

Living Together (Eng to german)(11.6.1986)

by Peter Maiden

Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, forgive others without limit, and serve others to be great in God's eyes.

Duration: 48:04

Scripture: Matthew 5:38-48, Matthew 6:14-15, Matthew 18:15, Matthew 18:21-35

Topics: "Community"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses four principles taught by Jesus to his disciples. The fourth principle is about true greatness, which is illustrated in a dispute about authority among the disciples. Jesus teaches that true greatness lies in serving others and not in seeking positions of power. The speaker emphasizes the importance of living out these principles in our teams and churches, creating a community of love, forgiveness, and honesty. The sermon also highlights the need to refrain from judging others and to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. The speaker references various passages from the book of Matthew to support these teachings.

Transcript

How people from very diverse backgrounds and cultures and denominations and theological opinions can live, worship and work together. And I want to read to you from the 5th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. We're going to read from verse 38 to verse 48.

And I'll ask Andreas to read in German from verse 38 to verse 42 and then I'll pick it up from verse 43 to verse 48. Verse 43. You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons 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. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? If you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Lord Jesus Christ certainly chose to work with an immensely diverse group of men. And I want to just introduce you to two of them. First of all, take Matthew.

We know that he was a tax collector. So everyone would have considered Matthew to be a traitor. He had sold himself into the hands of his country's masters and he'd done it for personal gain.

Matthew was the very reverse of a patriot. And then take Simon, Simon the Zealot. A very different individual indeed.

Josephus tells us in his writings about the Zealots. They were the most extreme group of patriots in their nation at this time. They said, God alone is our king.

And Josephus says they were willing to suffer anything, pain or death, for the sake of their nation. You couldn't get two more different people than Matthew and Simon. If they'd met anyone else than in the company of Jesus, you'd probably have seen Simon plunging a dagger into Matthew's back.

And yet Jesus took men like that and he moulded them together into a tremendous team. A team which certainly had problems. That even their enemies had to admit that in their generation they'd turned the world upside down.

Now I want us to discover how Jesus did it. And I want us to look at the Gospel of Matthew. Not all of it, just most of it.

I want us to look at five principles from the book of Matthew. The first is that Jesus taught and practiced an utterly revolutionary love. That's what we see him doing here in this passage in Matthew chapter 5. We're faced here in verse 38 with the oldest law in the universe.

This law, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It appears in the earliest known code of laws in the human race. The commentators will tell you that it was accepted law in Babylon two and a half thousand years before Christ.

And right up to the days of Jesus it was the fundamental law of human relationships. The law of vengeance. You have hurt me, I have the right to hurt you.

And here we see Jesus taking that ancient vengeful law and replacing it with something absolutely new. He says in verse 39, don't resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, no longer are you to strike him back.

The revolution of revolutions, you are to offer him your left cheek to thump as well. Now if you don't find that sufficiently radical, look at the next verse, because it's extreme. Can't be extreme, can it? It's from the teaching of Jesus himself.

But when you first read it, it seems that way. Jesus says, verse 40, if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, you must let him have your cloak as well. Now the tunic was that white inner garment which every Jew would wear.

And every Jew, even the poorest Jew, would have a change of tunic. But the cloak was a very different garment indeed. It was the large over-cloak.

And it was a coat through the day and it became his blanket at night. The law of the land was, you could never take a Jew's cloak from him after sunset. You could borrow it from him through the day, but it must be given back to him at sunset.

You can read that in Exodus chapter 22 and verse 26. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset. Every Jew by right had his cloak, even the law couldn't take it from him.

Now Jesus says, I want to show you something really radical. No longer must you be the kind of people who hold on to, maintain your rights. You're not to think so much of your rights as your duties.

Not so much of your privileges, but of your responsibilities. The whole spirit of these verses is totally contrary to the law of tit for tat. You know if we go into these teams demanding our rights, maintaining our rights, we've got trouble ahead.

