



Theme: The Sermon on the Mount
“The Challenging Ethics of Jesus”

Easter weekend sermon preached by Jeff Huber
April 17-18, 2021

Weekly Memory Verse:

43 “You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst.” –Mark 5:43 (The Message)

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “The Challenging Ethics of Jesus”

If someone were to ask you what it means to be a Christian, what would you say? Christians have different answers we give to this question. Some say we need to be baptized or a member of a church. That might be true, but there has to be more than that, doesn’t there?

Others might say that believing in God and being a good person is what it means to be a Christian. Much of the world believes in God and tries to be good, but that doesn’t necessarily make us Christian.

Some would say accepting Jesus into our hearts as Lord and Savior and having a personal relationship is what it means to be a Christian. What’s

interesting is that Jesus doesn't use this language anywhere in the Gospels, particularly in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We don't find anything close to those assertions from Jesus.

Four we find in the synoptic Gospels, which read more like stories in Matthew, Mark, Luke, is that to be a disciple is to learn from someone else and try to follow them. When Jesus calls people to be his disciples these are the words that he uses just before the sermon on the Mount in Matthew four, verse 19.

BIBLE

¹⁹ Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"

Later, in Matthew 16, we find these words.

BIBLE

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me."

In the Book of Acts, those who were part of the early church were called, "Followers of the Way." Later, in Acts 11:26b, we find they get their official name.

BIBLE

(It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.)

SLIDE Christian = "imitator of Christ," or "little Christ."

All the answers we give about what it means to be a Christian might be good answer, but they don't get at this specific understanding of being a disciple we find in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I have committed my life to Jesus, and I have a personal relationship that is deep and meaningful. I have accepted him as my Lord and Savior and I have been

baptized and I'm a member of the church. I believe in God and I try to be a good person. I pray and seek to do these religious things, even serving as a pastor.

But, if I do all those things and don't follow Jesus, trying to imitate him, then I have missed the mark. While the other things we have named are important, following is a direct command from him to each of us, especially if we want to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. If we are going to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world that we must learn to follow and as each of us joins in worship my prayer is not just to give you information but to encourage you to transformation which changes how we live and how we act in the world. Yes, we blow it and make mistakes, but it is what we aim for each morning when we get up, we should be asking, "How can I follow Jesus today? How can I do what Jesus wants me to do? How can I be the person that Jesus wants me to be?" If we can do these things, then we will find life and life that is abundant. We can then be instruments of giving that life away.

So, I am going to give you an invitation as we start worship today instead of doing it at the end of the sermon. I want to invite you unashamedly, unabashedly, to be a follower of Jesus. We all will follow someone in our life, and today I invite you to listen to what Jesus says and be willing to follow. I encourage you to pray, "I want to follow you Jesus and be the person you want me to be. I want to go where you want me to go. I have decided to follow and now lead me."

Once we have decided to follow Jesus, we enter onto the path of a good and beautiful life. That path is sometimes very hard because discipleship, following Jesus, is not always easy. We continue in our series looking at the Sermon on the Mount and we recognize this is the single most important sermon which was ever delivered. There is no other sermon in the world which has been listened to more than this one. There is no other sermon people have tried to live into that is greater or more popular than

this one. Even people in different religions know parts of the sermon because of its content and because of who spoke.

We find in the sermon Jesus teaching about ethics and spirituality and if we are going to follow him, we must pay attention. Today we turn to the second part of chapter 5 will refocus on the most challenging teachings of Jesus. Let's recognize right off the bat this truth.

SLIDE This is a hard set of teachings.

As we read these teaching on ethics it seems like they are impossible. It feels that way to me and it will feel that way to you. Jesus ends this section with this punchline in verse 48 which should make all of us nervous. Let's read them out loud together.

BIBLE

⁴⁸ **But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.**

Are you kidding me Jesus? Nobody is perfect but Jesus how in the world are we supposed to live up to this. I'm sorry, but when I think of the Sermon on the Mount, I can't fathom any single person in this room who could actually follow this perfectly, which is why some get discouraged by this sermon. They say this ethic is just too hard for us to live by. Martin Luther, the great reformer, said that was the point of the Sermon on the Mount. He said this sermon was meant to drive us to grace, to a place where we fall to our knees and say, **"I must have a Savior, because I can't do this alone. I need what Jesus Christ offers. Save me, heal me, please!"**

The apostle Paul captures this in Romans 3:23.

