

Matthew 5:44

by William MacDonald

This sermon emphasizes the importance of loving your enemies, honoring God, and trusting in His promises, even in difficult times.

Duration: 37:46

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:30, 1 Samuel 16:7, 2 Kings 5:4, Matthew 5:44, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 12:9

Topics: "Love Your Enemies"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by discussing Matthew 5:44, emphasizing the importance of taking a stand for Christ and how God honors those who honor Him. The speaker then moves on to Second Kings 5:4, highlighting the significance of unnamed individuals who have done great things for God. The sermon also shares the story of Mitsuo Fushida, a man who came across a copy of the New Testament and was deeply impacted by the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Fushida was particularly moved by Luke 23:34, where Jesus prays for forgiveness for those who crucified Him.

Transcript

For a change of pace during the afternoon sessions, we're just taking up some spiritual insights from the Word of God. We just look at individual verses of Scripture, and then we seek to draw some lessons from them. The first verse I would like to look at with you this afternoon is Matthew chapter 5 and verse 44.

Matthew 5 and verse 44. Begin at verse 43, 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 which despitefully use you and persecute you.

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. And I would just like to take those words, pray for them which despitefully use you. That is distinctly Christian, isn't it? To pray for those who despitefully use you.

Sometimes the best commentary on a verse is found in an illustration. And I would like to give you such an illustration this afternoon, how obedience to this portion of the word of God can result in great blessing. Pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

The story concerns a man named Mitsuo Fushida. He was the Japanese pilot who led the attack on Pearl Harbor. His was the glorious triumph, the privilege of radioing back to Tokyo, that certainly the main part of the fleet that had been there in Pearl Harbor had been destroyed.

Well, that was the beginning, of course, of the war with Japan. The war raged back and forth there in the Pacific. Sometimes it seemed as if Japan were on top, and finally the United States emerged victorious.

Now, during the war, the Japanese had murdered a missionary, an elderly missionary couple in the Philippines. They had a daughter here, an adult daughter in the United States, and God laid it on her heart to visit the prisoner of war camps in the United States, where Japanese prisoners were, and to tell them the sweet story of love. And they came to know that her parents had been murdered by the Japanese in the Philippines, and yet here was a woman who came to them and she brought New Testaments, and she told them the gospel story.

And they used to say to her, why do you come to us, of all people? I mean, we're the people who murdered your parents. Why do you come? And she said, it's because of a prayer my parents prayed before they were killed. But she never told them what the prayer was.

Well, after the war, Mitsuo Fushida was furious, of course, when Japan lost, and he decided to bring the United States to trial before an international tribunal. And so he started assembling materials, at least trying to, and he would be interviewing these prisoners of war who came back to Japan from the United States after the war. And there was kind of a refrain in their testimony.

They were always telling him about this woman who came to the prisoner of war camp and brought them a book called the New Testament, and told them about her parents and the prayer that she had prayed before she died. And that really wasn't exactly what Fushida wanted to hear. I mean, he wanted to hear about terrible war atrocities and how cruelly these men had been treated.

And instead of that, he was hearing about this woman who was giving her life to a people who had murdered her parents. In a very wonderful way, a copy of the New Testament came into Mitsuo Fushida's hands. And he decided to read it.

He was curious. After hearing about this New Testament all the time, he was curious about this book. So he read the Gospel of Matthew, and he was really gripped by it.

And so he decided, well, I'll go on to the next book. And he read the Gospel of Mark, and his interest deepened. And so he started reading in the Gospel of Luke.

And he came to Luke chapter 23 and verse 34, and he read those words, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And without anybody telling him, he knew the prayer that that missionary couple had prayed before they died. And that was it.

They had prayed that prayer. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. He no longer thought of the American woman or of the Japanese prisoners of war, but he thought of himself, a fierce enemy of Christ, whom God was prepared to forgive in answer to the prayer of the crucified Savior.

And at that moment, he sought and found forgiveness and eternal life by faith in Christ. The Jew of Tushita was not only converted to God, but he spent the rest of his life traveling throughout the world, preaching the gospel of redemptive grace. And I read recently, quite recently, where he went home to be with the

Lord.

Pray for them, which despitefully use you and persecute you. You know, if we would only take the scriptures more literally, I think we'd see more accomplished for God. If there's someone today, and you're in that position, someone is using you despitefully, and perhaps persecuting you for your testimony for the Lord Jesus.

