemies.

There's something to be said here that God delights in and even promises a reward for when we love another person. In verse 35 he says **But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.** This isn't a reward that's based on our actions. It's not something that we earn or even deserve. That reward is an eternity with our Father in heaven, something that only comes to us by faith in Jesus Christ, a true gift that God has already freely given to you.

Jesus tells us that this reward means that we are **sons of the Most High.** That certainly sounds like a lofty title, doesn't it? In fact, it's the title that Jesus claims for himself as the Son of God. What love he has to give us sinners the same claim! Jesus was often challenged when he called himself this, and in John 5:19 he defends what he said. **"Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."** Because of this, we also strive to do the same; to forgive and love the wicked and ungrateful, just as God has done for us. When we do this, we're really being just like “Dad.” God is love, and we want to be the same for our friends and enemies alike.

So when someone becomes your enemy for seemingly no reason, when hatred and anger are directed our way, we may be tempted to ask, “Where in the world are you God?” Well today Jesus has shown us that he is right there, in our love towards others – even our enemies.. Jesus makes it clear that the only way we can truly love our enemy is through the love that he first showed to us. Because of this love, God's reward, heaven and the title of “sons and daughters of the Most High” is ours! May the love of Jesus always be your motivation to show love even to the most ungrateful and wicked. Amen.