



REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

IT RAINS ON BOTH THE JUST AND THE UNJUST

Matthew 5:43–48 KJV



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

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IT RAINS ON BOTH THE JUST AND THE UNJUST

Matthew 5:43–48

Before we go any further this morning, I want to thank our choir and our music director for singing “Showers of Blessing.”

That is a wonderful old hymn.

But it was not selected by accident.

I specifically requested it because its imagery leads directly into today’s message.

And as if the Lord wished to provide His own illustration, it is raining outside today.

Some people stepped out of their cars this morning, felt the rain and immediately regarded it as an inconvenience.

Their clothes were getting wet.

Their hair was getting wet.

They had to find an umbrella.

They may have walked into church thinking, “What miserable weather.”

But someone else looked at that same rain and saw something entirely different.

It has been dry lately.

The grass needs that water.

The yards need that water.

The trees, flowers and crops need that water.

The same rain that one person calls an inconvenience, another person receives as a blessing.

And that brings us to today’s question.

What did Jesus mean when He said that God “sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust”?

Was He warning us that bad things happen to everybody?

Or have we taken one of the Bible’s most familiar statements and made it say almost the opposite of what Jesus intended?

Not long ago, someone approached me because something was not going well in her life.

She was facing trouble at work.

She was afraid that she might lose her job because of something that had nothing to do with her conduct, her effort or her performance.

She had not caused the problem.

Yet she feared that she might suffer because of it.

Then she said something many of us have probably said.

“Like the Bible says, it rains on the just and the unjust alike.”

I understood what she meant.

She meant that trouble does not always distinguish between the innocent and the guilty.

She meant that bad circumstances can affect good people.

She meant that we may suffer because of decisions we did not make and actions we did not commit.

Her fear was real.

Her observation about life was understandable.

And the Bible certainly teaches that faithful people are not exempt from hardship.

Jesus said in John 16:33, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

The book of Job tells us that “man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”

We live in a fallen world.

The decisions of other people can affect us.

Companies can close even when faithful employees have done everything right.

Families can experience consequences caused by one person’s choices.

Illness can enter a home without asking who deserves it.

Storms can damage the house of a believer and the house of an unbeliever.

The Bible does address those realities.

But Matthew 5:45 is not primarily one of the passages addressing them.

Her statement used words found in the Bible.

But the meaning commonly attached to those words is not the meaning Jesus gave them.

That is why we must do more than recognize a Biblical phrase.

We must open the Bible and read it in its context.

A statement can sound Biblical because every word came from Scripture and still communicate something different from what Scripture intended.

So let us reason together through the Word of God.

Let us begin in Matthew chapter 5.

Jesus says in verses 43 through 45:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Before we decide what the rain means, we must notice what Jesus was discussing.

He was not answering the question, “Why do innocent people suffer?”

He was answering the question, “How should the children of God treat their enemies?”

The subject is love.

The subject is mercy.

The subject is goodness shown toward people who have not earned it.

Jesus says, “Love your enemies.”

That alone is demanding.

Then He explains what that love looks like.

“Bless them that curse you.”

“Do good to them that hate you.”

“Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

Every command moves toward someone who does not appear to deserve what is being given.

The person curses you, but you bless.

The person hates you, but you do good.

The person uses you, but you pray.

The person persecutes you, but you love.

Then Jesus tells us why.

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.”

In other words, this is how your heavenly Father behaves.

If you belong to Him, your life ought to display the family resemblance.

And what example does Jesus give of the Father’s gracious character?

“For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.”

“And sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

The sun and the rain are not punishments in this illustration.

They are provisions.

They are gifts.

They are expressions of God’s generosity.

We can miss that because our relationship with rain is different from the relationship many people had with rain in the Biblical world.

We have weather applications on our phones.

We look at the forecast and complain because rain may interfere with a picnic, a ball game or a trip to the beach.

We have roofs over our homes.

We have paved roads.

We have storm drains.

We have indoor plumbing and water flowing from a faucet.

If rain does not fall today, most of us can still turn a handle and receive water.

But imagine living in an agricultural community in a dry land.

Your family’s food depends upon the field.

The field depends upon the seed.

And the seed depends upon the rain.

No rain means no crop.

No crop means no harvest.

No harvest means no food for your family and no feed for your animals.

