

Won't You Be My Neighbor – Collide

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Shabbat Shalom and the Mr. Rogers Neighborhood

Shabbat Shalom, everybody. We're continuing in this series that seems like it will never end, and I hope it never does. I'm enjoying this series — it's the series we're doing on the Sermon on the Mount, analyzing these bold, revolutionary teachings from this rabbi from Galilee that started a revolution 2,000 years ago. It's these teachings that we're looking over, reading over, and investigating — it's these teachings that have gotten numerous people killed for actually implementing them into their life.

In 1968, there was a television show that was perceived to be a children's feel-good program that was launched, and it had puppets, and it had trains, and it had play sets, and it had a calm, gentle host by the name of Fred Rogers. You may know this show as Mr. Rogers or Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. And what was expected to be just another children's program ended up being one of the most radical things ever to hit television. It was a children's show where a man had enough courage to address hard topics with children in an attempt to show them that everything is going to be okay despite what they see in this world. Mr. Rogers stopped at nothing. Nothing. He had one episode where he'd speak about getting over your fear of getting a haircut. Scary, right? And then he'd have another episode where he spoke about racism. Not to adults — to children.

In 1968, just four years since the unsettling to many, very controversial Civil Rights Act, and in the same year that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Fred Rogers decided to cast Francois Clemmons, an African American, a black man, in the role of a police officer in his show. It was going to be a recurring position and role in his television series. In neighborhoods all over the U.S. during this time, in African-American communities, police officers had the reputation of being two things mainly: brutal and white. And of course, in the white

communities all over the U.S., police officers had a larger reputation of being brave and strong and obeying the law — not to say it out loud, but for the whites. Not in Mr. Rogers' neighborhood. In Mr. Rogers' neighborhood, the police officer was going to be friendly, he was going to be cheerful, he was going to be nice, he was going to be gentle — and he was going to be black.

The Pool Scene

A year later, in one of the most famous episodes, Mr. Rogers invites Officer Clemmons. It's a hot day, right? They're on the set — you feel me, what a hot day. "Would you like to take off your shoes and dip your feet in the pool with me?" You guys seen this episode? You know what I'm talking about? It's very controversial — it's so hot outside, don't you want to dip your feet in the pool with my feet? It was a pretty provocative thing to do. It impacted white and black communities. It even upset and impacted religious communities. But the most radical scene during this moment that Mr. Rogers produced was the up-close shot of both of their sets of feet next to each other in the pool. They actually positioned the camera over the kiddie pool, zoomed in — so you have a set of black feet and a set of white feet. And Mr. Rogers is grabbing the hose, actually hosing off his feet. And at the end, he actually took a towel and began to pat Officer Clemmons' feet dry. Why? Because in Mr. Rogers' neighborhood, white, black, Asian, Hispanic — everybody deserves to stick their feet in the pool on a hot day. Don't you think?

Four years earlier, at the Monson Motor Lodge in St. Augustine, Florida, there was a protest protesting Martin Luther King Jr.'s arrest there. This protest was made up of white and black protesters, and they were protesting the lodge's policy on pool segregation — if you're black, you don't swim here. You're not allowed to swim here. You can rent a room, but you don't swim here. So all of these protesters decided to jump in the pool together, and the manager got muriatic acid and began to pour it in the pool with them right there. No one was injured — he was angry, but no one was harmed by it because of the water content and all that. But this is the culture that Fred Rogers thought it was a good idea — that it would be a great idea — if Officer Clemmons took off his shoes and put his black feet in the water, and he took off his shoes and put his pale white feet in the water, and they just got close. And hey, let's put a camera angle right up close to them. That's courage.

Divorce, Disability, and Nuclear War — For Children

Fred Rogers also did an episode speaking to the kids about divorce. Divorce. Explaining how sometimes people don't love each other anymore, but it's not your fault. A public television

series explaining to children that their parents' broken relationship is not their fault. Would that — I'm trying to put myself in his shoes — how do you even address that?

