

LOVE WITHOUT LIMITS

(Matthew 5: 38-48)

Intro: Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
-Matthew 5: 48.

We seem to have a schizophrenic approach to this thing called perfection.

-On the one hand we say:

#Practice makes perfect.

-On the other hand we say:

#Nobody's perfect.

So which is it?

-Is perfection something that we can achieve?

#If we just try hard enough.

-Is perfection unattainable?

#Beyond the reach of us sinful mortals.

I. Maybe We Should Start By Clarifying What We Mean By Perfection.

A. Often We Mean A Performance Which Is Without Mistakes Or Errors.

1. Math test.

a. 100 problems.

b. 100 correct answers.

-We call that a perfect score.

2. Baseball.

a. 27 batters up.

b. 27 batters down.

-No hits.

-No walks.

-No hit batsmen.

-No errors.

#We call that a perfect game.

3. Certain other sports.

a. Figure skating.

b. Gymnastics.

c. Diving.

-Judges give a score of 10.0.

#We call that a perfect score.

4. But who is perfect all the time?
 - a. Even the best of students.
 - Sometimes get a wrong answer.
 - #Those who are good in math.
 - #May not be quite so good in:
 - *Science.
 - *Social studies.
 - *French.
 - b. Baseball pitchers.
 - Don't pitch a perfect game every time out.
 - Even the best of pitchers.
 - #May be fortunate to pitch a perfect game.
 - *Only once in their lifetime.
 - c. Perfect score in:
 - Figure skating.
 - Gymnastics.
 - Diving.
 - #May be even rarer.
 - *Perhaps in part because those are subjective scores.
 - +Given by judges.
 - =Who are themselves less than perfect.
5. When it comes to God's expectations of us.
 - a. Who of us measures up?
 - All the time.
 - b. You have perhaps heard the story of the woman who prays:
 - “Lord, I thank you that so far today I haven't: ”
 - #“Been angry.”
 - #“Cursed.”
 - #“Stolen.”
 - #“Lied.”
 - #“Lusted.”
 - “But in a moment I'm going to get out of bed.”
 - #“So I can't promise I'll be able to keep this up all day.”
6. That's what we usually mean by perfection.
 - a. No errors.
 - b. No mistakes.
 - c. No sin.

B. But Jesus Means Something Different By Perfection.

1. Greek word.
 - a. Has a root which means:
 - End.
 - Complete.
 - Mature. -Full-grown.

- b. Same word which Jesus utters from the cross:
 - “It is finished.”
 - #John 19:30.
- 2. When Jesus says, “Be perfect.”
 - a. Not an impossible demand.
 - Don’t ever mess up.
 - Don’t ever make a mistake.
 - b. More along the lines of the recruiting slogan for the U.S. Army.
 - Be all that you can be.
 - Be all that you were created to be.
 - Be all that you were redeemed to be.
 - Be all that you were baptized to be.
 - Be perfect.
 - #As your heavenly Father is perfect.
- 3. Godly perfection.
 - a. Not something we achieve.
 - If we just try hard enough.
 - If we practice and practice and practice.
 - b. God’s gift to us.
 - c. Our faithful response.
 - To the One:
 - #Who was all that he could be.
 - #Whose life was brought to a perfect end.
 - #Who accomplished all that he could accomplish through his:
 - *Life.
 - *Death.
 - *Resurrection.
 - #Who sends us the Holy Spirit.
 - *To guide us.
 - *To empower us.
 - +To be perfect.
 - =As our heavenly Father is perfect.

II. So What Might Godly Perfection Look Like In Us?

A. Being Merciful.

- 1. Some of you shelled out:
 - a. \$20.
 - b. \$25.

-For a Synopsis of the Four Gospels.

2. This is one of those passages where the parallel might be helpful.
 - a. Matthew 5:48.
 - “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
 - b. Luke 6:36.
 - “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”
3. Could it be that Godly perfection looks a lot like mercy?
 - a. Not expecting that you yourself:
 - Will never make a mistake.
 - b. Not demanding that other people:
 - Will always measure up to your expectations.
 - c. But showing mercy.
 - To yourself.
 - To others.
 - #Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
 - #Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

B. Turning The Other Cheek.

1. “You have heard that it was said:”
 - a. “An eye for an eye,”
 - b. “And a tooth for a tooth.”
2. “But I say to you:”
 - a. “Do not resist an evildoer.”
 - b. “But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek,”
 - “Turn the other also.”
3. First of all.
 - a. *Lex talionis*.
 - b. Law of talion.
 - Guideline for a judge.
 - Not a justification for a victim.
 - #Punishment was to fit the crime.
4. Jesus takes it a step further.
 - a. Jesus is not saying:
 - We should let someone beat our brains in.
 - We should let other people bully us.
 - We should stay in an abusive relationship.
 - #Greek word “to strike.”
 - *Means “to slap with an open hand.”
 - *It’s not a punch.
 - #To be struck on the right cheek.
 - *Backhand slap.
 - #Used to reprimand:
 - *Slaves.
 - *Inferiors.

