

**Reeks:** Verwaarloosde Insig oor Verhoudings

**Titel:** *Friends & Enemies*

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Good morning, friends, it's good to be with you. If you have got a bulletin with you, you may want to take out the leaflet that has the reading, and maybe there might be something that you think God says to you today that you may want to write down and work with during the week.

Let me just say to you before I read this passage, you know, there sometimes, when a preacher, someone who is preaching, really knows, as they read Scripture, that, you know, I haven't yet even built this into my life, and I feel like that this morning. This is a passage of Scripture that challenges me very, very deeply, and I really need to say that I haven't got this one together yet in my own life; still working with this passage.

It's a very challenging passage, a very difficult passage, but I really hope that we will receive God's invitation today into a deeper and freer life as we read, so here it comes, Jesus, Matthew 5:43 to 48. You have heard that is was said, love your neighbour and hate your enemy, that's what you have heard, 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 He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that, and if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

So we thank God for these words that come to us from Christ, difficult as they are, and we pray that somehow His spirit will help us to build these words into our lives every day. That is our prayer for today.

I want to ask you a question to begin with, friends, this morning. What would... what would you consider to be the distinguishing feature, the distinguishing feature of someone who has been born again into the family of God? What marks that person out for you? What, for you, is the distinguishing feature of someone who is really following Jesus Christ? What, for you, is the distinguishing feature of someone who has been filled with God's spirit, the distinguishing feature?

Now, maybe some of you would say to me, Trevor, prayer. Prayer is the distinguishing feature of someone who really belongs in God's family, and I would want to say to you today that prayer is absolutely essential. I don't think it's the distinguishing feature. Some of you may say the distinguishing feature of belonging to God, of belonging to Christ, is really knowing God's story in the Bible, and I would want to say that is critical. I don't think it's the distinguishing feature. Some of you may say to me, Trevor, the distinguishing feature of belonging to God or following Jesus Christ is moving in the power and the gifting of his spirit, and I would say that is important. I don't think it's the distinguishing feature.

I want to suggest this morning, and we can talk about this together today, I want to suggest this morning that the distinguishing feature, the distinguishing feature of being born again into God's family is a growing capacity, a growing capacity to love those around us, especially our enemies; a growing capacity to love those around us, especially our enemies. All of us have got enemies. You pick them up as you go along. Have you noticed that, huh?

Sometimes they are even in your own family. Someone said to me the other day, Trevor, do you know why grandparents and grandchildren get along so well? They've got the same enemy. Hey? You know, enemies are people that make your blood boil. Enemies are people that you wish were dead. Enemies are people that you can't stand. Huh? Got any?

Sometimes you may be someone else's enemy, and sometimes you don't even know it. I never forget, when I first went to Kempton Park, when I was at Kempton Park Methodist, I was there for ten years, I sit up to preach, and after, I think, my second or my third sermon there I got a letter; people still sent letters in those days, not emails, letters. I got a letter from someone who obviously really liked the previous minister.

The letter... this is true, now. The letter goes like this: every time you stand up there I either just want to walk out of church or come up front and hit you. I don't know who I reminded this woman of, huh? The distinguishing feature, this is what I'm suggesting: the distinguishing feature of belonging to God's family is a growing capacity to love these people, to love these people.

Now, you may say to me, and this would be a good question, you may say to me, Trevor, where do you get that. Where do you get that? On what grounds do you make that claim this morning, and that is a brilliant question, so what I'm going to do, and I hope this will be helpful, is I want to take you through that passage, those words of Jesus that I read to you, and I want you to begin to see, and it's been quite a journey for me this week, because I've seen this again, I want you to begin to see why loving enemies is so important, and the first reason is obvious. It's obvious. It is so important to love our enemies, because when we do we begin to imitate the love that God has for people.



Look... just look at these verses that come from that passage: but I tell you, love your enemies, 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 He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Do you notice that Jesus introduces us to a God who has got no favourites, huh? That's quite something.

Conventional wisdom in the first century was that God liked certain people and didn't like other people. Jesus comes along and he radically, radically blows that picture out of the water and introduces us to a God whose love goes out to every human being, whose love goes out to those who are hostile to God. God loves those who are God's enemies. God loves those who sometimes do evil. God loves even you and me.

That's mindboggling.