Fred, in one episode, invited a ten-year-old, Jeff Erlanger, and Erlanger was a quadriplegic. He showed up in a wheelchair and he showed off his electric wheelchair to Mr. Rogers because Mr. Rogers was so interested in it and how it worked, and Erlanger was explaining how at a young age he had a spinal tumor that left him completely paralyzed. And the segment intentionally aimed to humanize individuals with disabilities. Okay, well, why is that such a big deal? See, those of us without disabilities, sometimes we see people who struggle and we get uncomfortable. You don't have to nod your head, I already know. You see someone who has some form of disability, maybe they're missing an appendage, and you don't know how to act around them. You're not sure if you should stare at them — no, you shouldn't stare at them. Should I even talk to them? Well, no, because then you might draw too much attention, so you just ignore them right there in the supermarket or at the park. You don't like to see people struggle. Maybe they want my help — should I try to help them? Maybe they want to be independent. And all the while, we're treating them like they're not really a human being, like we can't just say, "Hello, sir, how are you today?"

It's fascinating — I do IT contract work for an organization that primarily focuses on a special needs community, and it's amazing how I've made friends and learned names, and I walk in to do some computer work in the residence and everyone's like, "Hey, how are you?" And I say, "Hey, how are you? What's new in your life?" Now, some of them can't vocalize words, or aren't able to. Doesn't stop them from trying. Do I just ignore them because I don't understand what they're saying? No — you tell them how great it is to see them today. They look really excited — are they having a good day? Human beings. In Mr. Rogers' neighborhood, you treat everyone as a real, fully human being, despite how uncomfortable you are with a situation because you don't know what to do or you're unfamiliar with it. Mr. Rogers connected people to a world where love and mercy and kindness and ultimately loving relationships were the priority, no matter what.

This man even did an episode discussing nuclear war and nuclear arms at the peak of the Cold War. Not to adults — to children. He had a king in the Land of Make-Believe, King Friday, and he was anxious because there was another kingdom that he thought was building bombs against them. So he became anxious. "Now we need to build bombs — if they're building bombs, we need to build bombs." And by the end of the episode, the other kingdom was really just building a bridge or something like that, and it was a strike. Mr. Rogers had the boldness to

do that when the whole world was ready and prepared to go into nuclear war, and Mr. Rogers is like, yeah, that's stupid. It's stupid if everybody dies.

What Mr. Rogers Understood

Fred Rogers understood what it meant to be a Christian and to share the teachings of Yeshua despite the entire world rejecting him. Mr. Rogers created a neighborhood where these values were represented and implemented, and they showed us what our neighborhood could look like if we implemented them. Mr. Rogers understood his role: to show the world what God's kingdom looks like, how God's kingdom loves, how the shalom of God feels when it engulfs an entire community. This is Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, or his attempt at it. Fred Rogers actually had pursuits to become a Presbyterian minister — I think he fulfilled that role well in his television series.

The Ninth of Av

In the Hebrew calendar, tonight marks a significant, infamous day known as the ninth of Av. Anybody ever heard of the ninth of Av? Kind of a big day.

On the ninth of Av, on August 2nd, 1941, Commander Heinrich Himmler received formal approval to implement the final solution in Germany. That was the moment the Holocaust began — the ninth of Av. In 1492, July 31st, all of the Jews were expelled forcefully from Spain on the ninth of Av. In 1306, all of the Jews were expelled from France on the ninth of Av. In 1290, all the Jews were expelled from England on the ninth of Av. It's not a great date. The second temple was destroyed in 70 AD on the ninth of Av. It's also speculated that the first temple was destroyed on the ninth of Av. And traditionally, the spies returned from Canaan and gave a bad report to Moses on the ninth of Av. This is traditional. It's a big day, and it starts tonight.

It's fascinating, because after the destruction of the second temple in the first century, the authors of the Mishnah wrote about why it was destroyed. These are the sages and rabbis that survived the exile from Israel in the second and third centuries. And in Tractate Yoma 9b, it states this.

Wanton Hatred

And they're having a discussion about why the first temple was destroyed because of these reasons. Well, why was the second temple destroyed? Because of these reasons. And this is

what they say: they say, why was the second temple destroyed? Why? It was destroyed due to the fact that there was wanton hatred during that period. It was destroyed because, as a people, we chose to hate instead of love. And as a people, it was destroyed because we selected who our neighbor was and who wasn't our neighbor. This is Jewish tradition.