BIBLE

²³ **For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.**

We feel this as we read this section of the Sermon on the Mount and we recognize how separated we are from God and from each other and from

ourselves and trying to live into these ethics of following Jesus. Paul goes on to say in the next verse.

BIBLE

²⁴ Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.

Jesus came to redeem us, and we see his mercy and gracefully look to the cross. While it would be easy to dismiss this sermon as pointing us to our need for grace, I think Jesus really wants us to live into this and live up to this ethic. I think Jesus meant for us to take this seriously. I think he was casting a vision for us of what the Christian life is supposed to look like. Jesus called it the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Reign of God, that begins here on earth. I think Jesus is giving us high expectations because he believes in us and knows what we are capable of as his followers.

A great vision is always out there and gives us something to strive for and I think that is how the sermon on the mount is meant to be read. This is Jesus' moral and salvific vision. This is his picture of what life as a follow of Christ looks like. Will we ever get there? Not this side of eternity, but we can lean into it our whole lives. Aren't we glad Jesus cast a moral vision that is beyond our capabilities, and that we are always moving towards it? Isn't that better than a vision which ends after we've been a Christian for a few years? We could say, "Okay, I'm finished now!" What fun would that be?!

SLIDE perfect = τέλειος (teleios)

The word telescope comes from the same root, which is something we used to see something of close which is far away. Telos is to set out for a definite point or goal. It is the point aimed for, the end goal, ultimate purpose, the conclusion of an act.

To be teleios is to be mature (full grown of full age), finished (lacking nothing necessary to completeness), perfect. It's like saying, "I want to get

there and go there.” When Jesus is telling us to perfect as our heavenly father is perfect, he is giving up a goal of the Christian life. It’s an ideal we are meant to be living up to and Jesus paints a picture so we can lean into it, praying we might become that. This is not about not making mistakes, but about giving it our all to move towards that goal.

The Scriptures teach us that we are made in the image of God and we are meant to reflect that image the world. We are meant to live like we are God’s children which means there are things God wants us to do. If all 7 billion on this planet would be living into God’s will, we would find the pain, hurt, and brokenness see in the world today. We wouldn’t find abuse, poverty, starvation, political wrangling and things that bring hurt to groups of people if we were actually living into what Jesus calls us to in the Sermon on the Mount. We have a ways to go but today we want to focus on what that picture might look like that Jesus paints for us.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, preached what he called, “Christian perfection.” He would say that we are all on our way to perfection, and people would give them a hard time about that. Wesley made it clear that it was not about whether we make mistakes, but that we are seeking to live into the goal God has for us. We all make mistakes and fall short, and the Holy Spirit working through us can help us see the path and live into what Jesus has in store for us as we follow. We pray and walk in the direction and invite God to change our hearts, so we experience transformation and become more like Christ.

SLIDE Jesus speaks in “prophetic hyperbole.”

As we read the sermon on the mount together, it’s important to know a few things about how Jesus speaks. First, Jesus often uses something we call prophetic hyperbole. It’s prophetic because Jesus lays out a bold vision for idea that is big and black-and-white. He will not give us the exceptions to the rule as part of the teaching because he wants us to get the point. There are

exceptions to every one of the rules Jesus gives to us, but he wants us to know what the rule is most of the time, so we get it right most of the time. Even Jesus himself lives exceptions to these rules.

Hyperbole is speaking in exaggeration to make a point. If I say to you, “I am so hungry I could eat a horse,” do any of you think I am going to literally eat a horse? I’m not that hungry and I couldn’t even if I wanted to, but it gives us a visual image that speaks to our hearts to convey an important point. Jesus will do this multiple times in the Sermon on the Mount, and we will see that in several of the texts before us today.

We learned last week that Matthew is connecting Jesus to Moses and one of the ways he does that is by having us remember the 10 Commandments and how Jesus then takes several of them in this sermon and flushes them out, making them even harder. Jesus expounds and gives his interpretation of these Hebrew Scriptures, beginning with the 6th commandment as Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. We read this in Matthew 5 to set the stage...

BIBLE

¹⁷ “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.

BIBLE

²¹ “You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ ²² But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

The judgment for murder was the death penalty. Do you ever get

angry? Can you see why this might seem impossible to live up to? Did you get angry this last week? Did you get angry this morning or before you came to church? Have you ever said that someone is an idiot or posted something on Facebook or send an email calling people an idiot or full for in the opposite political party from yourself? I had a mentor who I respected a great deal as a pastor, but he would often tell me that sometimes people just need to be told they are idiots because they are aware of it! I asked him about what we do with this thing from Jesus and let's just say we had a lively discussion and I wondered if after I left, he was calling me the idiot.

