

Love Your Enemies

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon emphasizes the radical call to love our enemies as a reflection of God's character and a witness to the world.

Duration: 48:22

Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48, Matthew 6:33, Luke 6:27-28, Luke 6:35, Romans 12:14

Topics: "Loving Your Enemy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of believers being a demonstration of God's love and power on earth. He explains that through their transformed lives, even the most God-rejecting individuals will have no excuse before God's judgment. The speaker highlights the example of Jesus forgiving his enemies on the cross as the ultimate demonstration of God's love. He encourages believers to see beyond the outward hatred of those who curse them and instead recognize the brokenness and need for salvation in their lives.

Transcript

His comments on this text, the text is Matthew chapter 5, from the Sermon on the Mount from verse 43, about loving one's enemies. Chapter 5 in Matthew, from verse 43 through 48, part of the Sermon on the Mount, that many commentators have relegated for the millennial time, that its demand is so radical that they cannot conceive that the Lord intended that there should be any fulfillment or realization of it in this life. You've heard that it has been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love them who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors the same? And if we greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the heathen do so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.

Lord, we ask your blessing, your opening of this word that you yourself gave on that mount, my God, that blows all of our categories to smithereens, that exceeds anything that we could have thought as being reasonable, spiritual. Tell us what you mean by this, Lord, and give us new depths of understanding that will affect our conduct in these last days, as we're likely to experience more and more the opposition of those who hate us and curse us. So we thank you, my God, for this remarkable statement, asking your

illumination by your Spirit.

We're giving you already now the praise, in Jesus' holy name. Amen. So what is unusual for me is for me to write my thoughts down, that we will have enemies increasingly goes without saying, not because of some defect in us that would antagonize people because of some disturbing aspect of our own personalities, but that the life that is within us that we exhibit and express contradicts them and their sinful lifestyles.

We will be increasingly a living indictment of the world. Even when we're silent, we will be an indictment, and it's an indictment that will become sharper as the world becomes more evil and the saints become more holy. It's an inevitable collision course.

It's unavoidable. Count on it. Your enemies will increase, and their spiteful misuse of us, their abuse, their hatred and their cursings, all the more as our very presence will be an indictment against their godlessness.

So it's not the issue of something wrong with us. It's the issue of something good with us. So we are warned that we will be hated of all nations for his namesake, that we will be betrayed in the last days, daughters against their mothers-in-laws and children against their parents who will report us, turning us in, and that even those of our own households will become our enemies.

So the issue of enemy and the relationship with enemy is probably going to be not one of, but the most formidable aspect of the last days reality of believers. So it's not an issue of tolerating them, acknowledging them, bearing them patiently, but God even goes insanely further loving them. You might almost say that if you want a definitive statement of what the love of God is, it's not to be measured in any other way ultimately but this way.

We'll not know what divine love is until we face the requirement of this statement to love your enemies. Because what is it to love those who love us? What is it to have the same kind of feelings for our own kin or wives or children that the world itself has? That does not demonstrate God. That demonstrates only the most natural affection and affinity.

The thing that demonstrates the Father, which is in heaven, is an uncommon love that the world itself cannot understand, and that is the love of the enemy. It's an ultimate requirement. So yet God asks us to love them and bless them that curse us and pray for them that spitefully abuse and misuse us, that you might be the sons or the children of your Father who is in heaven.

So he's in heaven, but the statement of who he is and what he is, is desired in the earth, and it can only be set forth by sons. Because the sons will demonstrate what is the intrinsic character of the Father in one final way only, by the love of God, which alone can love the enemy. Only sons can perform this.

And it's something that can't be imitated and it can't be feigned. It's authentic or it's nothing. And the enemy will know it.

They'll stagger at it. It contradicts all that they understand, because what they want to provoke in us is a reaction of the same kind. They want us to rail against them as they rail against us.

They want us to curse them as they will be cursing us. They want us to hate them as they hate us. This is the only thing that they understand.

For them this is natural. This is human. And when you will perform like that, you will confirm them in the unreality which they take to be reality.

But when you show another response, which is absolutely opposite and contrary to hatred, which is love, then for that they have no answer. This transcends human natural categories. This is the divine witness itself.

This is the ultimate witness of the Father who is in heaven demonstrated now in the earth. This concludes the age. The age will end by enemies becoming more antagonistic to the sons and daughters of God, giving us our opportunity to manifest our Father who is in heaven.