Love Your Enemies

And all of that brings us to the next section and the next teaching of Yeshua on his sermon on this hill in Galilee. If you turn with me to Matthew chapter 5 verse 43, we'll just jump in. Matthew chapter 5 verse 43, and I have it. This is the last section of chapter 5. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.'" Yeah, there it is. That section of scripture that we always read over and we're like, man, that sounds like a great idea. The other week we spoke about turning the other cheek and this is kind of a continuation of the message.

Gospel Accounts and Authors

Luke, in Luke's gospel account, he actually combines those two messages together. He says that Yeshua actually blends them together because they flow into one another. What's great is I love that all of the Gospels are written by different people. Thank God for that, and they're written from different angles in different contexts, and these are orally transmitted accounts and stories that were presented to specific groups of people by specific people until one day someone was like, "You know what, we should really write these down." And I love that, just like the books in the Tanakh, each narrator had a specific agenda in how he wanted to present this person of Yeshua and the core principles that they wanted you to learn. That's why you see in some of the Gospels, some of the details are slightly shifted here and there. It's not supposed to be a video recording. It's supposed to be a message of who this person was from the author's standpoint.

John, for example, is all about presenting Yeshua as the Passover lamb. That's why this is clearly seen in the chronology of the Passion Week according to his gospel. That was his purpose: he is the lamb. Mark presents Yeshua as this king, a very Jewish king. Matthew wanted you to see Yeshua as the greater Moses and the ultimate teacher of God's Torah. Luke wanted to impact the Greek communities just based on the literary style and when he quotes the Septuagint in his works. I'm thankful to God that he revealed this passion via the Holy Spirit for multiple authors to give an account of the greatness of our King. I'm very thankful.

So some people say, "Well, was turning the other cheek a different teaching than loving your enemy?" That's the wrong question if you're trying to compare different Gospels and how they wrote what he said. Did he say it this way or did he say it that way? What is Yeshua trying to teach me? That's the correct question when you read the Gospel accounts. That's what you should be asking yourself. And we have multiple biblical authors that are there to help answer that for us. Some of you have no idea what the purpose of what I just said was, but some of you do.

Kingdom Colliding with Earth

We find Yeshua, this radical rabbi from Galilee, once again quoting the Torah, right? You've heard it said what? "Love your neighbor," okay? And he's preaching this new way to keep the Torah of God that he claimed he was doing on behalf of God's authority. Pretty bold. And Yeshua came preaching a kingdom that was not of this world. It was a kingdom that was colliding with the earth around him. And it's the kingdom of God's reign and justice and God's peace. And it's the kingdom of heaven, as Matthew calls it.

And Yeshua invites his followers—when he's speaking to them, he's inviting you to live that kingdom out in the world that you reside in. And if you live out this kingdom in this world, if you truly pledge your allegiance to this king, if you truly take up your vocation to be an ambassador of this kingdom, you will collide with the world around you. You will be the ambassador of heaven colliding with earth.

What Would You Do?

And here's the scene. Here's the scene of Yeshua's teaching. Let's say that you're a fisherman. Story time, right? Let's say that you're a fisherman or maybe you're a shepherd in Galilee in the first century and you've been listening to this rabbi from Nazareth. And he has some pretty profound things to say, so you're listening to him on this hill, and then you go to synagogue on Shabbat, and you're hearing him teach there. And you're learning how to follow this no-name guy from Nazareth and his revolutionary message of how Torah should be kept from the heart. And let's say that you're minding your own business on Shabbat, right? Shabbat is a day that you come together as a people and you reflect on God's good creation. This is what the day is about, and acknowledging God as king.

And let's say you're sitting beside the Sea of Galilee or wherever with your family having a nice picnic. And a Roman soldier comes up and he throws his bag down beside you. And he says,

"You carry this over that mountain for me. I'm tired of carrying it." Which they had the authority to do. They could tell you to carry anything they wanted to. Simon carrying the cross—same thing. What do you do in that moment? What do you do? Stand up to him. "I am a child of God and it is the Sabbath and I won't break the Sabbath on account of you, you big brute." Maybe. Is that what you do?