The truth is that each one of us have done anything, so we have all phone short of this ideal of what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus takes a commandment that might seem irrelevant to most people because we are not in danger of murder and makes it applicable to everyone. We might think about murder in passing, but most of us are not close to doing that and taking some of life. We tend to then look at Commandments like this and think we don't have to worry about them.

Jesus says, "Now. There is a spirit of this commandment that we all can violate we are not careful." Jesus is pointing to our hearts and what is going on inside which can cause damage and hurt to others, to ourselves, and to God, since each of us are created in God's image. Remember that when Cain killed his brother Abel, it began with anger, bitterness, and resentment in his heart. Jesus is inviting us to release our capacity to be angry and speak horribly about other people, whether to their faces or behind their back or online.

When we look at the world around us, it is easy to see how we live in angry times. We have witnessed shooting at grocery stores and schools in the last few weeks, as well as other people around racial tensions in places like Minneapolis. Sometimes, anger is justified and we read that God gets angry at times, so it's not just about being angry. It is about letting our anger get the best of us which leads us to destruction of other people and

separation between ourselves and God.

Right now, we live in angry world and we see it manifest itself often, especially after this year of pandemic. I read a recent study by AAA which found that 80% of drivers were angry at some point in the last week because of something which happened on the road in front of them are around them. Have you ever been angry while driving? I have. Last year when they were working on the bridges on Highway 160 – 550 over by Walmart the bridge was reduced to one lane each way and there was a sign which told us to merge into that one lane at the sign. Many people choose to merge earlier, but I follow the directions and went to where the sign was and then try to merge and no one would let me in because they were mad, I had passed them. I finally cut someone off and they honked at me and gave me the international sign of love and goodwill through their windshield which I could see in my rearview mirror!

As we got past the one lane and back to two lanes, I pulled into the right lane and they set up next to me and began waving their fist at me and even rolled down the window and I think they were saying something, but I kept my windows rolled up and listened to Christian music! They suddenly stopped and looked at me with a bit of horror and rolled up their window and drove fast in front of me. I thought it might be because they recognize me as a pastor and maybe they had been to church, but then I realized there was a sheriff behind us who seemed a bit concerned at their antics. I look back at that and I feel a bit embarrassed because I should've been more considerate, but I found myself getting angry because I felt like I follow the rules and they just didn't like that I was cleverer than they were about how to use those rules! I'm not sure who would have been more embarrassed from the exchange if she was another follower of Jesus, but neither of us probably handled ourselves very well.

We can all be childish, act immature, and let anger get the best of us. It's part of what it means to be human and I think it's why Jesus uses

prophetic hyperbole to drive home this point about the sixth commandment, and that it's not just about murder. Jesus is reminding us that nothing good comes from this kind of anger. I often remind you as your pastor that being angry or resentful or bitter is like taking a poison pill and hoping someone else dies. Practically speaking, it just doesn't work. The great preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick from the last century at Riverside Church in New York City said this about hate and anger.

GRAPHIC Hating People is Like Burning Down Your Own House to Get Rid of a Rat

Remember, that Jesus is telling us that generally this is the rule. Is there ever a time to get angry? Is our anger ever justified? Of course, it is. When there is injustice and people are being hurt, then we are wired to be angry and respond keep people safe. We find that God gets angry on many occasions in the Scriptures. We often read that God anger is kindled like a fire because of injustice and so there is a place for righteous anger. The problem is that most of the anger that we feel is not righteous but is usually unrighteous. We most likely get angry because our egos are bruised or someone didn't do what we wanted them to do. We get insulted or offended easily. We don't like people's politics which are different from ours and we become angry. That is not righteous anger.

When we are angry, God wants us to look inside and be able to offer to others what we would want offered to us. When we look at these teachings that we have a hard time looking up to, we turn to God and say that we are sorry and ask God for forgiveness and grace and mercy. That same grace we received from God is meant to be offered by us to others. That is the response we are meant to have, and it is possible to grow into this kind of a person, even if it seems impossible right now. This teaching from Jesus is meant to push us to a question.

SLIDE What is your goal for anger?