I don't know about you, but let me be honest with you; sometimes I have a tendency deep down in my heart to think that God doesn't like the people I don't like. I'm sure about that. If I don't like someone then I'm sure God doesn't like this person, huh, or if I'm in a conflict situation I sometimes almost think I'm sure God is on my side on this issue, huh, that we kind of almost feel as if God takes our side, and this happens on a personal level, and it happens on a national level and a macro level.

I'll never forget, going back, Kempton Park days, this was mid 80s, I was preaching once in the white Methodist Church of Kempton Park, and one of our leaders did the prayer that day, one of our lead elders, and prayed for God to be with our boys in the border, prayed for God to protect them, keep them, to vindicate their cause. That afternoon I went into Tembisa to preach in the black Methodist Church, and one of the elders there prayed the prayer that afternoon, and prayed for the boys on the other side, in the liberation forces. Same church, ten kilometres apart, both congregations believing God is on their side.

Jesus comes along and blows this out of the water. God has no favourites. God has no favourites, and when I begin to love those that are my enemies I begin to reflect something of God's love, and that's why it's so important, but it's important for another reason. When I begin... when I begin to love those that are my enemies I begin to go in the way of Jesus Christ. I begin to follow his example

Look again at those words that I've just read to you. Look again at them with me. I tell you love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in Heaven. Now, Jesus didn't only speak those words; Jesus lived those words. Jesus lived in the house of his own teaching.

You will remember as Jesus goes to the cross... do you remember his abuse, his humiliation, his rejection, and then on the cross, choking in his own blood, he says Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing. He lived this, and the early disciples lived it. The very first martyr, what was his name, Steven - read his story before you read anything else today - Acts 6, Acts 7, when Steven gets killed, as he's dying he prays the same prayer that Jesus prayed on the cross: forgive these people who are stoning me. When I begin to reflect a deep love for those who are my enemies I begin to walk in the way of Christ, and every day we get opportunities, every day.

Debbie... I'm married to Debbie. She's a teacher. I think she's brilliant. I think she's a great teacher. She's given her life to education in a government setting. The other day she's telling me, a few months ago she was talking she was talking to her class, and she said: what are your hopes and dreams? One girl put up her hand and said to her: my hope and dream is that every teacher in this school will get killed. Obviously Debbie was an enemy to this young girl.

I watched how Debbie responded to her. She got to know her name. Her name was Lerato. Every morning Debbie went out of her way to greet Lerato as she arrived at school. Then she got to know Lerato's story, her home life, where she had come from, and got to begin it understand some of the deep hatred towards teachers. Because I knew I was preaching on this this morning, yesterday I asked Debbie, I said: how's Lerato? I just want to know; it's about six months down the line.

These were Debbie's words, and I quote her: she's one of the most participative students in my class. Sometimes has happened. A cycle has been broken, a cycle of revenge, of getting even, a cycle of sin and evil. It's been broken in a person's life, and either I go along and I keep the cycle of getting even and revenge, I keep it alive, or in little ways I begin to break it. I begin to break it, and that's what Christ did. He stepped into this cycle of evil and sin and violence and he broke it.

But there's another important reason why loving enemies, praying for enemies, is so, so important. When we do we begin to discover a spiritual wholeness and maturity in our... we grow up. Just look at these words that Jesus speaks. They're very powerful, look at them. At the end of this passage he says: be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

Now, just leave that verse up for a moment. Jesus is not saying here be without fault. He's not saying that. He's not saying you must never make mistakes. He's not saying that. He's not saying you must never have flaws. He's not saying... Jesus knows that we are flawed, fallible human beings that make mistakes. Jesus knows that.

I know the Greek word for perfect, and this is one of the... one of the reasons I just... I'm so grateful I did New Testament Greek. I know the Greek word for perfect. It's the word teleois, T E L E O I S, and it means mature, to be made whole, to be completed, and Jesus is saying here: I want you to... I want you to become whole as your Father in Heaven is whole.