Rain was not merely a change in the weather.

Rain meant provision.

Rain meant fruitfulness.

Rain meant survival.

Rain meant life.

Deuteronomy 11:13 and 14 says:

“And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,

“That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.”

God described rain as something He would give.

The rain would make the harvest possible.

Psalms 65 says:

“Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it.

“Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof.”

Notice the language.

God waters.

God enriches.

God prepares.

God softens the ground with showers.

God blesses what springs from it.

Acts 14:17 makes the connection even more directly:

“Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

God gave rain because He did good.

Rain produced fruitful seasons.

Fruitful seasons produced food.

Food produced gladness.

That is the Biblical picture Jesus’ listeners would have understood.

When rain began to fall upon a thirsty field, the farmer did not usually stand there lamenting that another terrible thing had happened.

He looked upward with gratitude.

The answer to his need was falling from heaven.

But Jesus did not mention rain alone.

He placed the rain beside the sun.

“He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.”

Sunshine provides light and warmth.

Rain provides water.

Together they allow the seed to grow.

Together they make the harvest possible.

And God gives both of them to people who honor Him and people who do not.

The evil person awakens beneath God’s sunrise.

The good person awakens beneath that same sunrise.

The field of the just receives rain.

The field of the unjust receives rain from the same cloud.

The rain does not stop at the property line because the next farmer refuses to worship God.

The sun does not hide behind the horizon because a wicked person lives in the next house.

God gives good things even to people who do not recognize where those things came from.

Theologians sometimes describe this as common grace.

That term refers to expressions of God's goodness that are experienced broadly throughout His creation.

It is not saving grace.

Sunshine does not forgive sin.

Rain does not reconcile a person to God.

A fruitful field does not replace the need for faith in Jesus Christ.

But these gifts reveal something about the Giver.

They reveal that God is generous.

They reveal that God is patient.

They reveal that God is good.

Luke records a parallel teaching of Jesus that makes the meaning unmistakable.

Luke 6:35 says:

"But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."

There it is.

God "is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."

That is the meaning behind the sunshine and the rain.

Some people enjoy an entire lifetime of God's gifts without once stopping to thank Him.

They breathe air God provided.

They eat food grown in His earth.

They feel the warmth of His sun.

They drink water supplied through His creation.

They laugh.

They love.

They raise families.

They experience beauty.

They receive opportunities.

They benefit from minds and bodies they did not create.

And many never acknowledge the One from whom every good gift comes.

Yet God continues to be kind.

He is kind to the unthankful.

He is kind even to the evil.

If we are honest, that truth is not merely about someone else.

How many gifts did God give us before we thanked Him?

How many mornings did we awaken beneath His sun without acknowledging Him?

How many meals did we enjoy as though the food appeared entirely through our own power?

How many prayers did God answer while our obedience remained incomplete?

How many warnings did He give us before we listened?

How many times did He show mercy while we were still making excuses?

Before we point toward the unjust person standing in another field, we should remember the showers of mercy that have fallen upon ours.

We have all received goodness we did not earn.

We have all benefited from the patience of God.

Now, God's kindness must not be confused with God's approval.

The fact that the sun shines upon someone does not mean God approves of everything that person does.

The fact that rain falls upon a wicked person's field does not mean wickedness no longer matters.

Material blessing does not prove spiritual righteousness.

Prosperity does not prove that a life is pleasing to God.

And present patience does not mean that judgment will never come.

Romans 2:4 asks:

“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

God's goodness is intended to lead us toward repentance.

Every sunrise gives another day in which a person may turn toward God.

Every breath is another opportunity to call upon Him.

Every blessing is another testimony that the God we have resisted is still good.

His patience is not permission to continue in sin.

It is an invitation to repent while there is time.

Second Peter 3:9 says that the Lord “is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

We should never look at God’s patience and conclude that He does not care about sin.

We should look at His patience and marvel that He has given sinners time to turn to Him.

Someone may ask, “Pastor, can rain ever represent judgment in the Bible?”

Yes, it can.

The Flood in Genesis was judgment.

Destructive storms can be judgment.

Hail can be judgment.

The withholding of rain can also be judgment.

During the ministry of Elijah, the absence of rain demonstrated God’s judgment upon a rebellious nation.