You can almost say that God has set the stage. As much as he set it for his own first begotten son, that at the cross where Jesus had every provocation to answer back in kind at those who were hatefully persecuting him, instead we hear the most benign and remarkable statement, Father forgive them. They know not what they do.

The statement of love. It's not a man sucking his lip and knowing that he has to say something of a pontifical and religious kind, though his guts are going against it. It's easy for him to say that.

It comes out of what he is that is unfamed. He's authentically the statement of the Father being represented and expressed in the ultimate crisis of a persecution brought upon him because he is that statement. Why are the sons and daughters of God to be persecuted? Because the world hates God.

And to the degree that you're showing him forth, that hatred will be visited upon you. If you want to be spared this last day scenario, just play it safe. Stay casual.

Don't stick your neck out. Don't be perfected in your identity as sons. And just be a get-by Christian.

And I can assure you, this persecution will not come upon you. You will not provoke anybody to hate you. Rather, you'll console them because they can tolerate that.

That's only religious. They can make room for that, but they cannot make room for the reality of God that contradicts their whole lifestyle and calls them out of death. In fact, it's their last opportunity.

And what blessing are you going to bless them with as they curse you and you bless them? What is the good that you're going to do for them that despitefully misuse and abuse you? It's this very thing, that your prayer and your blessing is the key to their salvation. You're not going to be praying, Lord, make nice. Lord, diffuse their anger.

Lord, sweeten them. You're going to be praying for their salvation, for this is a final and last moment and extremity and statement of God alone that can save them. So to be able to bless like that is no cheapy thing.

A lot of us talk about blessing and bless you, brother, bless you, bless you, but it's just a hiccup. It's just a little verbal air. But to bless that is a blessing, that can bring even salvation, requires the very authority of God himself, the very priestly character of God himself.

So the same one who has come to a perfection of maturity, when he says be perfect, it doesn't mean be sinless. It means in your being come to God's intention for the fullness that he has desired for you, that you would resemble his first begotten son. You would come to such a maturity as to reflect God.

And that is what provokes the world against you in its anger. But the very thing that is in you that provokes them is the thing that is in you that will bless them. See that? The thing that provokes their anger is the thing that gives you the authority because it's godly, it's godlike, not by imitation or some kind of spiritual emulation, but by the authentic representation of God himself, that your blessing and your word and your prayer is as God's.

It will bless them and save them, bring them as brands out of the fire who would otherwise have perished. It's God's final statement, his testimony, the evidence of himself registered and enacted on the earth through those who have become sons, so that even the most hateful and God-rejecting world will be without excuse before the throne of God in his judgment. They will have seen God.

They will have had a testimony that is indisputable. You cannot quibble with it. No man could feign this.

No man can attain to this religiously. This is the demonstration of the Father who is in heaven. Put up or shut up.

They'll be without excuse at the judgment of the Lord. And that was the testimony of Jesus himself, as I've said, with his last breath upon the cross against his own detractors and enemies. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

And as the Father engineered that circumstance in that testimony, he will ours as well. Because this is the very fulfillment of the faith. This is the conclusion of all things.

For God created, that's our subject in these days, God the creator created all things in order that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might be demonstrated to the principalities and powers. These are the ones that are moving upon the unregenerate in the hatred which they have against God. Their wisdom is destruction.

Their wisdom is hatred. Their wisdom is malice. Their wisdom is violence.

God's wisdom is forgiveness, love, mercy, patience, forbearance. It's a head-on collision at the end of the age between the two wisdoms and one of which alone can triumph. And in that triumph will establish over creation the one wisdom or the other.

We are the church. God is waiting for a final corporate manifestation of his wisdom, which is to say his character. What he is in himself as the Father in heaven, demonstrated on earth by those who at one time were full of hatred, full of anger, full of bitterness, full of cursings, full of violence themselves.

It's a mystery. It's the statement of God's magnanimity. I don't know of another word like that.

The ultimate graciousness of God that can bear even the worst of his detractors against him to kind of envelop them in his love and stifle their curses by his kiss, so to speak. Can you picture that? He snuffs out the anger against him. It's the hatred against God because of his standard of his call that will not let men go.

And he embraces them while their curses are coming from their mouths. The love of God takes them up, curses and all, because that's what he did with us. While we were yet enemies, he died for us.