Or maybe you're migrating your flocks from different sections of the territory and you come to the toll road where you have to pay the taxes to bring your sheep from one pasture to the next. And that's where you meet Matthew or whoever. So you have to pay your taxes. Or let's say you've been fishing and you catch a bunch of fish, but you have to pay the taxes on the fish. And let's say you're working this out and maybe you don't have enough tax money or whatever, and Matthew reaches across the table—pre-Jesus Matthew—and just backhand slaps you across the cheek. Like, "You peasant, you are so worthless." And he slaps you and he humiliates you in front of everyone to show just how little you are. As a Yeshua follower, what do you do?

Compassion, Not a Doormat

And last time we spoke, we spoke about rejecting retaliation and instead responding in a way that exposes an offender to God instead of shutting them down. And these verses sometimes get abused. One's about turning the other cheek. Because sometimes, I think Scott McKnight mentioned something about the doormat mentality. Like, have any of you guys ever had turning the other cheek and these teachings presented in a way that made you feel like, "Oh, I'm supposed to be a doormat?" Anyone ever heard it presented that way? Like if these things happen to you, just lay down and be completely passive and allow others to walk all over you. And that's not what Yeshua is presenting here in that message and in this one. He's presenting something much bolder than that.

Yeshua is asking you to engage these people. The Roman soldier that's interrupting your Sabbath day. Matthew, the tax collector that's humiliating you in front of everyone. He's asking you to treat these people and engage these people as your neighbor, to engage them with service and to engage them with some type of tangible love.

Engaging Your Enemy

Tax collector slaps you and you could cuss at him. I know none of you would ever do that as a response. You could slap him back, get stabbed by the Roman soldier who's standing around guarding the money. Or you could look Matthew in the eye and say, "Hey, I can't imagine the

level of stress that you're being put under. As a Judean charged with collecting taxes from your own people, I can't imagine being in that position. You seem to be very frustrated, and I'd love to help any way possible. Do you need to let any more out? I'm willing. Here, can this help you?"

Yeshua calls his followers not to run away. Yeshua doesn't call his followers to be a doormat. Yeshua calls his followers to find compassion for their offenders. Yeshua calls his followers to have compassion for their enemies. Find compassion and do something that could help benefit them and their heart and relationship with the God that you know. Obviously, they need it.

Yeshua expects his followers that are placed in this circumstance to view it as an opportunity, a stage to expose God's power and love. It's the Sabbath, and you want me to help you carry a bunch of bags? Yeah, wow, okay. You guys work so hard. I mean, I can't imagine. How long have you guys been walking around with all this stuff? I cannot imagine what the empire puts your guys through. Have you guys been fighting all over the place? I know the empire is expanding. You're always on edge. Do you ever get a break? It would be my honor to carry your bag over this mountain. Is that all you need? Do you need me to carry it further? Where are you heading? I would love to serve you. You poor, poor person, who has to carry all this stuff in this hot summer day.

Taking a Break Is Strength

Jeez, we're over here having a Sabbath picnic. Would you guys want to sit down with us real quick? I mean, at least take a break. That's what this day is all about. You guys want to take a break? That's not being a doormat. That's not being passive. That's not laying down and doing nothing. That's not being weak. Weak is when you choose to run away. Weak is when you allow yourself to be overcome with your own anger and frustration. This is strength. And Yeshua is telling you that you need to figure out a way to be strong because that's how God's kingdom. In Yeshua's neighborhood, this is how we respond to others.

This also takes power away from an offense. The moment that you have compassion for an offender is the moment that you take control of the situation and the outcome. It's hard to teach a message like this. It's hard to repeat the words of Yeshua. When you know me, you struggle with this. Maybe some of you don't. This is the hard sayings of Yeshua, of what he expects those who claim to be part of the kingdom will act in a world that doesn't know God. Choosing not to respond with revenge or anger or hate, and choosing not to stand by and do nothing, but

responding with love. And this is how relationships are evolved. This is how evil is defeated. This is how neighbors are made. This is how Yeshua says you turn an enemy into a friend.

And so verse 43, he says, So here Yeshua is once again quoting what? He's quoting the Torah. He's affirming the Torah. This is a good thing. He's not saying anything bad or negative about it. And because he said he wasn't going to. He was going to reveal how to fully keep the Torah.