We go into these teams grasping for every privilege. We've got trouble ahead. I've been telling you, some of you, that I'm trying to introduce change into my church back home.

It's an exciting business trying to introduce change into a traditional Plymouth Brethren Assembly. Really good. And I'm an elder of this church.

And I'm only, I think, 38 years of age. Or it could be 39. I was born in 1948.

Wave it out to yourself. And a 79 year old lady came to me two Sunday mornings ago. She said, what to introduce this change that you're talking about in this assembly? And it's my right, she said, to enjoy this service as it's been ever since you were a baby.

What are we going to do in the months ahead? Are we going to hold on to our rights? Or are we going to be willing when we're asked for our tunic to say, brother, there's my cloak as well? Now some of you are looking a bit startled, so we'll take one massive step further. Because that's what Jesus does in verse 43. You've heard it was said, love your neighbor.

Hate your enemy. That was the old law. But here's something new.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Now that's a bit hard, isn't it? How do you love your enemy and love those who persecute you? If somebody does come up and punch you on the right cheek. And it can happen on OMT's even, you know.

You say, yeah, okay, I can offer my left, I understand that. But do I have to love him even if he punches me? That's a nice, you know, warm affectionate feeling. Brother, that was lovely.

Thank you. What does it mean to love your enemy? Well, you all know, don't you? There's a number of Greek words which we in the English language would translate with just one word, love. And when Jesus commands us to love our enemies, he's using a very special word.

It's not the kind of word we use when we talk about family love or falling in love. It's not a love of the heart so much as a love of the will. It's something that you have to decide to do.

Whether you feel it or don't, you decide to love. It's not so much natural affection, more a victory over your natural instinct. It's that lovely Christian word.

And it means whatever is done to you, foolish deeds or evil deeds, you're going to respond for that person's good. We once had in England a very godly Archbishop of Canterbury. Many years ago now, actually.

He was called Thomas Cranmer. And it was said of Thomas Cranmer that if you did him an evil turn, you would find you'd got a friend for the rest of your life. Now that's the love that Jesus is talking about here.

Responding for the good of the person who is seeking to harm you. You can see how radical Christian teaching is. For centuries it was tit for tat.

Now Jesus says it's totally new. It's responding for the good of the person who harms you. Now let's look at a second great principle.

This time in Matthew chapter 6. And I want to just read to you verses 14 and 15. Please follow carefully in your own languages because they're very important verses. If, this is Jesus speaking, if you forgive men when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you don't forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. That is an incredible statement, isn't it? And it just doesn't appear once in the New Testament. If you take a concordance, you'll find it, or something very similar to it, appearing at least four times.

Why is forgiveness, a spirit of forgiveness, so crucial to Christian experience? Well let's turn to a story to find out. The story is in the 18th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. And it begins at verse 21.

It goes right through to verse 35 but we won't read it. I want to tell you the story and I want you to follow it as I tell you the story. Peter comes to Jesus with a question.

Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me? And before Jesus can answer, Peter offers a suggestion. Lord, shall I forgive him up to seven times? Now Peter was definitely having a good day. This was an exceedingly generous and charitable offer.

Because the accepted principle of the day, at the time of Christ, was that you only forgave a person three times. Rabbi Hosea ben Hanina, known I'm sure to all of you tonight. He was a rabbi at the time of Christ.

This is what he said. He who begs forgiveness from his neighbor, must not do so more than three times. It was the accepted principle of the day.

You could forgive a man three times, but if he sinned against you four times, you shouldn't forgive him. It was actually based on a misunderstanding of a verse in the book of Malachi. If Peter was feeling generous, he must have been absolutely devastated by the answer of Jesus.

Jesus said, I tell you Peter, not seven times, but seventy times seven. The number really isn't very important. Don't, you know, get your calculator out and work out exactly how many times you can forgive.

