

**SERMON NOTES**  
**Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36**  
***“Serving the Undeserving”***

**Intro:**

- Most of us have probably never had the kinds of enemies that Obang has had in his life
- *But most of us do know the experience of someone offending us or deeply wounding us or mistreating us or opposing us or ridiculing us or abusing us or slandering us or defying us or disrespecting us or mocking our values or beliefs*
- We certainly know the experience of the pain and disappointment of being let down by people who were supposed to love us and nurture us and take care of us and stand with us and defend us and protect us – and failed to do so
- And every parent of a teenager knows how difficult it can be sometimes to fill a teenager’s love tank with unconditional love when the teenager is behaving badly and rebelliously and disrespectfully
- *“People need love, especially when they don’t deserve it.”*
- **God made us for a love relationship with Him and with one another**
- *No one can function at his or her best without their love tank being filled with God’s love // their parents’ love // their spouse’s love // and the love of family and friends and church members*
- Most of us have experienced some deficiencies of love in our lives – **some people have experienced serious deprivation of love in their lives**
- *Their behavior shows it – God made us that way – God designed us to require love to behave at our best*
- The problem is: *most of us are a lot better at conditional love and reciprocal love than we are at unconditional love and unrequited love*
- We do pretty well at loving people who behave well // who treat us well // who return our love – *people who are deserving of our love*
- We don’t do nearly as well at loving people who behave badly // who mistreat us // who are unkind or disrespectful to us – *people who are not deserving of our love*
- ***But People need love – especially when they don’t deserve it***
- *People who don’t deserve our love are showing us by their behavior that they need more love*
- When our children and youth are behaving well – *when they are easiest to love and most deserving of our love* – that usually indicates that their love tank is reasonably full – and although everyone could always benefit from more love – the good behavior shows that child is not desperate for love at that moment

- *But when our children and youth are behaving badly – when they are hardest to love and most undeserving of our love – that usually indicates that their love tank needs filling and are most in need of our unconditional love*
- The same principle applies to other family members and friends and co-workers and neighbors and church members
- **People need love – especially when they don't deserve it**
- Now, why am I talking about relationships with family and friends and church members in a sermon about loving your enemies?
- G.K. Chesterton: *“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.”*
- Who are the people who have hurt you most deeply in life? Who are the people who have provoked the strongest feelings of anger – and perhaps even hate – in your life?
- *Is it not those who are nearest to you?*
- Few of us have been deeply wounded by a stranger or a far-away neighbor – though perhaps some of you have been victimized by a crime committed by a stranger
- *But for most of us – our most serious and hurtful and damaging conflicts in life have been with those who are nearest to us – parents // brothers and sisters // spouses // children // extended family members // close friends // church members // near neighbors*

**Matthew 10:36 (NIV) <sup>36</sup> A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'**

- Now the context of that statement of Jesus is family members opposing or mocking or hindering the faith of a new believer in Christ – some of you have experienced that
- *But in a broader sense, many of us have felt our most intense anger directed toward a member of our own household*
- For me – my father about 30 years ago
- *But there have also been times of deep hurt and serious conflict and intense anger between me and Beth or my children or a close friend or church members – far more painful than any persecution by non-Christians*
- **A man's enemies will be the members of his own household**

Erwin Lutzer: Perhaps you read the story about a woman and her husband who came to a pastor and said, *"We're going to get a divorce, but we want to come to make sure that you approve of it."*

There are people who come to the pastor hoping that when they say there is no feeling left in their marriage, the pastor will say, *"Well, if there's no feeling left, then, the only thing you can do is split."*

Instead, the pastor says to the husband, "*The Bible says you're to love your wife as Jesus Christ loved the church.*"

He says, "*Oh, I can't do that.*"

The pastor says, "*If you can't begin at that level, then begin on a lower level. You're supposed to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Can you at least love her as you would love a neighbor?*"

The husband says, "*No. That's still too high a level.*"

The pastor says, "*Well then, the Bible says, Love your enemies. Begin there.*"

- Who is your enemy?
- *Is it someone who persecutes you for your beliefs – or someone who has deeply wounded or mistreated or betrayed you?*
- *Is it a stranger – or a neighbor – or a member of your own household?*
- How are Christ-followers commanded to treat their enemies?