Love Your Neighbor

You've heard it said, love your neighbor. This is a well-known verse. Any Bible nerds know where this verse is found? Come on, somebody. I'm looking for another chapter book with a lot more blood in it. [Leviticus 19:18](#), right? And we have this quote here. And here's the verse. This is like part of Yeshua's foundational kingdom creed. He says, Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. I'm Yahweh. Love your neighbor. Hate your enemy.

Where in the Torah... Is there a commandment to hate your enemy? To hate your neighbor? Spoiler, there's not one. There's not one in there. So notice Yeshua doesn't say you've seen it written. Love your neighbor, hate your enemy. He says you've heard it said. So what he's exposing is how this verse has been taken and interpreted and applied in the majority of the community. So we love our neighbor. And when you say love our neighbor, what is the first question that pops in your mind? God says you need to love your neighbor. What's the first question that pops in your mind? Who's my neighbor? And when you say who's your neighbor, what you're really saying is who do I have to love?

Defining Neighbor in Context

Let's take a look at this verse in context. Okay, so this is always good to go back and kind of read around the verse. And let's see who is your neighbor in this section of scripture. You guys ready? So [Leviticus 19](#), starting in verse 15, here's what the Father is saying to Israel. And he says, And you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor. I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

So, in the context of [Leviticus 19](#), who is your neighbor? Who's your neighbor? Everybody? That's not what it says. Fellow Israelites? Your own people don't come against the sons of your

own people. You shall not bear a grudge against your own people. The context of [Leviticus 19](#), fellow Israelites is the context. Some of you are like, where is he going to go with that message?

In the context of the first century, you have a Jewish teacher standing here speaking to a Jewish audience saying, who's your neighbor? And they're like, your own people, right? Like us, the Judeans. Like this was a big discussion in the first century. This is why Yeshua brings this up so many times. Because for the past 600 years, this people, their land and their privacy and their property and their government has been encroached by foreign government occupiers, pagan people who have conquered them from Assyria to Babylon to Persia to the Greeks and now the Romans. Yeah, the neighbor is us, not them. Big teaching during the first century. Non-Israelite pagan groups that are occupying. No, they're not my neighbor. And this is how this verse was interpreted during the time of Yeshua by many, many, many, many rabbis. Look, [Leviticus 19](#) clearly says it's fellow Israelites. That Roman, not my neighbor. Even if he's a nice guy and his wife makes good cookies. Not my neighbor.

Extending Neighbor Beyond Borders

But here Yeshua is going to side with a different interpretation of the Torah. And he's going to teach like he's actually read the entire Torah. And if we keep reading [Leviticus 19](#), we run across a verse that those of us who want to isolate who our neighbor is, you're going to hate it. And so it's [Leviticus 19](#), 33 through 34, and it states this. It's a continuation of the thought. When a foreigner lives among you in your land, you must not oppress him. You must regard the foreigner who lives with you as a native born among you. You are to love him as yourself. For you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.

So this commandment later in [Leviticus 19](#) is addressing non-Israelites. This verse is addressing foreigners or immigrants or strangers, those people who are not like you. They're not your culture. They don't look like you, but they're coming to live among you. And we are called to love these non-Israelites? Yeah, because these people are immigrants coming to make a good life with you. And we're called to welcome them, we're called to help them, we're called to bring them into the community and treat them and love them as a fellow Israelite. So the stance, obviously, extending neighbor to non-Israelites, right? This is what the stance of [Leviticus 19](#), the whole context is. Neighbor is not just Israelites, it extends beyond Israelites.

But this caused a further discussion in the first century. So like this brutal Roman soldier who's forcing me to do all this stuff and oppressing my family, like... He's not an immigrant looking for a better life and to live in peace and cultivate a good loving relationship with us. Like this

guy's threatening my family. I'm just trying to eat my turkey sandwich on Shabbat. So is he? This Jewish tax collector, a traitor to his own people, funding the occupation against us. He's obviously not my neighbor. This was the discussion in the first century. You see how it's got really big really quick? Who is your neighbor?