What Jesus is saying is, you've got to forgive, and you've got to forgive, and you've got to forgive. Unreckonable limit to your forgiveness. And then Jesus, the marvelous storyteller, tells one of his best.

Here's his servant, forgiven an absolutely massive debt by his master. He owed his master ten thousand talents. Now if your bible's got notes, there's probably some kind of suggestion as to how much that is.

The problem is, all the suggestions in the different bibles are, you know, they're different. One fact we do know. And that is that the annual province, the annual income, sorry, in the whole province of Galilee at the time of Christ was just three hundred talents.

So Jesus, Jesus is choosing a number intending to shock. There was absolutely no way this man could ever repay his debt. It's incredible actually when you read this, just how optimistic he was about repaying his debt.

Basically he says, you know, just give me a minute now, I'll pay everything. Debtors are incredibly optimistic people, I'm sure you've noticed that. But he could never ever repay.

And Jesus said the master forgave him everything. And out he went and he found another servant who owed him one hundred denarii. We know much more accurately what that was.

That was a working man's daily wage, just one day. And he grabbed him by the throat and demanded payment. And look what Jesus says at the end of this story.

Verse 35. This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. The master who had cancelled the debt turned him over to the jailers because he wouldn't cancel the other servant's debt.

And Jesus says, my father will do the same to you if you don't forgive your brother from your heart. You and I this evening have been forgiven the most enormous debt. We see the cross of Calvary by faith and we see the debt which has been paid for us.

And every time we come to the communion table we remember the debt which Jesus covered, atoned for us. And if you go out and fail to forgive your brother, if you are bearing a grudge, if you are holding something against a brother or sister, you are doing exactly what this wicked spirit. It is a community of forgiven forgivers.

People who have known the forgiveness of Christ. They have been to the cross of Calvary by faith and they know what Jesus has done. And they say, Lord if you have done that for me then I am going to go the extra mile for my brother.

And maybe some of you right at the end of this meeting need to respond to this. Maybe you need to meet someone at this conference to ask forgiveness. Maybe you need to pick up a pen and write to your parents or your brother at home or your home church and you need to beg forgiveness by letter.

If you have had a vision of Calvary you can never harbor a grudge against your brother. And this is how Simon and Matthew can live together. Forgiveness, forgiveness.

Now let's look at a third principle. And this time we go to chapter 7 of Matthew's gospel. You are all familiar I am sure with the teaching of the first five verses.

Verse 1 says don't judge or you will be judged. Verse 2 is immensely challenging isn't it. In the same way or with the same measure you judge others you yourself will be judged.

Next time you are really taking a hard line with your brother remember that verse. By the standard you judge your brother you will be judged. And then Jesus drives it home with a lovely bit of humour doesn't he.

He said you live rather like you are walking around the campsite with a great wooden plank coming out of your eye. And as you walk around with this great plank you have people passing by and you say look at that speck of sawdust in his eye. And often we are rather like that aren't we.

We can see faults in others so quickly. And we criticize and we judge. And all the time there is a great plank in our own eye.

You know I thought a lot about criticism and judgment or judgment of others in the Christian life. And I have come up with five principles I want to share them for you, with you. Number 1 I am never going to judge my brother's motives.

I may be wrong but I have come to believe that only God can really judge the heart of man. And sometimes people come to me and they have got some idea and it seems all wrong. The motive seems all wrong and yet in the course of time I am proved wrong.

And others come and their plans seem so great and they seem so deeply spiritual but in the course of time it is all wrong. I determined without being naive that I am going to take my brother at face value. I have got to get into judging the motives of other people.

Secondly I am not going to judge as much as I am able. I fail often but I am not going to judge by outward appearance. You all remember the story from James chapter 2. I hope you do.

James who was a very up to date writer says two men came into the tent in Belgium. And he said one was very well dressed and he had a bible, the knowledge of the holy and true discipleship under his arm. And the other was a tramp, a vagrant and he smelt.