The same symbol may carry different meanings in different passages.

A lion can represent Christ in one passage and the devil in another.

Leaven may picture corruption in one setting and the growth of the kingdom in another.

Fire may purify in one text and destroy in another.

That is why context matters.

We do not decide what rain means merely by finding the word “rain.”

We allow the passage to tell us what the image means.

In Matthew 5, the rain is paired with sunshine.

It is used to describe the Father’s treatment of His enemies.

The parallel passage says that He is kind to the unthankful and the evil.

And His behavior becomes the pattern for the good that His children should do.

The context settles the matter.

Here, rain is a blessing.

But understanding the weather illustration is only the beginning.

Jesus did not give us this information merely so we could correct somebody's favorite expression.

He did not say it so we could win a Bible trivia contest.

He said it because He was teaching us how to love people who do not love us.

It is much easier to explain common grace than it is to practice enemy love.

It is much easier to correct the meaning of rain than it is to bless someone who curses us.

It is much easier to identify another person's misuse of a verse than to obey what the verse actually commands.

Jesus says, "Love your enemies."

We may respond, "Lord, I can tolerate them."

Jesus says, "Bless them that curse you."

We may respond, "Lord, I can avoid saying anything back."

Jesus says, "Do good to them that hate you."

We may respond, "Lord, surely doing them no harm is good enough."

Jesus says, "Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

We may respond, "Lord, I will pray that You straighten them out."

But Jesus keeps moving us beyond retaliation, beyond avoidance and beyond reluctant restraint.

He calls us to active love.

Bless them.

Do good.

Pray for them.

Why?

Because that is what your Father is like.

He does not merely withhold lightning from the field of the unjust.

He sends rain.

He does not merely allow the evil person to survive another night.

He sends the morning sun.

God's goodness is active.

Christian love must also become active.

This does not mean that love has no wisdom.

Loving an enemy does not require us to pretend that evil is good.

It does not require us to trust someone who has proven untrustworthy.

It does not require someone to remain in an abusive or dangerous situation.

It does not mean ignoring criminal behavior.

It does not mean removing every rightful consequence from another person's actions.

It does not mean that a boundary is unloving.

Sometimes love forgives while still maintaining a boundary.

Sometimes love prays for a person without restoring that person to the same position of trust.

Sometimes love reports wrongdoing because allowing it to continue would harm other people.

Jesus commands love, not foolishness.

But wisdom must not become an excuse for bitterness.

Boundaries must not become a polite name for revenge.

Distance must not become permission to hate.

You may be unable to trust someone today.

But you can ask God to work in that person's life.

You may need to say no to renewed access.

But you can refuse to celebrate that person's suffering.

You may need justice to take its proper course.

But you can surrender personal vengeance to God.

Romans 12:19 says:

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”

Then the passage continues:

“Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.”

Again, Biblical love is active.

If he is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

Do not become evil in order to defeat evil.

Verse 21 says:

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

That is exactly what we see in Matthew 5.

God overcomes evil with good.

He sends light into a dark world.

He sends rain upon hardened ground.

And He calls His children to do good in places where hatred has tried to make everything barren.

Jesus says, “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.”

This does not mean that we earn salvation by loving our enemies.

We do not become children of God because our behavior was good enough to purchase adoption.

Salvation is by grace through faith.

But those who have received the life of God should begin to display the character of God.

Children often bear a family resemblance.

Sometimes you can look at a child and immediately see the father’s eyes.

You see the mother’s smile.

You hear a familiar expression.

You recognize the same mannerisms.

Jesus says there should be a spiritual family resemblance.

When the world sees how we treat those who mistreat us, it should see something of our Father.

Not because we are naturally better.

Not because the injury did not hurt.

Not because the wrongdoing does not matter.

But because we have received a love greater than the hatred directed toward us.

Matthew 5:46 continues:

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?”

Loving people who love us requires no supernatural explanation.

Anybody can return affection.

Anybody can be kind to the person who is kind first.

Anybody can smile at the person who praises them.

Anybody can invite the people who will invite them in return.

Jesus asks, “What do ye more than others?”

The distinguishing mark is not how warmly we greet our friends.

It is how faithfully we represent Christ when dealing with an enemy.

Verse 47 says:

“And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?”

It is easy to greet our own group.