Pray for them, and see wonderful things happen for God. Our second verse is found back in 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel chapter 2 and verse 30. And once again, it's just a fragment of a verse, and it's a fragment that you're familiar with.

But I'll read the whole verse, 1 Samuel chapter 2 and verse 30. Wherefore, the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me forever. But now the Lord saith, be it far from me, for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

Them that honor me I will honor. One of the many ways we can honor the Lord is by standing true to divine principles and steadfastly refusing to compromise. And in the society in which we live today, there are constant temptations to cut corners, to fudge, to engage in under-the-counter deals, to compromise.

And this scripture is just as true today as the day when it was first uttered, them that honor me I will honor. Years ago, there was a young man in England. His name was Adam Clark, and he worked for a silk merchant.

And of course, the silk came by the yard, and he'd have to measure it out. The customers would come in and order so many yards of silk. And one day his boss said to him, Adam, when the customers come in, stretch the silk.

In other words, when you're measuring it out, stretch it, you know. He would make a little extra money on the deal, at least the owner would. And Adam Clark looked at his employer and said, Sir, your silk may stretch, but my conscience won't.

Adam Clark grew in the things of the Lord, and God used him to write what is now known as the Adam Clark Commentary on the Books of the Bible. And that's quite a lifetime achievement, isn't it? To write a commentary on the books of the Bible. And who knows, but in the providence of God, it goes back to that day when Adam Clark said, Your silk may stretch, but my conscience won't.

Some years ago, when the Olympics were coming up, there was a young man running, scheduled to run in a 100-meter event. His name was Eric Liddell. And when he found that the heats were scheduled for Sunday, he went to his manager and told him he wouldn't be able to run.

To him, that was the Lord's day, and he said, If you love the Lord, you'll love his day too. And so this raised quite a furor, you can imagine. They said he was letting his country down.

They said he was a spoiled sport. They said he was a straight-laced religious fanatic. And then he noticed that the heats for the 200-meter event were scheduled for weekdays.

Well, that wasn't his distance. The 200-meter event. But he went to his manager and asked if he could try out for them.

And so he was given permission, and he won the first heat. He won the second heat, and he won the semifinals. And on the day of the finals, as he strode to the starting line, somebody slipped a piece of paper in his hand.

And he opened the piece of paper, and he looked at it, and it said, Them that honor me, I will honor. He not only won the race, but he set a new world record. God used him, sent him out to the Far East.

He was interned by the Japanese in World War II, and he died in a concentration camp there. Them that honor me, I will honor. He has the glorious privilege of being one of the martyrs, one of the martyrs of the Christian faith.

Well, the Bible is filled with illustrations of this. Joseph. Joseph was an embodied spine.

He would not compromise. Joseph is one of the few men in the Bible, I think, about which nothing negative is spoken. He wore throughout the white flower of a blameless life.

Moses, a man of conviction, who was determined to honor God or die. Daniel, another man of whom nothing negative is written. And, of course, the greatest of all, the Lord Jesus Christ.

No one ever honored God the Father like the Lord Jesus. In more recent years, there was a Palestinian refugee named Samir Zar, living in Lebanon. And he became a Christian through the witness of the Navigators.

And he started to grow in the things of the Lord while he was attending the university in Beirut. He was discipled by the Nav, and he received a degree in business administration there. And on his first day working for a chemical firm in Kuwait, his employer said this to him.

He said, Samir, the first thing I want you to understand is this job is to be your God. We require this of our men. So what would you say? Well, Samir shot up a quick prayer, and he looked his new boss in the eye, and he said, Sorry, I already have a God, but I'll make a bargain with you.

I'll work for you, and if I can't sell more in giving this company my second best, then anybody here who makes this company his God, you can fire me. And his employer was startled that he agreed to the bargain. It wasn't easy, but Samir worked hard and put God first and the company second.

And his second was better than anyone else's first. Them that honor me, I will honor. Today he's in charge of all contract negotiations in all Asia for this firm.

God clearly honored his decision on priorities. Them that honor me, I will honor. Still working today, young people.

Take a stand for Christ and watch him honor you. 2 Kings 5 4 And here we read these words. And one went in and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.

I just want to take out that expression from the verse. The maid that is of the land of Israel. What did you say her name was? Her name isn't given.

And I think there's a deep spiritual lesson for us here that some unnamed people have done some great exploits for God. Let's think through the Bible of some people and that we don't know their names. We won't know till we get to heaven.