And you got hold of the brother with the bible and you said look come right by me at the front here, magnificent seat. And you can sit there and look at maiden's bald head, it's very very good seat. And when you got them all sat down beside you, you said just give me a minute and you nipped back to the door.

And you said see that seat over there brother, in the far corner. That is just for you, you will find it exceedingly comfortable. Now James said if you ever treated two people like that you have proved you don't begin to understand the gospel of Jesus.

Judging merely by outward appearance of the person who follows the Lord Jesus. Who was Jesus attracted to? The rich? Yes he was sometimes. But he was also attracted to a cemetery where a man called legion was chained because nobody else would have anything to do with him.

Afford to judge by how people look. And then thirdly I am not going to judge people who have personal convictions about issues which are not abundantly made clear in the bible. And you know brothers and sisters not everything about the Christian life is clear.

You can throw me out as a heretic afterwards if you don't agree with me. But if you want all your theological T's crossed and all your theological I's dotted, you've got trouble ahead. Read Romans chapter 14 when you get a minute.

Problem was meat which had been offered to idols in Paul's. People came to this display of meat and they said that's a magnificent steak and I'm going to consume it. Other people said that looks good that steak but actually it's been offered to idols.

To touch it would be a denial of the faith. And there were tremendous fallouts in the early church over that issue. And you can all think I'm sure of modern equivalents to the meat issue.

Now what does Paul say? He doesn't say one is right and the other is wrong in all circumstances. He says let every man be convinced in his own mind. He said I've just got one word for you on the issue.

If your eating is going to upset the faith of your brother, don't eat. You may be free to eat, it wouldn't be sinful for you to eat, but for the sake of your brother, don't eat. And you know that doctrinal policy which some of you missed? I don't know where you were, I'm still looking for you.

But if I'd been here, I would have spoken a little bit about this issue. In OM we say there are certain issues which it's not clear. Great Christians, greatly used of God, have taken opposing views over the years on the same issue.

So I'm not going to judge you on it, and I hope you're not going to judge me, and we don't want to spend the month of June talking about these issues. Our opinion. We want to get on with loving God, and we want to get on with loving Allah.

And then the fourth thing is that we should never judge the service of another Christian. You read the first five verses of 1 Corinthians 4, when you get home. And then finally, you should never judge your brother by speaking evil against him.

Can you imagine how much trouble in the church would have been saved, how much trouble would have been saved from, if we'd just taken Matthew 7, 1 to 5. Flee with it if you take it seriously on the things this month. And then very quickly, the last two principles. The fourth is that Jesus taught these disciples where true greatness lies.

To see this, you have to go to the 20th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. And in your notes, just scribble down verses 20 to 28. Again, we won't read it, I'll just tell you the story.

It's a dispute about authority, who's boss. It begins with a mother who wants the very best for her two children. She comes to Jesus and she says, Could I have one of my children sitting on your right and another on your left, when you get into your kingdom? The other disciples hear about it, they're really upset, they're indignant, and they come to these disciples and they really tick them off.

And Jesus grasps this opportunity to teach a principle. Look at verse 25. The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

The big boss syndrome in that aspect, that section of society. But not so with you. Whoever wants to be great, must be a servant.

Whoever wants to be first, must be a slave. The body of Christ, it's not like a pyramid. The boss is on the top and he's comfortable and everybody is underneath him.

That's not spiritual leadership. Jesus turns the pyramid around. And he said, get underneath if you want to be the leader.

If you want to be the chief, learn to serve. If you want a reward from God, become a slave. And just like everything else, Jesus didn't just say it, he lived it.

So you read in verse 28. It's just like the son of man, he didn't come to be served, he didn't come to the boss, he came to serve and to give his life for ransom to men. In the world, the great man is the man who controls others.

When he speaks, others leap. But in the assessment of Jesus Christ, the badge of greatness is service. Again, I wonder how much conflict in the church over the centuries would have been avoided if only we'd

believed this principle.

