

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

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1ST SEPTEMBER 2020

One of the most challenging, and arguably one of the most famous instructions that Jesus gave can be found in Matthew 5. It says "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children 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."

This is very tricky. It is not easy for us to do. Naturally we want to hate those that hate us. We want to be angry and take revenge but the bible teaches us to do the exact opposite.

When I was a teenager I tried to take this passage literally. There were some girls at school that I didn't get on with very well. They pretty much ignored me but they annoyed me by being loud and disruptive. In my naivety I assumed that because I didn't like them, they didn't like me. One day I decided that I would buy them some sweets and bring them into school for them. I gave the girls the sweets and was met with confusion. They couldn't understand why I had done this and I couldn't explain that I bought them because I didn't like them. The intention was there but I don't think that this is exactly what Jesus meant.

There are people in all of our lives that annoy us. There are people we find hard to deal with, whether that be at school, at work or even at church. They might have hurt us, or worse, they might have hurt those we love. Jesus says we should treat these people with love and respect, not speaking badly about them or planning their downfall, regardless of how they treat us. This is incredibly hard and something I fail at all the time but it is what Jesus has instructed us to do.

My sister also had people at school that annoyed her, but instead of being distant acquaintances they were people that were trying to be her friends. She dealt with it in a much better way. She accepted these people as friends, even when she found it hard, and learnt to be good friends with these people. She became very important to them as she became friends with them when few others would and they became important to her. Although it began with them being an annoyance, she loved them the way Jesus would and saw their value as people and they became her friends.

Loving people the way Jesus did, without prejudice, without reacting to how they acted towards Him, might change how people are towards us. It might soften their hearts and we might find out that they act a certain way towards us because of pain in their past. We might find out that they are really insecure. Or we might not. They might always be mean or annoying to us. But that doesn't mean that we should treat them any differently. You don't have to necessarily do what I did. A random act of kindness to people that didn't know I didn't like them without any follow up didn't help them and made me feel uncomfortable. But if someone comes into your life and you get the prompting of the holy spirit, love them no matter what. Love them in a way they will recognise. Love them unconditionally. Avoid avoiding them and spend time with them.

Unconditional love is the hardest of all. Love is a choice that we have to make. We have to choose to act with kindness and treat others as well as we can. We have to treat them as we would like to be treated and better. Our emotions always take time to catch up with how we act, but they will get there. We will hopefully become less bitter as we act in kindness. As we pray for our enemies, we will start to wish good to happen to them rather than bad.

It's really important that we pray for those who are our enemies. If we don't how will the relationship ever change? How will we learn to forgive?

There are great examples of this in the bible. Two that come to mind are Jeremiah and Ananias. One enemy was the Babylonians and the other was much more personal, just one man, Saul.

Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem at a time when the Babylonians had taken over. They had taken some of Israel into exile in Babylon but left some in Israel to look after the land. Jeremiah was one that was left and he wrote to those living in Babylon. He says to them in Jeremiah 29: 7 "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city

to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." This would have been very hard for the people of Israel. They hated the Babylonians, the pagans that didn't know their God who had taken them from their land and their homes and yet they were told to pray for their prosperity.

An example from the new testament was much more personal. Saul was a prominent Jew and he persecuted Christians. He was trying to kill as many Christians as he could and was doing quite well. However, when he was on the road to Damascus he was blinded and had a vision of Jesus. Then the story continues in Acts 9. "In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, and after taking some food, he regained his strength."

Ananias could have chosen fear. He could have chosen hate for all the things Saul had done but instead he chose love. Ananias chose to follow what God had told him to do and as a result Saul became Paul and a great evangelist was born. Without Ananias' bravery and grace we might not be Christians today.

So let's choose love. Let's forgive and pray for those who are against us. Be good to them when they don't deserve it and refuse to speak badly of them to others. We never know what the outcome could be for us or them.



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