I want you to become mature, completed, as your Father in Heaven is mature and completed. I want you to become whole, mature, in Me, and you may say; but where does... what's this got to do with enemies. Let me tell



you, enemies put me in touch with those parts of my life that need to be made whole. Enemies put me in touch with those parts of my life that I don't want to face. I remember learning this, early 90s, I want on a retreat and someone asked me to write down the name of someone that I really didn't like, or a group of people that I didn't like. I had no problem; I wrote down the name of a group of people that I didn't like, that I really hated. Then, the second question was: note all the characteristics about this person or this group, and I wrote down. I had... I just wrote, wrote, wrote, wrote, wrote, wrote. Lekker. I just got it out, aggressive, violent, just... Last question: go into the silence; ask God to shine his light on your life, and see how many of those characteristics are in your own life. 70% of the list that I wrote down, things that I didn't like in the other person, were alive and well in my own life, my own inner enemies, my own aggressiveness, my own violence, my own prejudice. I had to face up to my... and then I had to...

I had to begin to pray and love my own inner enemies and bring them to Christ just so that I could become a little bit more whole and healthy, and freer. That's why enemies are so important, and you most probably are saying to me, Trevor, but what happens if I run out of enemies? Let me tell you; God loves you so much that God will give you another enemy. Hey? God just loves you so much and is so committed to your wholeness that I'm sure God will send someone into your life that you just can't stand, and will... and you'll learn so much about yourself. Let me end. Let me end. Has this been helpful, hey? I wonder what your first step is today. I wonder what your first step is on this journey. Maybe your first step is just to write down the name of someone you don't like. Just write it down somewhere, maybe just to acknowledge you've got enemies. I've got enemies. We've all got enemies. Maybe that's the first step you can take.

Maybe the... a first step would be just to maybe face up to some of the hurt that you've experienced through someone, to maybe find someone to... someone professional, or a friend, and you can maybe begin to speak about some of the deep hurt, the deep hurt that you've experienced at the hands of someone else, and sometimes that's the first step, just facing our hurt, our anger, our own pain.

Maybe you just need to stop gossiping about someone that you don't like, I think sometimes we murder people with our words, maybe just to stop talking badly about someone you don't like. Huh? I think you'll feel better about yourself. I think the only time that it's right for us to speak badly about someone else is if we are talking to someone professionally or confidentially about our pain and our hurt.

Maybe you just want to begin to pray for someone that you don't like; just to pray for them. Huh? Not, God, fix them while I fix them here below, just pray for them, and can I give you a simple hint? I often just pray the Lord's Prayer for that person, so let's just say if my enemy is John, let's just say that, I'll say John... John's Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name, in John, your Kingdom come, in John, your will be done on earth, in John, as it's done in heaven. Give John his daily bread. Forgive John his trespasses as he forgives those who... deliver John for evil, and as we begin to pray the Lord's Prayer for our enemies sometimes changes.

We discover new freedom, new joy. The climate of our life changes; it becomes open to miracles, to God working. Things happen, incredible things. Pray for your competitor in business. God bless him. Bless him, Lord, huh? Sometimes in Benoni we pray blessings upon the churches around us, that God would bless them, bless them. Maybe that's the step you need to take.

Maybe, and this is really radical stuff, maybe a step you need to take is to do something positive for that person, just something positive that will bless them. It's a journey. It's a journey. The distinguishing feature, the distinguishing feature, family likeness in God's family, if we are going to look a little bit like God, a little bit like Jesus, we need to learn to pray for and love those around us, especially those we can't stand.

So, now we're going to ask God in the silence just to shine His light into our lives. We're going to sing it together. We'll go into two minutes of quiet. Just say, Lord, shine your light on my relationships, my friendships, my enemies, that maybe today will be the beginning of new beginnings.

Lord Jesus Christ, it really astonishes us that it was when we were yet sinners, when we had made You our enemy, that You died for us, that even though we have betrayed You deeply, even though we have broken Your heart again and again and again, You never stopped loving us, and we want to receive again Your divine love into our lives this morning so that Your divine love can flow through us towards those that we really struggle with, and You know who they are, Lord.

We thank You that we don't have to pretend about this with You, that we don't have to... we don't have to pretend to be nice. Thank You that we can just own up, Lord, in Your presence, and that, as we share our struggle and our pain and our hurt with You, so You help us into a new way of living that releases us into new joy and new freedom. We thank You and we ask, Lord, that today You would begin and deepen that work in our lives. This is our prayer, and we offer it to You, Lord, with all the love and with all the longing of our hearts, in the name of Christ and for His sake, and we say together as God's people: Amen. Amen.

Friends, have a wonderful day. May the joy, the wild, wild joy of Jesus Christ be with you. God bless you. Take care.