A Radical Interpretation

And here Yeshua says, This radical rabbi from Galilee expounds the interpretation of this Torah commandment in a way that no other rabbi had ever done. Your neighbor is not just your fellow Israelites. Your neighbor is not just the foreigners that come peacefully into your land wanting to hold hands and sing songs about butterflies. Yeshua is teaching and declaring that the love presented here in [Leviticus 19](#) is a love without boundaries because it's the love of God. It is a love that is so potent that it extends to your neighbor and to your enemy.

We see many times Yeshua loses a lot of followers. Teaching is just too hard. Too hard. Crazy. Crazy rabbi from Nazareth. This is what he says. And where does Yeshua get this from? Where does he even get the remotest idea of loving your enemy? Why should we love our enemy? Well, when we continue reading... When we continue reading in verse 45, he says, so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. And then he references the weather. He says, for he makes his sunshine on evil and on the good, and he sends rain to the just and the unjust.

How God Treats People

So according to Yeshua, when we engage in relationships, the highest priority of all of these teachings in Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount and how he presents God's kingdom, the number one priority he has is being fully human and engaging each other in full loving relationships. That's the stream. That's what connects all of his teachings together. Because we are the sons of God and we represent God and we imitate God on earth. So Yeshua is saying, I know you don't like the idea of loving your enemy, but how does God treat people? And then Yeshua says, look at the weather. It rains on the just and the unjust. And so Yeshua is presenting a challenge to the way that we think God should run his economy and his government.

Because, you know, when you drive around as human beings, do you ever look at a really nice house and they got a lot of nice cars and this family has a really good job and like no one has a disease or gets sick in the family. Like they can afford all of those oils, right? And they're, I mean, right? And this family, I mean, they even got the pretty babies. Like this family must be blessed by God. I mean, has anyone ever viewed materialistic wealth and blessings like,

obviously it's a blessing of God. And then we turn the corner and we see someone who doesn't really have that great of a job. And we see someone who lives in very, like, that's not a great house. And the kids are sick. And maybe there's some disabilities or diseases in the family. And, you know, in our human, fractured, frail world mindset, obviously they're not blessed because that's not what blessing looks like.

Obviously we also haven't read the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Yeshua is saying that this is a very simple-minded way of viewing the world under God's reign. And you do a disservice from viewing it that way. There's an entire book of the Bible that seeks to deconstruct this mindset. It's called the book of Job. If this was the correct mindset, and only the righteous get this blessing and only the wicked get curses, then Job's friends were totally correct. He must have done something. The author of Job knew what he was doing in challenging us, trying to put God in a box.

Yeshua looks around and sees that those people in that house over there and those people on the side, these people over here who are righteous, they go to synagogue, they do all kinds of great stuff for people who need help. The rain comes and it gets them wet. And then you have this utterly unjust, wicked, vile person over there. And look, the same raindrops hit him too. And then you have this family that has suffered through so many tragedies, but they still seek to love each other and produce this peaceful relationship, and they study God's word. And the sunshine comes out, and it warms them and gives them life. And then you have this vile, just evil, despicable person over here who hates his brother, and the sunshine keeps going and gives light and warmth to him too. This is a God, Yeshua is saying, that is generous, and he's generous to all. And he's generous even to those who hate him.

Psalm 145 and God's Generosity

[Psalm 145](#) is very much so associated with this section of the Sermon on the Mount. And I'd love for you to read it with me. [Psalm 145](#). I don't think it's going to make it up on the slide, but I'm going to read it for you if you could turn there. So I want you to bookmark this because I believe this is where Yeshua is getting his teaching from. Starting in verse 8, it says, The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love. The Lord is good to... He has compassion for all he has made. All your works praise you, Lord. Your faithful people extol you. Your eyes, the eyes of all look to you and you give them food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. This is who God is. This is who Yeshua taught that God is. He gives rain and sunshine to everybody. He may not even like them. He still gives them rain. They may hate him. His generosity is without boundaries, and that's all fun and

games, but Yeshua says that if you claim to keep God's Torah, if you claim to be a part of God's people, if you claim to be a representative of God's love, then this is how you live too. This is how you engage others. This is how you love. You love like God. You love as an image bearer of God.