What I know is that if we don't make it our goal, it will never happen. Fosdick also wrote a great book on The Meaning of Prayer. He said this in that book and preached these words often. **“Prayer opens our lives for God so his will can be done in and through us, because in true prayer we habitually put ourselves into the attitude of willingness to do whatever God wills.”**

GRAPHIC Harry-Emerson-Fosdick on Prayer

The idea is that prayer is not about changing God's mind but changing our hearts. God knows how we fly off the handle and get impatient and irritated when people say things we don't like. God knows how challenging it is for us to deal with people whose politics are different than ours. So, our prayer is simply, “God, help me to be patient toward them as your gracious towards me.” In the next chapter, Jesus will teach us about prayer and gives us these words that we pray every week as part of worship, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Several years ago, a team did some research with 1000 children between the ages of eight and 18, asking the young people to give them grades on their parents' behavior. They asked the students the one thing they would change about their parents. Does anyone know what the number one answer was?

SLIDE They wished their parents were less tired and stressed out.

Then, the students were asked to give their parents grades in different areas of parenting. Moms got an overall GPA of 3.14. Dad had an overall GPA of 2.98. That means we were not quite at a B level as dads. One of the questions was, “How would you grade your parents' ability to control their temper when you do something that makes them angry?” 40% of kids gave their parents a D or F on this particular question.

I find that in my own life, to get angry with strangers or church members or people in general I don't know very well very often. I'm pretty

good on the roads most of the time, especially since I passed the age of 45. But, I find it is the people I love the most, my wife my daughter, that can be the easiest to unleash my anger upon. I see something I shouldn't say and then one of them says something they shouldn't say and a spiral or tornado begins. This can also happen at work with our staff at times because we are like a family and spend much time together. If I'm stressed or tired, it's especially difficult to deal with angry feelings.

I find it ironic that I can get angry toward the one person I have spent the most of my life with, my wife. We will have been married 30 years in August and been together for 33 years total. That is more than half of my life and I love her the most and yet I find it is the easiest to be angry with her. I wonder if that is true for you? If my kids got me at just the wrong moment, I would react in anger, and then later have to apologize for my behavior. I try to never say anything that would be hurtful, but it just blurts out sometimes. Does that ever happen any of you? Am I the only idiot or fool in the room? I think that when Jesus uses these words talk about calling people an idiot or a fool, we are also meant to remind ourselves how easily that can be us.

Jesus is calling us to live differently and live into a bigger vision for what we do with our anger. Today, I invite each of us to do an honest assessment and see if there is some work to be done in this area of our lives. I know that I need to do some work, and I'm guessing that it applies to most of us, which is why Jesus included it in his most important sermon. Jesus then goes from the 6th commandment to the 7th commandment because there is something here for us to learn as well.

BIBLE

²⁷ “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and

throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Yikes, that is tough! Jesus takes the seventh commandment which was hard in the ancient world in particular because it was not a value for most cultures. Human beings have always wrestled with infidelity. We have these two drives inside of us which can lead to destruction. We have the sex drive, which is built in for procreation and pleasure. It's tied into our emotions and our gut and our reflexes at times.

This drive comes together with our drive to be selfish and do the things that we want, even when we know they can be destructive to ourselves and others. If we are told to drive 55 miles an hour, let's be honest, and most of us know the true speed limit is about 62! There is this thing inside of us that loves to violate the rules or see what we can get away with. Can I get through that yellow light without being caught? Did they put one of those traffic cameras up in this intersection? Will anyone see me if I go to that website on the Internet? This has been a struggle for us throughout human history.

I saw an interesting piece of research lately which seems to point to the fact that fewer people commit infidelity against their spouse than most of us think. Somewhere between 10% and 20% report they have had an affair outside the bounds of their committed relationship and that number gets smaller with each age group, which is a good sign. In younger adults, that number has been declining for the past few years. That's good news, but Jesus takes this one step farther.

I use a Pre-Marriage Awareness Inventory with every couple that I marry as their pastor. It's a great tool that gives us insight into everything from communication to sex to money. There is this one question that always

cracks me up.

SLIDE **Sexual fidelity (faithfulness) in marriage is:** (fly in responses)

- a) Absolutely important**
- b) Very important**
- c) Important**
- d) Optional**
- e) Irrelevant**

In all the years I've been using this tool, no one has ever put anything but "absolutely important," so, I guess that's good! But I always take this question one step further and I asked them to define, "sexual fidelity and faithfulness." I asked them, "What's crossing the line? Is it flirting, a kiss, or intercourse?" Every single one of them says something to the effect that an emotional affair would be more painful than a simply physical one. I also discover this is true as I meet with couples who are going through the pain of an affair. The emotional part is just as painful as the physical.