## I. HOW DO WE SERVE THE UNDESERVING?

**Matthew 5:43 - 44 (NIV) <sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup>But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**

**Luke 6:27 - 31 (NIV) <sup>27</sup>“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup>If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. <sup>31</sup>Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

- The question: *Who is my enemy?* is related to the question we looked at last week: *Who is my neighbor?*
- *Love your neighbor as you love yourself* is a central teaching of the Bible – indeed, it is the command that is the goal of all biblical instruction
- Religious people like to think they can please God while retaining their self-righteous pride and prejudices – so they like to define the term “neighbor” as narrowly as possible
- *A neighbor is “our kind of people”*
- *A neighbor is someone who is deserving of our love*
- *So “Love your neighbor as yourself” really means “Love your own kind of people who are deserving of your love”*
- **Jesus radically changed that narrow definition of neighbor with his Parable of the Good Samaritan**

- In our text today, Jesus is once again challenging that narrow religious definition of loving your neighbor as yourself
- *You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies.*
- The OT Scriptures do clearly teach the importance of loving your neighbor as yourself – but nowhere does the OT teach God’s people to hate their enemies
- *There is, however, clear and repeated teaching that God is a holy and righteous God who hates evil – and there are some Psalms that talk about hating evil-doers and hating those who hate God*
- The Pharisees came into prominence in Judaism after the completion of the OT canon, and they – along with the Qumran community of Essenes and other Jews – developed a narrow definition of “neighbor” that basically restricted the term to those within their own sect of Judaism – *and all Samaritans and Gentiles and even Jews not belonging to their own sect began to be identified as sinners and evil-doers and even enemies of God*
- So the command to love your neighbor as yourself applied only to those within your own religious community
- *You were under no moral obligation to love outsiders as you love yourself*
- This was the accepted Jewish teaching at the time of Christ
- *But Jesus would have none of it – none of this carving up humanity into people who are deserving and worthy of our love and people who are not*
- **For Jesus came as God in human flesh to reveal that the heart of the Father is mercy toward undeserving sinners and outcasts – and the supreme demonstration of that heart of mercy was the Cross**
- Tired of religious games that would divide people into neighbors and righteous people to be loved, and non-neighbors and sinners unworthy of love – *Jesus simply broadened the command to love your neighbor to include your enemies*
- In fact, in Luke’s Gospel, the Golden Rule is spoken by Jesus in the context of loving your enemy (6:31)
- *“Do to others as you would have them do to you” includes “Do to your enemies and those who hate you and those who mistreat you as you would have them do to you”*
- This goes way beyond forbidding vengeance or retaliation toward those who have wronged you and sinned against you – *this is a command to treat your enemy as you would want your friend or neighbor to treat you*
- And what, practically speaking, does it mean to love your enemies? How are we supposed to do that?
- Jesus gives some practical examples:

**Luke 6:27-32** (*The Message*) <sup>27</sup>“To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst.

<sup>28</sup>When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. <sup>29</sup>If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. <sup>30</sup>If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

<sup>31</sup>“Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for *them*! <sup>32</sup>If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. “

- *Most of this is pretty self-explanatory – but a comment is necessary on the teaching to turn the other cheek when you are slapped*
- The primary reference here is not a prohibition to prevent children from resisting bullying or to prevent women from defending themselves against assault
- *In the Jewish culture of that day, a slap on the cheek was intended to convey personal insult and rejection – and was sometimes associated with removal from the synagogue*
- Thus the command may have more to do with responding to persecution than to physical violence in general
- At any rate, Jesus set the example for us:

**1 Peter 2:23** (NIV) <sup>23</sup>When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

- *Notice – he entrusted himself to him who judges justly*
- The call to love your enemies does not mean that God does not care about meting out justice for wrongdoing
- *Rather, the emphasis is on the fact that executing justice and punishing sinners is God’s prerogative – not ours*
- **It is not justice that is prohibited – but rather personal retaliation**

**Romans 12:17 - 19** (NIV) <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup>Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “*It is mine to avenge; I will repay,*” says the Lord.

- Also, when Jesus teaches that his followers should allow others to take unfair advantage of them -- *and to respond to begging and even stealing with generosity* – that does not mean that we should become enablers who repeatedly rescue people from the consequences of their own self-destructive habits