Choosing Love Through Action

And what Yeshua is asking you to do here is to choose—not simply to have feel-good feelings about someone that you don't like. Not to muster up butterflies. No, he's asking you to choose to have an attitude that produces an action. An action. And right here, Yeshua associates prayer with having this action of love. Prayer. When you have someone that persecutes you, you respond with this action. First and foremost, you pray for them. You pray that they would receive the reality of God's love and peace in their life. That they would experience what you allegedly have already experienced.

Yeshua came with this attitude to show forth God's love and guess what he did for these people that you hate? Was Yeshua's love generous? Even to the people who hated him? Did his love really extend to those who persecute others and are vile and unjust and evil people? Did he really love them too? I mean, there has to be a boundary. There are no boundaries with the love of God. This is what Yeshua said. This is how Yeshua lived. Because we do not have the right to treat others like they are unloved by God. We don't have that authority, especially when Yeshua died for them specifically because they are loved.

You Don't Choose Who Deserves Love

And in this world, this world teaches us to be our own judge. You make a choice on who you want to show kindness to. You make a choice on who you want to love. You make the choice on who is your neighbor. But in the kingdom, in the kingdom of Yeshua, Yeshua is saying that you're not the judge. Therefore you don't choose who receives kindness and you don't choose who receives love and you don't choose who is your neighbor. Yeshua says here, he even explains it, and in verse 6: "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than the others? Do not even the Gentiles or pagans do the same? You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

And you're called to choose specifically, not to have warm feelings, butterflies, or cuddles with people that you don't like. You're called specifically to show them the generosity of God's love

and kindness and patience. And you do this through mercy. And you do this through compassion.

The Generosity Only God Can Demand

You can be nice to people who you know you will benefit from. We do it all the time. If you're nice to someone else, they'll be nice to you, and that makes you feel good. If you tell someone they have pretty hair, they'll tell you that you have pretty hair. You dress nice today—that's great. We love engaging with people that we like because why do we like them? We get something from the relationship. Folks you want to impress, I always love being nice to them. I want to impress them. This is great. The wicked person can do that. The corrupt person can do that. The traitor can do that. You're called to show the world something different. Something different.

And Yeshua is exposing the world standard that when we get around people that we like and around people who are like us, we naturally show kindness and love. We do. When we walk in here, even if there's a stranger in here, we know they're in this place and it's Saturday and they're probably just like us and we're here for the same purpose. And it's much easier to smile at someone and shake your hand, someone here, than it is just a random person out on the street. It's easy to do. Even the non-Israelites do that. We all always behave pretty decently when we get around our church niche or group or clique. We always open up, ask how you're doing, and we're actually concerned.

When Tribal Love Becomes Hate

See, this is not the issue. The issue here, the issue is that we love people who are exclusively in our tribe, who are like us, and we hate everyone who isn't. This is what the world does, and we hate everyone who does not believe what we believe, and we hate everyone who has different traditions, and we hate people from different cultures. And they are not our neighbor—that's pretty much the final conclusion. They're not like us. We don't like people who do things differently. This is hate. We refuse to protest to show kindness and love to someone we disagree with. And we hate to promote a peaceful relationship with someone who does things differently.

Okay, so we hate people who view scripture differently than we do. And I could go down that rabbit trail, and we all know that because it's something—oh yeah, I disagree with someone who views scripture differently. That's not real enough, guys, for what Yeshua's talking about.

So let's see if we can kind of expose and peel back the layers. How about this? We hate those trashy white people that mooch off the system. We hate those black people that live and sell food stamps. We hate those liberal-minded youth that want socialism. We hate those conservatives who parrot Alex Jones and Fox News. We hate that Democrat that wants a gender-neutral bathroom. We hate that Republican that thinks it's okay to separate children at the border. We hate that ignorant racist. We hate that immoral homosexual. We hate that Muslim who hates America. We hate. They, they are not my neighbor. We do this and we say this all the while that God is sending them the same sunshine that he gives us. And he's sending all of them the same rain that he's sending us.

Yeshua is calling a people to make a choice, not to be fickle-minded when selecting who to show God's character to. Your love—you don't have the authority to make your love self-centered, because that's not the love of Yeshua.