This is exactly what Jesus is pointing towards. It's not about simply looking at someone in thinking they are attractive when they are not our mate. It's not even about that momentary desire for flash that can happen and come upon us because some of that is natural. It's really about meditating upon it and mulling it over in our minds until it invades our hearts. I can't speak for women, but I don't know of many men who haven't struggled with thoughts about other relationships at times.

Jesus is pointing to this human truth, that whatever direction our hearts and minds get pointed, our body often follows. God cares about our thoughts and what is happening inside of our hearts, because it is there, we will find our treasure, as Jesus will say later in the sermon. God wants our thoughts and hearts to be about love, compassion, mercy, and faithfulness. Is having a lustful thought the same as sleeping with someone? No, it's not. I will tell you as a pastor and someone who has worked with couples, there is

a big difference between someone who literally had an affair and someone who just thought about it.

Jesus is making this relevant for all of us by making this big sweeping statement, reminding us how easy it is for us to go down the slippery slope. He drives this point home by telling us to pluck out our eyes or cut off our hands. Is that literally what Jesus wants us to do? Of course, he doesn't want us to do that, but he is using this hyperbole to make a point that he's afraid we will miss if he doesn't make a dramatic. We are not meant to take Jesus literally, but we are meant to take Jesus seriously and not just blow right past this section of the sermon because it seems ridiculous. Jesus is serious that this can harm us and others.

GRAPHIC Ashley Madison - Life is Short Have an Affair

While people have always wrestled with fidelity, most recently we have had things like Ashley Madison, the website which promises a great time if you have an affair. Here's their trademark and marketing slogan.

Let me just be honest with you and say that life is not short. I am 57 and I've been married 30 years, which is a long time. That's three decades and I never thought I would make it this far. Now, I hope to make it another 30 years or more which is a long stretch of time and I would like to grow old with Tami. Some days it catches me by surprise, but our marriage is richer and deeper, and the love we share is stronger than it is ever been in our lives. We have more joy and happiness now than when we first got married. There were moments in our lives, and stretches in the journey, where it would've been easy to give up. Even when I was studying to be a pastor and seminary or serving in different churches, it would've been easy to violate my wedding vows. It's true for pastors and it's true for everyone.

What I know is that if we take that step, and then another, and another, it's not long before people's lives are shattered. Have met with at least a dozen people who have come to my office and told me about their

experience of living through an affair. People in fetal positions in pain and the brokenness because of shattered trust. God wants us to avoid all of those experiences, but here we have Ashley Madison telling us that life is short and we should have an affair. What I can tell you is that life feels a lot shorter if we have that affair and make that step. The older we get the more we wish we had someone share our lives with, the more painful it becomes that we have left our lives in tatters. When we think that Ashley Madison has some sort of truth that Jesus didn't have, we are fooling ourselves.

We miss out on the good and beautiful life, and it feels like our eyes have been gouged out and parts of our body have been cut off, and we gave it up for something that would not satisfy long term. Today, we live in a time where it is not just a moment of the maybe with someone else, but the multitude of graphic images we have access to at our fingertips, 24 hours a day, many of them free of charge. When we begin to feed that to our brain when we are 12 years old, it rewires our brains.

At Manchester Metropolitan University in England, neuroscientist Dr. Nicola Ray found that, **“Porn works on the brain like any addictive substance. The thing you're addicted to takes hold of your neural circuitry and hijacks the pathways related to more natural rewards so that they become unresponsive. So, porn becomes the only thing the brain understands in relation to sexual stimulation; basically, real sex becomes increasingly less exciting.”**

It is like any other drug that can bring pain to our bodies and keep them from functioning the way God designed them. Sexuality is meant to be a beautiful thing given to us by God and it becomes distorted and broken when we head down this path. I want to be clear that there is no judgment, but this simply describes what can happen when we don't take seriously what God hopes for in our physical lives. Both men and women wrestle with this area of our lives and when we use the word sin is simply meant to describe brokenness that happens between us and others, God, and ourselves. Be

careful about what we are putting into our brains from our fantasy lives because it can hurt us traumatically in the end.