Read the history of the Christian church. Power politics in the name of Jesus. So often, people searching for worldly power under the guise of the church and of Jesus.

I hope you're going to turn your back on all that in your life generally and definitely on these things this month. One final principle. Chapter 18 again.

And this time verse 15. If your brother sins against you, said Jesus, Now what would you expect him to say next? After all he said about love and forgiveness and so on. If your brother sins against you, you're an evangelical, imagine it didn't happen.

You don't want to upset him, do you? So just sweep it under the carpet, imagine it never happened. Now Jesus says, if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault. And he's very very specific, isn't he? If he doesn't repent, take two people and go and tell him again.

Be careful how you choose the two people. I don't want gossips, I want people who can hold confidentiality. But find two people and go and tell him.

And so Jesus goes on, pointing out the steps you must take when your brother sins against you. Now why do we close on this point? I want to show you that the revolutionary love that Jesus is teaching here in Matthew's Gospel. And this great Christian principle of forgiveness is not the road of least resistance.

It's not taking the easy, peaceful, pleasant way out of difficult situations. If the church has suffered from a lack of love over the years, it's probably... And you know if you really love your brother, more than sentimentality, but if you really love your brother, you'll be willing to hurt him. Because what happens if you don't show him his fault? He'll probably do it again, won't he? And he'll probably do it again.

And he'll become hardened against his sin. And your brother, humanly speaking, could be lost to spiritual effectiveness because you are not willing to be honest with him. True Christian love is honest.

It's straight. Now you have to be careful about this kind of teaching. You can take it to extremes.

The moment you think your brother's done something wrong. He picked up his knife or his fork in his wrong hand, I don't know. You go and rush on the basis of Matthew 18 and you want to deal with it.

And you've got to be sure, haven't you, of your facts. You've got to be sure. But if your brother is sinning and he's not repenting, it's your responsibility as his brother to go and talk to him about it.

Because you love him, because you long for repentance and restoration in his life, you'll be willing to pay the price of honesty. This is how the world will know that we are the disciples of Christ. Our chats will help, there's no question about that.

Selling Bibles will help, there's no question. But the world will know that we are the disciples of Christ when they see us living out these principles on our teams and in our churches. This is what Jesus Christ died to produce upon this earth.

He died to produce a kingdom, a community, a community of love, a community of forgiven forgivers, a community where criticism and judgmentalism is put behind us, a community where people are just longing to get under, longing to serve, and a community of honesty, and of longing that these teams

throughout Europe this summer will be local communities like that. There'll be lights set on a hill and they won't be able to be heard. And people will be drawn to the light of God when they see your good works.

So let's just bow before God and ask him to deal with us in our lives in these areas. We're not going to make any appeal or anything like that, but I say again that maybe after this meeting some of you need to take specific action in the light of what you've heard. It may mean going to a person, it may mean taking your pen in your hand.

Let's just spend a few moments quietly before God. Our Father we want to thank you tonight for Calvary. We can never question your love for us.

We can never question your love for a lost world when we think of it. And Lord when we think of your love we want to show, we want to express that love through our lives in this world. You're in heaven Father, we're your body, we're your ex... When we think of how much you have forgiven us, we never again Lord want to hold anything against any brother or sister.

Lord if we're... We don't want to limp... We don't want to limp into a summer of service. To know Lord that our lives are right. Deliver us Lord, deliver me from the critical... It's one thing for me to talk about taking this servant's place.

Willing to pour out our lives... We have to admit Lord we love peace sometimes much more than righteousness. Honest with you, honest with ourselves... Lord we thank you that Simon and Matthew could live... And Lord we can too. And we want to glorify your name by doing so.

We're living in a world Lord where the church is divided and it's over. Though we may be very different, we want to unite on the essentials. Help us we pray in Jesus' name.

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