He has a special propensity for enemies, and he wins them by his love. And now he's saying, what I've done for you when you were enemies, I'm asking you now to do with those enemies who will now be

besetting you in that last day. You demonstrate to them what I demonstrated to you.

But Lord, who is capable of this? We can't play at this. It's either going to be the demonstration, actuality of God and his people, or we will fail wretchedly. And how are we doing now? With those who are not our enemies, but our friends.

Other denominations, or the more liturgical church, or those whose traditions and histories have even had with it a persecution against the saints of earlier times, like the mainline Protestant churches. The reformed church of Zurich, of Zwingli and Luther, persecuted the Anabaptists, whose representatives we have in this room now. Can we love them? Can we forgive them? Or are we threatened by them, or the descendants that remain today, that constitute Christians of a kind different from ourselves? How are we going to love our enemy if we can't love those aspects of Christendom that are in a place different from ourselves, against whom we are angry for those very differences, because they seem to threaten us? Where's our confidence in our place in God, that we can absorb them in our love in those differences, as the Lord himself can absorb and take in his enemies? If we can't love our friends, how shall we love our enemies? So how can we do it? It's one thing for Jesus to do it, but for us, who are so presently easily offended, easily bruised, easily put out of shape, easy to incur resentment and murmuring, because this one said this, or this one looked at me this way, or this one was sad, or this one didn't thank me for mowing the lawn, or, I don't know.

I've been a believer 36 years. I've never seen a generation of believers more susceptible to injury, hurt, offense, and the nurturing of those offenses as our present generation. My God, are we ever alive to every offense, imagined or real? And that's coming from brothers.

And we can't love them because of the injury, and we're going to love enemies? It's as if the Lord has stacked an ultimate requirement, put up or shut up, and this concludes the age. God is love saints. You can't believe that I should be speaking this.

This is not my forte. I'm not a master in this department. Ask Inger.

But I know what's being required. I know what's being asked. I know what the final demonstration of God is.

It's what he is in his story. As your Father in heaven is perfect in love, that's what we ourselves have to be and have to demonstrate. Under extreme provocation, when we have to bear what is the opposite of love, hatred, cursing, and vexation, violence against us, we can't imitate Christ in this or feign love.

Is there anything more phony than feigned humility? Oh, don't ask me to be a public speaker, really. I'll tell you what. My Jewish people, God bless them.

They may be as blind as bats, but when it comes to discerning the authentic from the false, they're Johnny on the spot. They were more quick to size up the televangelists who fell into sin and shame before you. You were still paying their bills and sending them your contributions and adoring them while the Jews were turning the switch off of their TV set because they instantly recognized them as phony.

There's something about Jews, and they've been a test for the church historically, to sense what is authentic and what is false. You cannot feign humility. That's why the irrepressible and ultimate hallmark of an apostle is his meekness, not his ability, not his church problem-solving ability.

It's his meekness, apostolic meekness, because no man can feign that. You only have that in proportion to your proximity to a God who is by nature meek, and neither can you feign love. We can get by with our families and those close to us in a natural way, but it's the enemy that tests us.

That's right. And in some of our instances, even the dear ones are becoming our enemies, our own wives or spouses. And is there any more painful kind of opposition than that which comes from them? What we could have borne as an insult from someone on the street, it would have been like water off a duck's back, but let your wife say it, and you crumble.

Let your husband say it, and you're undone. There's something that comes from those whom we love. When they become our enemy, the pain is the greater, and the test is the greater to love them, even in that.

And last night we heard one of the most wonderful testimonies of how a woman was won when her husband could not be provoked, when she willfully set out to contradict his opposed faith by testing it and found that she could not succeed. God was too real. It won her.

She turned from an enemy to a friend. So when we can demonstrate love when the enemy doesn't expect it, when we exhibit the opposite of what they themselves are performing against us, this is the ultimate testimony of being the sons of the Father and having obtained a perfection, a maturity of godliness, that we are able to give such a response. And as I said, the very thing that provokes the hatred, which is God in us, Christ in us, the hope of glory, is the very thing that enables us to love.