- #I won't say that a backhand slap wouldn't smart.
 - *But it was more of an insult.
 - +Than a physical assault.
 - *Like in the movies.
 - +If a guy gets fresh with a gal.
 - =She slaps his face.
 - +It probably hurts his ego.
 - =As much as anything else.
- b. What Jesus is saying:
 - You don't have to get even.
 - You don't have to retaliate.
 - You don't have to strike back.
 - You don't have to engage in the very behavior.
 - #You wish to condemn in another.
- 5. Otherwise, where will it end?
 - a. If I punch you.
 - b. You punch me back.
 - But I feel:
 - #You hit me harder than I hit you.
 - #I owe you one.
 - Back and forth we go.
 - #Where will it end?
 - I have T-shirt at home that says:
 - #AN EYE FOR AN EYE MAKES THE WHOLE WORLD BLIND.
- 6. There is power in turning the other cheek.
 - a. We tend to have the notion.
 - If we don't retaliate.
 - If we don't respond with force.
 - #It's a sign of weakness.
 - b. But look at what happened in Egypt.
 - Last three weeks.
 - Mostly without violence.
 - c. Look at the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.
 - How did change come?
 - #Lunch counter sit-ins.
 - #Freedom rides.
 - #Courageous people who absorbed:
 - *Billy clubs.
 - *Water canons.
 - *Dog bites.
 - +Without retaliating.

- When I went to Georgia in 2008.
 - #To visit my son Joel.
 - #I went through Birmingham, Alabama.
 - *Civil Rights Institute.
 - *16th Street Baptist Church.
 - +Where four little girls were killed.
 - =While they were in Sunday School.
 - +Bombing.
 - =September 15, 1963.
 - *Kelly Ingram Park.
 - +Across the street.
 - =From the Civil Rights Institute.
 - +Kitty-corner.
 - =From 16th Street Baptist Church.
 - +Outdoor sculptures.
 - =Jail cells.
 - =Police dogs.
 - =Water canons.
 - #There was power there.
 - *Power that changed this country.
 - *Power of turning the other cheek.
- When I came back from the Gulf Coast last fall.
 - #I went through Selma, Alabama.
 - #I drove over the Edmund Pettus Bridge.
 - *March 1965.
 - +Voting rights march.
 - =From Selma, Alabama.
 - =To Montgomery,
 - State capital.
 - *Bloody Sunday.
 - +Police turned back the marchers.
 - =At the Edmund Pettus Bridge.
 - =With:
 - Billy clubs.
 - Tear gas.
 - #There was power there.
 - *Power that changed this country.
 - *Power of turning the other cheek.
- Last Tuesday.
 - #President Barak Obama.
 - *Awarded the Medal of Freedom to several individuals.
 - +Highest award this country can give.
 - =To a civilian.

#Medal recipients included:

*Stan Musial.

+Former Cardinal baseball player.

*George H.W. Bush.

+Former President of the United States.

*John Lewis.

+U.S. Congressman.

=From Georgia.

=For the last 25 years.

+One of those who got bloodied.

=On Bloody Sunday.

=On the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

#There was power there.

*Power that changed this country.

*Power of turning the other cheek.

7. There is power in the cross of Jesus Christ.

a. Humanity's ultimate act of violence against God.

b. God's ultimate act.

-Non-violence.

-Mercy.

-Turning the other cheek.

#Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

#Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

C. Loving Without Limits.

1. "You have heard that it was said: "

a. "You shall love your neighbor,"

b. "And hate your enemy."

2. "But I say unto you: "

a. "Love your enemies,"

b. "And pray for those who persecute you."

3. Pastor.

a. Preaching about loving your enemies.

b. Asked the congregation.

-If there was anyone who didn't have any enemies.

c. One old guy in the back raised his hand.

d. Pastor said:

-"Julius, you don't have any enemies?"

e. Julius said:

-"No, sir."

-"I used to."

-"But I've outlived them all."

-"Now they're all dead."

4. To be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.
 - a. To be all that we can to be.
 - b. To be all that we were created to be.
 - c. To be all that we were redeemed to be.
 - d. To be all that we were baptized to be.
 - Not to outlive our enemies.
 - But to love them.
 - #To pray for them.
 - *Not that something bad happen to them.
 - *But that they might become:
 - +Perfect.
 - +All that God created them to be.
 - +All that God redeemed them to be.
5. We tend:
 - a. To like those who like us.
 - b. To love those who love us.
 - c. To welcome those who welcome us.
6. Can we love as God loves?
 - a. God makes the sun to rise on:
 - Evil.
 - Good.
 - b. God sends rain on:
 - Righteous.
 - Unrighteous.
 - c. God loves without limits.
7. Can we love without limits?
 - a. Love those who won't reciprocate.
 - b. Love those who can't reciprocate.
 - Those who depend:
 - #On the gleanings in the field.
 - *Ancient form of welfare.
 - *How the poor got fed.
 - +Leviticus 19:9.
 - #On our generosity.
 - Those for whom we're raising money today.
 - #Souper Bowl of Caring.
 - #To benefit:
 - *Helping Hands Food Pantry.
 - *ELCA World Hunger Appeal.
8. Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Concl: Green Bay Packers won Super Bowl XLV.
-They weren't perfect by worldly standards.
#They lost six games this season.
*Including one to the Detroit Lions.
-But they became all that they could be.

Can we?

Will we?

-Washed in the water.
-Fed at the table.
#Being merciful.
#Turning the other cheek.
#Loving without limits.

Be perfect.

-As your heavenly Father is perfect.

Be merciful.

-Even as your Father is merciful.