And yet they really accomplished for God. I think of the three men who served David. And one day David, he just expressed, he was thinking back to his boyhood and he was thinking of how he played around in Bethlehem and he was thinking of that cool, refreshing water that they used to get in the well in Bethlehem and he just kind of whispered a sigh.

He said, Oh, if I could just have a drink of that water from the well in Bethlehem. And between him and the well in Bethlehem, the enemy was encamped. And those men, those three men heard him say that and they said, in effect, your desire is our command.

And they, at great risk, they went through the enemy lines and they went to the well in Bethlehem and they got a drink for David and they brought it to him. And he said, I couldn't drink that. He said, that water was brought to me at the possible price of blood.

And he poured it out as a drink offering to the Lord. That might seem ungrateful to you, but it wasn't ungrateful. It was a wonderful act of dedication and worship to the Lord and it expressed the deepest appreciation for what those men had done.

But we don't know their names. Three unnamed men. I think of the great woman of Shunem who entertained the prophet.

But no mention is made of her name. And then in today's passage we have this anonymous Jewish maiden who advised that Naaman should go to Elisha. I tell you, some of the great doors of history swing on little hinges, don't they? And here is a maiden, we have no idea who she was and yet she was used of God at a crisis time in history.

I think of that dear woman who came and anointed the head of the Lord Jesus. At least one of the women who did that, she's unnamed as far as the scripture is concerned. I think of the poor widow who cast in her two mites.

We don't know who she was. It doesn't tell. I think of the boy who brought the five loaves and the two fishes to Jesus and he took them and he blessed them and he broke them and he multiplied them and fed the multitude.

In 2 Corinthians 8 verse 23 you read about how Paul sent two brothers to Corinth with Titus for the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem and he calls them messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ. Just think of that. Messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ.

And one of them, he says, of one of them whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches. And yet we have no idea who those men were and anything you say would be speculation. In his poem, Gray's poem, *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, he says, full many a flower is born to blush unseen and waste its fragrance in the desert air.

Gray was wandering through this country churchyard and he saw the gravestones of people who'd been buried and there may have been a true greatness about them but they just lived and died in obscurity and their bodies went into the grave and he said, full many a flower is born to blush unseen and waste its fragrance in the desert air. Well, I've got news for you, friends. There's no waste with God.

I think of some of those who are serving here at the camp, serving behind the scenes. As far as man is concerned, probably very little glory for it. Somebody said to me this week at the table, do you think there'll

be a special crown for cooks at camp? And I said, yes, I think so.

I do. In fact, I think God has a special way of compensating for things that are done quietly for him, for these dear anonymous people who serve him and they don't worry about public acclaim. Perhaps I'd like to turn now to Isaiah chapter 45 and verse 3. Isaiah, this is like a Kodachrome slide presentation.

Let me just change pictures quickly here. It says in verse 1 of Isaiah chapter 45, I'll read verses 1, 2, and 3. It says, Thus saith the Lord to his anointed to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut. I will go before thee and make the crooked places straight.

I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut and thunder the bars of iron. And here it is. I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

Now just think about it first of all in its context. Cyrus, of course, was a man ordained of God to rise to power in the Medo-Persian Empire at the time that the captivity of Israel was to come to a close. And Cyrus was the one to whom God gave the great privilege of issuing that decree allowing the people of Israel to go back to the land.

Well, here he makes promises to Cyrus and among those promises he says, I will give thee the treasures of darkness. And to Cyrus that was a promise that as he went on his mighty conquest he would get all kinds of loot, booty, prizes of war. But you know there's a way in which we can appropriate that promise to ourselves and that is in a spiritual sense.

I will give thee the treasures of darkness. That means to us that treasures can be discovered in the dark nights of life that are never found in days of unrelieved sunshine. God allows his people to go through deep trials, difficulties, heartaches and all the rest.

But there are treasures in those hours of darkness. Somebody says to suffer passes but to have suffered remains with us forever. Now that means that the suffering itself passes but the benefits that we reap from the suffering go with us forever.

God can give songs in the deepest night. The poet says in many a rapturous angel amid those suns of light will say of his sweetest music I learned it in the night. And many a rolling anthem that fills the father's home sobbed out its first rehearsal in the shade of a darkened room.