Children Reflecting Their Father

A kingdom people, a Yeshua-following Christian community is one that acts, Yeshua says, acts like a child reflecting who their father is. And if God is generous with kindness, his children reflecting him are generous with kindness. And if God is generous with mercy and patience, guess what? His children are generous with mercy and patience. If God gives blessing generously, his children who reflect his image give blessing generously. That, that is the message that will get you killed in this world.

No, Matt, I mean, okay, I know. I'll be nice to those people. And that's fine. I shouldn't judge them. I mean, I really don't. But they're not my neighbor. Like I don't need to treat them like they're my neighbor because I disagree with them and they live a completely different lifestyle and they have different political beliefs and they want to affect my life negatively. That must be in the expounded footnotes of what Yeshua was saying because it's not in the word of God. Yeah, but Yeshua says—Yeshua invited the traitors and the prostitutes to sit at a table with him as the guests of honor.

Yeah, but they were already converted and perfect at that point. They'd already been baptized. Guys, that's kind of a special condo. No, no. Matthew didn't repent when he started. "Get up and follow me." Yeshua opened the doors to show the people who needed God's love and mercy the most.

He was a vessel for that. That is how we take over the world. That's how God's kingdom engulfs this world. When you stop making your identity God's identity, and you stop having a names

list at the door of God's kingdom, you're a servant. Do not encroach your role.

Worship team, you guys can go ahead and get set up. We're going to conclude the message.

Why We'd Rather Skip This

I know we don't like that. We don't like this message. Because honestly, who wants a Savior that loves the enemies that we want to kill? Who wants a Savior like that? So let's just skip over this section of Scripture, and let's skip over how Yeshua opened his arms to the people that the religious had the most issues with.

Your Neighbor Is Everyone

Your neighbor is everyone who God sends sunshine to. Your neighbor is everyone who receives rain from God. So the next time you're in a situation with someone who is far outside of your clique or group, far from your lifestyle or culture, the next time you encounter someone who is against you, hates you even, you have an opportunity that God has opened the door. You have an opportunity. And you can act like the rest of the world that does not follow Yeshua, or you can respond, "Won't you be my neighbor? Won't you be my neighbor?" And you can be used as a vessel for God's kindness and love manifest in this world.

Fulfilling the Torah

So here Yeshua says, this is how you fulfill the Torah of God. And this is how you break the Torah of God. And what are you doing to make your enemies into your neighbor? What are you doing to show your enemies the love and the peace that you've experienced from God?

Yeshua concludes his teaching by saying to be perfect like your heavenly father is perfect. That word there in the Greek is talios, I think. It means to be full, to be fully, like matured kind of. The Greek is a beautiful language, but sometimes we have a hard time interpreting it. To be full in your nature that God has given you to be, to be fully human, so you can be full in your nature and complete in your nature just like God is.

Invited to the Table

Yeshua invited the tax collectors and prostitutes to sit at his table. He hosted them, the enemies of the religious, as the guest in honor of his table. And we need to come to a place where we are truly, truly, truly and honestly with ourselves. And we ask ourselves, who are our enemies?

Who Are Your Enemies?

Who are your enemies? Whose face is coming up in your heart right now? Yeshua says, you can make them your neighbor. And it may be a daunting task. It may be a task where you say, no, no, no. Yeshua says, yes, yes, yes, you can do it. And it starts by acknowledging that they have a right to be your neighbor, regardless of the distance between your culture and ideas and philosophy. And even your faith. The people who are without God need to be your neighbor.

The Choice Is Yours

So the choice is yours. And Yeshua is saying that you should be a child of God and walk out the scriptures. Reflect your dad who is in heaven now. He gives to all.

And so, I don't know where you're at this week, what struggles you're going through, but I invite you to stand as we conclude services the same way that we entered into them. We conclude with worship and praise. And if you're in need of prayer, we have a prayer team off to the side. If you're struggling with something this week, if you're experiencing the weight of broken, non-fully manifest relationships, if you need encouragement to give the grace that God can only give, I don't know, maybe today you know exactly who your enemy is and you don't know how you can ever love them or extend love to them. I invite you to come. We're called to empty ourselves so that he can fill us. And we have a wonderful prayer team here that can pray with you, that can encourage you, and that can support you in that. Amen.

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