This transcends human, natural categories. It's very God himself in the saints who have perfected holiness in the fear of God. If we know that this is going to be the last day scenario, the last day's challenge, the final put up or shut up of the reality of the Church, making manifest the wisdom of God for which all things were created, what ought we now to be doing but perfecting holiness in the fear of God, consciously and willfully seeking the maturity of sonship and welcoming every challenge that God gives us and every trial that he set in our way to obtain that very thing.

Your enemy is your blessing. Your outraged wife who knows how to needle you unbearably is the very provision of God to test you and bring you through to a place in godliness that had never before been probed or touched. You thought you were a saint before.

You hadn't even begun to take first steps. You were coasting. Now be it.

And when you can be it there, then the Lord has got us set for the final demonstration. So don't, what shall I say, don't dishonor or be offended by God's provision because I can tell you that the wife who's performing this doesn't like it either. She hates herself even if she's hateful and she wonders how come she's like that.

She's never been such a witch. She's never been so full of anger and malice. She doesn't know where it's coming from.

She herself would even desire to be nice and she can't be because she's performing something for God to her husband that no one else can perform. She doesn't understand the mystery of this but she's being employed for an ultimate sanctification because it's got to come under our own roof and with those who are closest to us. We need to recognize that and thank God for it and give Him the praise for it, the exquisite provision and that very acknowledgement and that very praise is the receiving of the benefit that

attains sonship.

But to resent it is to forestall the process. To see yourself as a victim and to allow self-pity to be encouraged, how come, why me, is to miss the point and to miss the value. This is God's provision for sonship that we might love our enemies and pray for them and bless those who despitefully use us and persecute us.

Only saints who are not satisfied with getting by or excusing themselves as only being human and have taken the divine standard to their hearts, not to imitate God but to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, will attain to this. We can't make excuses for ourselves. I'm only human.

The Lord knows that only too well. It's the beyond the human. It's beyond the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees that God is after.

And except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you can in no way enter the kingdom of heaven. There's an ultimate righteousness that God is requiring that is more than being a nice guy under normal circumstances. It's demonstrating what very God is under extreme circumstances.

That's the righteousness of God. So we haven't told you about the whole episode here with this altar decoration that became an issue at Ben Israel, put up by a brother from another dimension in Christendom that is totally against our principles and contrary to our way. Highly liturgical, ceremonial, decorative, and all the kinds of things.

And he left this for us, and it was an offense to some of us. And by every reason, we should have taken it down. But something in my own spirit wouldn't allow me, at least, to do that.

And I kept trying. We had a Ben Israel meeting before you guys came to decide the issue. We never came to a decision.

It's still there. And I was trying to express something that, like, God is wanting something out of this. It's easy to take it down.

It's easy to act with indignation at something that threatens our very mode of spiritual understanding and being. But God is wanting something, and I can't articulate it. It's a deeper righteousness than what we would have known, that somehow it will be served by bearing with this and what it represents than removing it, even if we have to face the embarrassment of saints who will come here and be offended because they thought we stood for something else.

And what happened? Are you guys getting soft? See, there's a reproach that comes with the obedience of sons who act not by principle, but because they have scriptures that they can quote to verify their position, but because they act out of an obedience as sons to something that even lies beyond the still small voice of God. If it's a still small voice that can be heard, there's no problem. But it's obeying God even in those things which he does not articulate but intimates that seem even to contradict our understanding of what godliness is and how we should deport ourselves.

That is a factor in bringing us to ultimate sonship. I hope you can understand that. I don't know if I can understand it myself, but I'm glad that I said it.

Okay. So, in no other requirement on the Sermon on the Mount, if you read the whole chapter 5 and 6 of Matthew, there's no other place where the issue is becoming that you might be sons of the Father which is in heaven. Only here in the love of the enemy is that stipulated.

In no other place of that sermon, as demanding as it is, does it have this as a touchstone. Only the love of the enemy talks about that you might be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, because it's the ultimate statement and the ultimate requirement. So your intention even to become that mocks you.

If you intend to become a son of the Father who is in heaven and reveal what he is in himself as love on the earth in the face of the severest opposition, it mocks you before the enemy. It makes you a mocked man and an object of opposition that will soon enough become a persecution. It's that intention that provokes the very hatred and anger, for only that is ultimately what love is, and what love is is what God is, for God is love, and the world hates him for that very thing.

It does not want to know that there is an alternative to its hate. It wants to indulge its hate. It wants to take it out on the other guys in the neighborhood who are not the Crips because we're the Bloods.