I will give thee the treasures of darkness. I think of a woman like Fanny Crosby. I don't know whether she was born blind but if not she became blind very early in life.

Fanny Crosby wrote at least six thousand hymns. God gave her the treasures of darkness. We sang one happens to be my favorite hymn.

We've sung it I think twice since we've been here. When my life work is ended and I cross the swelling tide in that bright and glorious morning I shall see. I shall know my redeemer when I reach the other side and his smile will be the first to welcome me.

As her eyesight got worse her insight got better. And God used her in a wonderful way. There's a darkness of what somebody has called life's inexplicable mystery.

The calamities, the catastrophes the sudden and unexpected experiences which have come into life in which all our forethought has not been sufficient to ward off. And life is dark because of them. Sorrow, loss, disappointment injustice, misconception of motive slander.

These are often the things that make life dark. And humanly speaking none of us would choose those things. We would rather have the light.

Leslie Weatherhead said like all men I love and prefer the sunny uplands of experience when health, happiness and success abound. But I've learned far more about God and life and myself in the darkness of fear and failure than I have ever learned in the sunshine. There are such things as the treasures of darkness.

The darkness, thank God, passes. But what we learn in the darkness we possess forever. And I just know that as I say these things the wheels are going in your mind and some of you who have been through the darkness and have learned blessed lessons there just are ready to testify to that fact.

I will give thee the treasures of darkness. Romans chapter 5 and verse 5. Romans chapter 5 and verse 5. It says, well, I just have to break in. I'll start at verse 3. Not only so but we glory in tribulations also knowing that tribulation work of patience and patience experience and experience hope and hope make us not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Sometimes words in the Christian vocabulary have quite a different meaning than they have in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 7th edition. In fact, it's good to have a Webster's dictionary when you're studying the Bible but it's not good to use it for doctrinal purposes. And it's good to have a good Bible dictionary there to give you the scriptural definition of many of these words.

And hope is one of the words that I'd like to speak about that has a different meaning in the Christian vocabulary than it has in ordinary usage. As far as this world is concerned hope is to look forward to something in the future but you have no certainty that it will come to pass. Isn't that right? Once again, my friend in business and he's having a tough time and he says, well, I hope next quarter I'll be in the black.

Well, it's okay to hope. It's okay to be optimistic but actually he has no assurance that things are going to be better. It may only be wishful thinking.

Now, the Christian hope also looks forward to something that's future. Romans 8, 24 says, Hope that is seen is not hope for what a man seeth why does he yet hope for? But the Christian's hope is absolutely certain because it's based upon the word of God. That's why it's different.

That's why when we use the word hope in a Christian sense there's no doubt about it. And it's good to remember that. When you use the word hope in connection with the things of the Lord there's no element of chance.

There's no element of uncertainty. The writer of the Hebrews says, We have this hope as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast. That's what it says.

We have this hope as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast. Hope is faith laying hold of God's word and living in the present assurance of what he has promised or predicted. And because hope is based upon the word of God it can never be put to shame or lead to disappointment.

One of our teachers at Emmaus years ago wrote this. He said, Hope without God's promise is empty and futile and often even presumptuous but based upon the promises of God it rests upon his character and cannot lead to disappointment. It's good.

Remember that. And that's why the Christian's hope is spoken of as a good hope. We have good hope through grace.

That's why it's spoken of as a blessed hope. The blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. Or better, of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

It's a living hope. 1 Peter 1, 3. And you know, a wonderful thing about the Christian's hope is this is what enables him to endure those hours of darkness that we were just speaking about. It's the Christian's hope that enables him to endure persecution and privation and tribulation and even martyrdom.

You know, I really think that we miss something in putting away the stories of the martyrs. You never hear about the martyrs today, do you? I never do. I don't know why somebody doesn't write a book really telling the story of the Christian martyrs in the language of today.

I happen to be brought up in a home where those stories were brought before us all the time. I can remember a calendar in our kitchen and there was a picture on it, a picture of John Brown, one of the Covenanters in Scotland years ago. There was a wicked man in power at that time.

His name was Claverhouse and he was hunting down the Christians and chasing them and pursuing them and killing them. And John Brown was one of the men on which there was a contract. And John Brown had a wife and several children, but he didn't dare come home except secretly.

He was living out in the dens and caves and in the woods and every once in a while he'd come home for clothes and food. And on one of those occasions when he came home, Claverhouse and his men were waiting for John Brown. And the calendar showed Claverhouse and his men there in the kitchen of that Scottish home and John Brown and his wife and the children clinging in fear to the wife's dress.