GRAPHIC **Wrong Way – Do Not Enter**

GRAPHIC **Do Not Enter - Wrong Way (red one second please)**

GRAPHIC **Round About Give Way Sign**

I grew up near Oakland and had a motorcycle when I was in high school. I made the mistake of driving it into the city where I encountered one-way streets. They have many special rules for motorcycles in California and I figured I could go the wrong way on a one-way street because I was on a small bike. Not a good plan. It seemed to make sense of the time but could have been deadly. It seemed to be harmless, and been a shortcut, but could have led to my demise. We have those roundabouts now here in town, and I also found this sign about those dangers on a bike or motorcycle. Jesus gives us these ethics and teachings as a warning sign for going the wrong way, and what can happen if we were not paying attention.

GRAPHIC **Danger - Do Not Enter - One Way Aisle**

These signs have been more common this past year, but the idea is the same. Let's look at one last impossible ethic Jesus lays out for us at the very end of this chapter.

BIBLE

⁴³ “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do

that.

This seems like an impossible ethic in today's divided world, doesn't it? I would argue it is impossible without God's help. Jesus lays out this way of living our lives and it particularly applies in today's world. There is anger and anguish and division right under the surface, and out on full display, every day in our culture. This teaching and ethic of Jesus is meant to be an antidote to the world in which we are living today. Loving our enemy is not about a warm and fuzzy feeling, but a dogged determination to seek the best for the other person. It doesn't matter whether we agree on politics, we are meant to choose to love the other person and do the loving thing. It doesn't matter if we don't see things the same way on any particular issue, even one very important to us, we still are called to choose to love because this kind of love has the power to change everything.

Choosing to do the loving thing has the power to make our enemy into our friend like nothing else. Would to God, that all of us in this country, following the divided election and now the rhetoric that follows, that the 80% of us in America who say we believe in Jesus would take this teaching and ethic seriously and have it be something we strive towards. Jesus called us to follow him and if we are going to do that then that means we must love people that we don't agree with or don't even like at times. We have to work on loving others and praying for them, seeking their best, especially when we disagree. I have found that people who have vehemently different views of politics and everything else, when they reach out to one another in love and care and show kindness, enemies become friends.

I invite you today to take Jesus very seriously. Think about the people in your life, on your Facebook or Instagram feed, with whom you are really struggling. They have different views from you and there are all kinds of arguments you have been having. Maybe we have family members or neighbors we can't talk to anymore, or even people in our church! I want to remind us that Jesus and this teaching and ethic of Jesus comes first because

our relationship with him is eternal. The politicians we let work us up over issues will be gone in time, but the Kingdom of heaven is forever. Let's not worship our view of politics or some hot button issue, but instead a Lord and Savior who invited us to follow and embody his teaching and ethics.

The apostle Paul puts it this way in Romans 12:

BIBLE

¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

"I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.

²⁰ Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."

²¹ Don't let evil conquer you but conquer evil by doing good.

This is what it means lean into being perfect like our heavenly Father is perfect. Is a hard? Yes, and we will make it their own or own. In our entire life, we may not make it there, but it is the direction in which we are called if we are a follower of Jesus. I want to invite you, once again, to be a follower of Jesus. I invite you today to repent, which simply means to see things differently. We may not have seen it before, but now we do, and Jesus gives us a better way to be and live by following him.

GRAPHIC Meditation Moments

You will be able to read many more of these Scriptures from the Sermon on the Mount when you use our Meditation Moments off our website this week, and I hope you will read it and pray it. Let's pray...

SLIDE Prayer

God, you know our hearts, our minds, and the many ways we fail and fall short of your glory and will. You created us in your image and yet we have damaged that image. We have given in to brokenness and pain and hurt so many times. You know how angry we get with each other over silly and serious things. God, you know the anger and animosity across our country right now. We have strayed from the path and we need to repent. Heal us. Heal me.

I invite you to whisper quietly under your breath, *“Lord, please forgive me ...”* And name what you need to name. Ask God to wash you clean and make you into a new creation...

Now, take a moment to commit your life to God and following Jesus, asking him to help you be better tomorrow than you were yesterday ...

Lord God, we thank you for your mercy and grace. Thank you for forgiving us. Thank you that you came and suffered and died so we might experience that forgiveness, grace, and mercy as a gift to the entire world. You know how we have failed and blown it, but please, pick us up again. Wash us and make us new. Give us the power and strength by your Holy Spirit to follow you. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

April 17-18 Order

1. Ely Welcomes people
2. First Song and Prayer
3. Welcome by Jeff and invite people to wave and be seated.
4. VIDEO Native Hope
5. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - Native Hope Food Drive
 - Register using QR code.
6. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
7. Video bumper plays.
8. Sermon