It wants for the Serbians to take it out on the Bosnians or the more recent conflict in Kosovo. There's always an enmity. There's always a racial antagonism.

There's always a basis for men to justify their hatred, and what they want for you is to condone it, to support them in that as being natural. But when you represent something contrary to that, it staggers them because it shows them that there's an alternative available even on the earth, for you are the visible evidence of that alternative because you hate them, because you do not hate them who hate you and have become your enemy for that reason. They don't want to know that there's an alternative to their hatred.

They are intractable enemies who want to be confirmed in their hatred as being natural. And what do you expect? Look what they did to us, that we have a right to do this to them, to justify our blood less than murder, whose father is from below rather than from above, who was a murderer from the beginning, who justified their bloody revolutions for the so-called benefit of mankind. I didn't know this when we went to Yekaterinburg in central Russia, but it's the city where the Tsar was assassinated, and I meant to bring with me his picture.

We went into a little Russian Orthodox church there in the town square of Yekaterinburg, and there they had different memorabilia and things you could buy, incense and candles, the kind of thing that turns us off. But the one thing that I could buy was a poster that showed Tsar... I forgot his name. Nicholas.

Is it Nicholas? And his family. I want to tell you, I don't know if someone touched up that photograph, but I've never seen a face of a man that looked more like a saint than this Tsar Nicholas. He was ethereal.

There was a beauty in his face and a purity, and that man was butchered by the Bolsheviks, and I'm ashamed to tell you that the man who actually pulled the trigger was a Jew. In the name of humanity, in the name of removing the class conflict and establishing human brotherhood, men justify their murder, their violence, and their mayhem. They don't want to know that there's an alternative, but when it's demonstrated, it's put up or shut up.

They will be eternally responsible for God, not because some abstract principle has been preached to them, but there's been a demonstration of heaven made to them by flesh and blood men like themselves,

who at one time also themselves hated and reviled and cursed, and now can love their enemy by the love which is the love of God and not mere natural sentiment. They'll be without excuse, and it may save them. It's the final testimony that God is God, the undeniable testimony, unfeigned, heartfelt, but it cannot occur out of natural possibilities but only when what is natural is transcended.

So God is setting us a table in the midst of our enemies. Isn't that an interesting phrase? That he might bless those who curse us to the degree that our union in Christ has provoked that curse. Our union with Christ gives priestly authority to bless them who curse us, even unto their salvation, their salvation which, of course, is the greatest blessing.

And our authentic love sees the nexus of their frustration. Can you look at an enemy who's foaming at the mouth, whose eyes are ablaze with hatred, not to see him as the threat to your physical being, but to see through that mask of hatred what is inside in frustration, in defeat, in failed living, in all of the kinds of things that will turn a man to hatred because his life has been a disaster, because his marriage has failed, because he doesn't know how to love. He's a mess and he knows it and he's fuming against his own failure and the one that he hates more than anyone else is himself.

Can you see that? Only the eye of love will see it, but the eye of self-love will see only an enemy to be feared and to be resisted. But the eye of the love of God will see through the exterior, foaming at the mouth and with all visible signs of hatred to see that there's a man whose life is deformed and stunted, who never grew up right, who never had any opportunity, wasn't instructed in the way, had only some scant religious background that turned him off, ran afoul with friends who mucked about and whose whole life was perverted from the beginning and he's full of hatred against the world, against himself, against God. You've got to see that or your compassion will not be released and if your prayer is not a compassionate prayer and your blessing does not flow out of a heart of love for the man in that pitiful condition, it will be vain words that will affect nothing.

We've got to see through the face of the enemy, the face of a piece of defeated, abject mankind on its way to eternal hell, whose life is lost and loving, not as the enemy, but as a lost soul. Because there for the grace of God go you. That's how God saw you when you were his enemy.

So our authentic love sees the nexus of their frustration, has compassion on their wasted lives and despicable living and desires the liberation from death. For their hatred will ultimately consume them. For it is at root self-hatred for a failed and lost life.

Pray for them, who despitefully use you and persecute you. If you don't, who will? They're not in a place to pray for themselves and they're not running with a company who knows how to pray or desires to pray. If you don't pray for them, no one else will.