- *Rather, what he is teaching is that our response to others should be governed by a loving concern for their well-being rather than a selfish concern to cling to our money and possessions*
- The decision to give or to withhold is based on valuing the other person more highly than we value our own possessions
- *And we can do this because we are children of our heavenly Father and we find our security in Him, not in our money and possessions*
- Notice Jesus' practical wisdom here: *Do good to those who hate you – pray God's blessings on those who curse you and mistreat you*
- **Actions precede a change of feelings toward others**
- *You may not feel warm fuzzies toward those who have wronged you and mistreated you – but you can do good to them and you can serve them and you can pray for God to bless them*
- You do so for your own mental, emotional and spiritual health – so that you are not overcome by evil and swallowed up by evil and destroyed by evil – *the way to overcome evil is by doing good – the way to disarm hatred is by showing love*
- Merv Budd: *Chris Carrier of Coral Gables, Florida, was abducted when he was 10 years old. His kidnapper, angry with the boy's family, burned him with cigarettes, stabbed him numerous times with an ice pick, then shot him in the head and left him to die in the Everglades. Remarkably, the boy survived, though he lost sight in one eye. No one was ever arrested.*
- Recently, a man confessed to the crime. Carrier, now a youth minister at Granada Presbyterian Church, went to see him.
- *He found David McAllister, a 77-year-old ex-convict, frail and blind, living in a North Miami Beach nursing home. Carrier began visiting often, reading to McAllister from the Bible and praying with him. His ministry opened the door for McAllister to make a profession of faith.*
- No arrest is forthcoming; after 22 years, the statute of limitations on the crime is long past. In Christian Reader (Jan/Feb 98), Carrier says, *"While many people can't understand how I could forgive David McAllister, from my point of view I couldn't not forgive him. If I'd chosen to hate him all these years, or spent my life looking for revenge, then I wouldn't be the man I am today, the man my wife and children love, the man God has helped me to be."*
- You may or may not change your enemy's life by loving your enemy – but even if you don't – you will change your life – you will become a better man or woman // a better husband or wife // a better father or mother – *if you choose to love your enemy and do good to him and forgive him*
- The main beneficiaries of your obedience to Jesus' command to love your enemies could well be the members of your own household

## II. WHY DO WE SERVE THE UNDESERVING?

- Notice – and compare – how Jesus concludes this teaching in Matthew and Luke:

**Matthew 5:48 (NIV) <sup>48</sup>Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

**Luke 6:36 (NIV) <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

- *Of all the attributes of God, which attribute does Jesus single out for us to aim for in our pursuit of godliness?*
- *Of all the qualities of spiritual maturity that one could think of – which quality does Jesus single out as the epitome of spiritual maturity and godly character?*
- **Jesus equates being perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect with being merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful**
- *Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice*
- **It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**
- *Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? **The one who had mercy on him.** Go and do likewise.*
- *Are you starting to get the picture of what Jesus values highly?*
- **Jesus came to earth as God in human flesh to reveal to us the Father – to show us that the heart of the Father is mercy – mercy to the physically and spiritually sick, to sinners and outcasts, to the wounded and broken people of the world – mercy to the undeserving – mercy even to His enemies for whom Christ died to reconcile them to God**
- *So what does it mean to be a child of God? What does it mean to be a godly person?*

**Matthew 5:44 - 45 (NIV) <sup>44</sup>But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>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.**

**Luke 6:35 - 36 (NIV) <sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

- *Jesus equates loving your enemies with being sons of your heavenly Father*
- *Jesus equates being merciful to the undeserving with being sons and daughters of our heavenly Father*

- Why?
- **Because it was by God's mercy that you were transformed from being a sinner at enmity with God into being a beloved and forgiven child of God**
- *Loving enemies is what the Cross is all about – and the Cross is what reveals like nothing else that the heart of God is mercy*

**Romans 5:6 - 10 (NIV)** <sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... <sup>10</sup>For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

**Ephesians 2:4 - 5 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

- ***What is the most tangible, practical, concrete evidence that a person has grasped and experienced and been transformed by the mercy of God shown at the Cross of Christ?***
- *That we would be merciful, just as our Father is merciful*
- *And what are some tangible, practical ways of showing this mercy to others?*
- *Go and do likewise – go and show mercy to the wounded and broken people of the world as the Good Samaritan did*
- **And – love your enemies**
- *Do good to those who hate you // serve the undeserving // pray God's blessings on those who mistreat you // be kind to those who are mean to you*
- **In so doing you will prove to be a child of God**
- **You show that you are a child of God by acting the way your Father acts**
- *If you are God's son or daughter, then His character is in you – and you will be inclined to do what He does*
- **And God loves His enemies – the evil and unjust – in sending rain and sunshine on them instead of immediate judgment – and most of all – in sending His Son to the Cross for them – for us – for all who are sinners**
- *There is nothing distinctively Christian about loving those who love you // doing good to those who are good to you // being kind to those who kind to you // being generous to those who have the means to repay you -- anyone can do that – pagans and sinners and unbelievers can do that*

**Luke 6:32-35** <sup>32</sup>**“Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that!**

<sup>33</sup> **And if you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much!** <sup>34</sup> **And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, what good is that? Even sinners will lend to their own kind for a full return.** <sup>35</sup> **“Love your enemies! Do good to them! Lend to them! And don’t be concerned that they might not repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked.”**