And Claverhouse ordered his men to kill John Brown. And they looked at him and they saw the face of an angel and they couldn't kill him. So Claverhouse himself killed John Brown in cold blood in front of his wife and children.

And he said to Mrs. Brown, What do you think of your husband now? And she said, I always thought a great deal of him, but I never thought more of him than I do now. Now how could she say that? Hope. Because our hope is based upon the word of God and it's sure and it's steadfast and it enables us to go through trials like that.

The Christian knows that no matter what he might be called upon to go through down here, the sufferings of this present time are only pinpricks compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us. Well, let's look at one or two more. 1 Samuel chapter 16, verse 1. 1 Samuel chapter 16, verse 1. It says in verse 1 of chapter 16 of 1 Samuel, And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided me a king among his sons.

I would like to draw this spiritual lesson from this passage of Scripture. The passage I have in mind is, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? The lesson I get

out of this, and the Lord has used it in my own life, there comes a time in life when we have to stop mourning over the past, and get on with the work of the present. Now let me explain that.

Saul was, I mean, Samuel was involved in the inauguration of the kingdom. He was God's key man at that time. And let's face it, there's a certain glory about the beginning of a kingdom and about the coronation of the first king.

And Samuel was the kingmaker. He really was, under the hand of God. And he was there when all the pomp and splendor and glory attended the coronation of Saul.

And he saw Saul in his illustrious reign. It was illustrious at first, and then started to go down, down, down, down. And then God rejected Saul, and Samuel was crushed.

He was absolutely crushed. And he grieved over it. And perhaps, in a sense, he sulked over it, and just couldn't be consoled.

And now God says to him, quit mourning. My program hasn't failed. I have a better man than Saul to step onto the stage of Israel.

That was true, too. Quit mourning. My program hasn't failed.

My program's going to go on. I think David learned this lesson. Do you remember when that little baby was sick? David fasted and mourned.

When the baby died, he bathed. He changed his clothes. He ate a meal.

He went to the tabernacle to worship, first of all, and then he ate a meal. And his men were alarmed, and they were astonished at it. They said, why do you do this? He said, the baby is gone.

I'll go to the baby in death. The baby won't come back to me in life. And I think this has a voice for us today.

Sometimes in life, a ministry may be taken away from you. Maybe there's something that God has given to you to do, and it really becomes very central in your life. And through no fault of your own, that ministry may be taken away from you, and you grieve over the death of an avenue of service.

I've known that to happen. I knew a man in California, and a ministry was taken away from him, and he went down to his grave grieving. Dear friends, it shouldn't be.

How long wilt thou grieve, mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him? Maybe you've had a friendship or a partnership in life, and that is severed. Or you've been cruelly disappointed by someone who was very dear to you. And you could call that the death of a valued relationship.

And you grieve and you mourn, and you just can't rise above it. God says, look, there comes a time to stop mourning and get on with the work. Maybe some lifelong dream of yours has been shattered, or some ambition has been frustrated.

Call it the death of a vision. There's nothing wrong about mourning, but it shouldn't be prolonged to the place where it really robs us of effectiveness in Christian service. E. Stanley Jones said that in all the knocks of life, he tried to recover within the hour.

Well, I am not able to recover within the hour. But anyway, it's been a challenge to me to think of a man who had made that his desire before God to recover within an hour. What this scripture is saying is that you and I should not be forever inconsolable over circumstances that come into our lives that cannot be changed.

Don't you think that's helpful? I do. How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Even a ministry should not take the place of the Lord in our lives. I think we said that the other night.

We quoted somebody as saying that communion with God means more to him than service for him. God is wooing, the Lord is wooing a bride, not hiring a servant. How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Well, we'll go on with some more insights tomorrow, going through the word of God and trying to extract honey by the Holy Spirit from these isolated verses.

Shall we pray? Father, we just thank you for these portions of your word today, and we just pray that we might translate them into action. We just pray that we might be men and women of the book, that we might go and see what you're saying to us. We're impressed how relevant these scriptures are to the day in which we live.

I think especially of that verse, them that honor me, I will honor. Lord, in a day of compromise, in a day of weakness, we pray that we might stand true to Jesus, so a thousand voices from the world may call. We ask it in his precious name, and for his sake, amen.

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