You can hate their evil and it doesn't mean that you condescend to what they are about or condone their sin, but you love the sinner and you're plucking him as a brand from the fire, doing good to them that hate you. And so, how can we contemplate this as an ultimate end? How are we doing now, to repeat myself, toward our friends, to those in the faith, in the church, whom we see as our enemies because their doctrines, practices, liturgies are at variance with our own, threaten our sanctity, whom we are already murdering with our anger. If you're angry with a brother, Jesus said, you're a murderer already.

Do we recognize that Episcopal priest as our brother, whose form and liturgy and manner of worship is at variance with our own, and in fact has been involved in opposition of persecution to true saints historically

through that same denomination? That's our first test. So even this enemy is the object of God's love, who makes the sun rise on the just and the unjust. God loves his ecclesiastical enemies and that is the glory of God's love, because he doesn't love those that are like him.

He loves those that are opposed to him, and that alone is divine love. Love covers a multitude of divergences and differences and even historic sins against the people of God. All-inclusive love is the love of the Father.

It includes Episcopalians, the love of the only begotten Son, the love of the sons of God who glorify God. And that love revealed their Father who is in heaven. And this is the very urgent struggle which lies before us that concludes this age.

So, one of the enemies of the last days, I'm going to end with this, might surprise you, are those whom we love, but will see us as a threat to their Jewishness. I believe we're going to see, and I think Reggie has long understood, that Jews will see and misconstrue even the best and well-meaning intention of Christians for their good as a threat to their Jewishness, as some intent to rob them of their distinctive identity as Jews and to convert them and make them Christians. What we're likely to see is that those for whom we have the greatest love will see us as enemies and rail against us and threaten us.

And we will be the object of their persecution even as they themselves are being persecuted. How will we bear that? What a disappointment that they don't understand our motivations and see us as an enemy and treat us as an enemy. But our question is how will we treat them when they so respond to us in that way? May our love disarm, overwhelm, and absorb them who oppose themselves in their own ignorance by persecuting the very agents of salvation sent unto them until like Saul of old they will kick against the bricks.

What ultimately was the lever of God in converting the greatest enemy of the faith to becoming its leading apostle? It was the demonstration of love and suffering and bearing in magnanimity the opposition of those for whom he intended the greatest good. And Saul could not reconcile that. As religious as he was, the only categories he knew were that which was natural.

If someone curses you, you curse them back. If they hate you, you hate them back. But to see this Stephen who was only a busboy, who only waited on tables, demonstrating not just the spirituality but a godliness that the whole of Paul's pharisaical and rabbinical upbringing could not even begin to touch was the thing that finally made him to kick against the bricks.

I believe we're going to come full circle and that we need to brace ourselves that among those who will hate us are the Jewish people of the last days because they will totally misconstrue our intention and see it as a threat all the more because they're already coming under persecution and they will rail against us and curse us rather than thank us for our extending ourselves. It will be a real test of what our response will be to their persecution. We can understand and bear ourselves to receive the persecution of the world but can we receive and bear the persecution coming to us from Jews because we're quote Christian and a threat to their Judaism or to their Jewishness in their ignorance and pray for them in the very fury of their hatred and persecution because I can tell you no one can turn it on more bitterly and more fiendishly and more excruciatingly than outraged Jews.

So I just want to conclude with a statement by Bonhoeffer on page 151 if you have an edition like this you should get it. The Christians will be hounded from place to place subjected to physical assault

maltreatment and death of every kind. It's the urgent duty of every Christian to prepare himself for it.

A kind of last days mortal combat a struggle almost between life and death because what is life and death but love and hatred? The conflict between love and hatred is the conflict between life and death. It's the one and the same thing. The stand for love is the stand for life.

And the triumph of love is the triumph of life over death. And death seems to have all the marvels. Seems to have everything going for it.

Power, violence, numbers and we'll be the weak little entity that stands for love and for life. But love triumphs. Not love that is abstractly held as a principle or spoken as a thought but the love that is palpable and demonstrated all the more and best in the face of that very hatred.

So we are approaching an age of widespread persecution and therein lies the true significance of all movements and conflicts of our age. Our adversaries seek to root out the Christian church and the Christian faith because they cannot live side by side with us. Because they see in every word we utter and every deed we do even when they are not specifically directed against them a condemnation of their own words and deeds.

They are not far wrong. They suspect too that we are indifferent to their condemnation. Indeed they must admit that it is utterly futile to condemn us.