- *God is kind to the undeserving and ungrateful and unrighteous – that is His nature – His heart is mercy*
- **Therefore, that will be a distinguishing characteristic of His children – that they will love and serve and show mercy to the undeserving – that they will be kind to the ungrateful and unrighteous – that they will do good and be generous to those who are unkind and mean to them**
- Few of us have any idea how much of God’s love and mercy and generosity goes unrequited
- *We are so fearful that our love or generosity will be unproductive or wasted*
- We care more about making sure none of our money or time or good work gets wasted than that we grow into the likeness of our heavenly Father
- **God is kind to the ungrateful and unrighteous – so are His children**
- Notice how practical and down-to-earth Jesus gets
- *If you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? (Matt. 5:47)*
- **Godly love greets people outside your social group**
- *Loving your enemy doesn’t always involve some heroic good deed – sometimes it is as simple as saying hello to someone who is not part of your social group at school or at church or at work*
- Sometimes it is as simple as being the first person to break the ice and speak to someone who is not speaking to you – *and whether they return your greeting or not – speaking to them the next time as well*
- Sometimes it is as simple as sitting with someone who is alone in the lunch room or striking up a conversation with someone who is beneath your coolness level in the social hierarchy
- **Greeting people outside your social or religious group – speaking to someone who is not speaking to you – those are godly actions that testify to the reality that you are a child of God who has been saved and transformed by His mercy and grace in Jesus Christ**

### III. WHERE DOES THE POWER TO LOVE COME FROM?

- And you thought the command to love your neighbor as yourself was staggering!

- *If our self-centeredness makes it difficult for us to seek our neighbor's physical and spiritual well-being with the same passion as we seek our own family's physical and spiritual well-being – then how in the world are we going to be able to love our enemies when we can barely love our neighbors?*
- **This love does not come from ourselves – or else Jesus would not have distinguished the love God's children must show others from the kind of love expected of unbelievers**
- *We love, because He first loved us*
- *We are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ – therefore God's Spirit lives within us and pours out God's love into our hearts*
- **God's love fills our love tanks so that we are empowered to extend His love to others – even to our enemies – and even to our neighbors and friends and family members who have hurt us and sometimes feel like our enemies**
- *We have already received and experienced God's mercy that has been shown to us through His Son – our Savior – Jesus Christ*
- **Therefore the mercy we are called to show to the undeserving is not just modeled on God's mercy but is actually rooted in our personal experience of God's saving mercy in Jesus Christ**
- *Freely we have received mercy when we were undeserving – therefore, freely we are to give mercy to others who are undeserving*
- ***Freely we received God's unconditional love when we were rebellious sinners at enmity with God – now freely we give love to our enemies***
- *The love and mercy we have received is the power to show love and mercy to others*
- There is no lack of sufficiency in the power of God's love to enable us to love others
- *So if we are struggling to show mercy to someone who is undeserving – to someone who has hurt us – to someone who has become our enemy – or at least feels like our enemy – then our inability to show mercy is a clear indicator that we are in need of more mercy from God*
- *Something is blocking the flow of His love and mercy into our hearts*
- Perhaps pride // perhaps a critical spirit // perhaps a judgmental attitude // perhaps a self-righteous sense of superiority // perhaps bitterness or unforgiveness
- *Something is blocking the flow of God's love and mercy into our hearts and that is hindering our ability to extend mercy to others*
- Perhaps it has been awhile since we have been to the foot of the Cross in brokenness and humility crying out to God: *Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner*
- Sin doesn't always take the form of immorality or wickedness or major failures or self-destructive addictions

- *Sometimes it is simply the failure to love your neighbor as yourself // the failure to extend Christ's love to sinners and outcasts // the failure to forgive someone who has offended you // the failure to seize the opportunity to show mercy to a broken or wounded person // the failure to greet someone who was lonely*
- **When we come to the Cross seeking mercy and grace – and humbly receive God's generous grace and abundant mercy for the undeserving – then we are empowered to extend that love to others and extend mercy and acts of kindness to those who have hurt or offended or mistreated us**

(Conclusion):

- How about you? *Who is your enemy?*
- *Who has injured you? Who has wronged you? Who has offended you? Who has persecuted you? Who has taken unfair advantage of you? Who has mistreated you? Who has betrayed you? Who has opposed your beliefs or values or goals or dreams?*
- Who is your enemy?
- What would obedience to Jesus' command to love your enemy look like for you?
- *Greeting someone who isn't speaking to you? Praying God's blessings on someone who has mistreated you? Doing an act of kindness or service to someone who deserves your wrath rather than your mercy?*

## **Prayer**

Worship Team – Altar Call -- *Grace Like Rain*