We do not reciprocate their hatred and contention although they would like it better if we did. You know what drives them to an ultimate fury? That we do not react like them. They are angry to begin with but the thing that really brings them to the boil is that even under their directions and provocation we do not respond in kind and that really pulls out the last stop.

That's the ultimate fury. That releases the gnashing of teeth and the stonings and the violence. So how is this battle to be fought? Soon the time will come when we shall pray not as isolated individuals but as a corporate body, a congregation, a church.

We shall pray in multitudes however small. We shall loudly praise and confess the Lord who was crucified and is risen and shall come again. And what prayer, what confession, what hymn of praise will it be? It will be the prayer of earnest love for these very sons of perdition who stand around and gaze at us with eyes aflame with hatred and who have perhaps already raised their hands to kill us.

That's our final prayer, our final confession, our final hymn, God's final act. So I want to pray for such a church, corporately, personally, that has taken the word of God to its heart, who has said to us, love your enemies, has given us a commandment and we have no excuse by saying I'm incapable because the receiving of the commandment is the receiving of the enablement. To receive the word of God is to receive the grace to perform it.

But to balk at it and to say it's beyond anything that I can perform is to deny that grace and therefore to keep yourself at a level beneath that which is a son who shows forth the father who is in heaven. He must be revealed on earth and only sons can do it. So let's bow before this remarkable requirement of God, final, ultimate, last day's requirement, being assured that our enemies will multiply, their hatred will indeed grow more intense, and that we will be fitted and formed in that day to stand and to show forth our father who is in heaven because we have contended for the faith, because we've allowed God to wrought, to obtain in us his image, because we have perfected holiness in the fear of God, because we have received

every trial, every distress as coming from his hand, calculated for that end, and have thanked him for it.

So Lord, we bless you. What a privileged calling of the bringing of many sons to glory, that your first begotten son gave that demonstration under the cruelest provocation that could ever come upon a son of man, not just the physical torture, but the jeering and the taunts at the base of that cross that would provoke a man finally in exasperation to spit out the curses with which he's being cursed. Live from the father.

May we also be able in the day of our testing not fail. And Lord, long before that day, in the smaller trials that come to us now, not from enemies, but from friends, friends of a different persuasion that have irritated, threatened us, rubbed us wrong, may we be able, my God, to love them. And absorb them.

So we bless you for the divine call, the divine course. We affirm it anew, Lord. We take the cup of covenant and say yes, Lord.

Thank you for the bread and for the wine that sustains us in such a walk as this. Oh, Lord, bring many sons to glory. Thank you that we can identify why it is now that our wives are chomping at the bit, threatening divorce, coming against us with such severity that we could not have ever expected that we could have more reasonably taken had it come from someone outside.

But our own flesh, our own sons, our own daughters, our own children, our own movements, this is your hand, my God. And it is full of divine wisdom. And if we have murmured about it and have resented it, forgive us.

Give us a grace to recognize the master at work, bringing many sons to glory and to receive, my God, that school of preparation which now is. I bless your sons, Lord. I have an ability to bless your sons because I'm a priestly servant, because I have an authority.

I bless your sons with a blessing this morning, with a palpable blessing that will serve them in good stead when their wives gnash upon them with their teeth, when they speak ugly things, when they take their heart out of them who came with their heart in their hands hoping that this time they'll be accommodating. This time they will have seen the light and only to suffer a yet greater disappointment that crashes upon them and makes them want to throw in the towel. I pray that in that moment, Lord, the blessing that is being conferred now will sustain them.

It's the blessing of the Lord. It's the God who has passed through all that and knows how to comfort those with the comfort with which He has been comforted. And the faith that believes that today's enemy is tomorrow's friend and lover.

And greater than she had ever been previously, that the marriage that had been predicated on a natural affection, natural disposition, natural attractiveness, and is now no more, will be established on a far more invincible and unmovable foundation, the love of God the Father. Thank you, Lord. Bless your sons in this, my God, and bring forth glorious shouts of praise in that day because they have paid their dues and received, my God, their training and borne their suffering as good sons will who know that the issue is more than marital happiness but the glory of God the Father.

Thank you, my God. I bless them. We bless them.

And we say again, carry on, my God, and bring us to that perfection that shows you forth in the last day. We give you the praise, the glory, and the honor for so great a call, high call of God, in Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. May God's people say, Amen.

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