It is easy to speak to the people who agree with us.

It is easy to show warmth to those who make us comfortable.

But the love of God crosses the line we would have drawn.

It reaches the unthankful.

It reaches the evil.

It reaches the enemy.

Then Jesus says in verse 48:

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

The word “perfect” in this context is not permission to announce that we have achieved sinless perfection.

It carries the idea of completeness and maturity.

Do not allow your love to remain incomplete.

Do not love only the people who love you.

Do not restrict goodness to the people you believe have earned it.

Let your love mature until it begins to resemble the complete love of your Father.

He sends His sun upon the evil and the good.

He sends rain upon the just and the unjust.

Now let us return to the woman who was worried about her job.

What could we say to her?

We should not dismiss her fear with a theological correction.

People need more than someone standing nearby saying, “You used that verse incorrectly.”

Her situation still called for compassion.

We could say, “You are right that people sometimes suffer because of things they did not cause.”

We could remind her that God sees what is happening.

We could help her think wisely about what steps she should take.

We could pray for her employment and her peace.

We could stand beside her if the feared outcome occurred.

And then, when the time was right, we could open Matthew 5 together and discover that the familiar saying contains another message.

The verse may not explain her trouble.

But it may reveal how she should respond to the people involved in it.

If someone else created the problem, can she refuse to hate that person?

If someone speaks against her, can she pray for that person?

If someone treats her unjustly, can she entrust judgment to God while continuing to do what is right?

The correct meaning may speak to her circumstances even more deeply than the mistaken one.

The mistaken interpretation says, "Trouble happens to everyone."

The actual passage says, "When someone becomes your enemy, remember what your Father is like."

One offers resignation.

The other calls us to transformation.

One says, "This is simply how life works."

The other says, "This is how a child of God lives."

And we need that message because our world is increasingly organized around retaliation.

Someone insults us, so we search for a sharper insult.

Someone embarrasses us, so we look for an audience before embarrassing them.

Someone posts something cruel, so we answer with cruelty and call it courage.

Someone disagrees with us, so we stop seeing a person and begin seeing an enemy category.

But Jesus refuses to allow the behavior of another person to determine our character.

Their curse does not cancel our calling to bless.

Their hatred does not cancel our calling to do good.

Their mistreatment does not cancel our calling to pray.

Our response is governed by our Father, not by our enemy.

That does not make the response easy.

It makes it Christian.

Perhaps there is someone in your life whose name immediately came to mind when we read the words "Love your enemies."

You may have tried not to think about that person.

You may have carefully explained why your resentment is justified.

You may have repeated the story so many times that the wound has become part of your identity.

I am not asking you to say that what happened was acceptable.

I am not asking you to deny pain.

I am asking whether you are willing to place that person before God in prayer.

Not a disguised prayer of revenge.

Not, “Lord, show them how wrong they are and make sure everyone else sees it.”

But a sincere prayer that God would bring truth, repentance, healing and salvation.

Can you ask God to do good in the life of someone who did evil in yours?

That is difficult.

That is why we need grace.

We cannot manufacture the Father’s love through willpower alone.

We love because He first loved us.

And nowhere is that love displayed more clearly than at the cross.

The greatest shower of blessing did not fall from a cloud.

It flowed from the grace of God through His Son.

Romans 5:8 says:

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Christ did not wait for us to become deserving.

He did not wait for us to correct every failure.

He did not wait for us to love Him first.

“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:10 goes even further:

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...”

We were enemies.

Yet God loved us.

We were unthankful.

Yet God was kind.

We were sinners.

Yet Christ died for us.

The command to love our enemies is not an abstract moral burden placed upon people who have never received such love.

It is the family pattern established by the Gospel.

God loved His enemies.

Those enemies were us.

When we receive His mercy, He teaches us to extend mercy.

When we stand beneath His showers of blessing, He teaches us not to build an umbrella over everyone we dislike.

He calls us to become channels of the goodness we have received.

That does not mean we can save anyone.

Only Christ saves.

But our kindness can point toward His kindness.

Our patience can bear witness to His patience.

Our willingness to forgive can become a small reflection of the forgiveness found at the cross.

There is another question we must face.

Have we received God's rain without ever thanking the One who sent it?

Maybe you can identify blessings throughout your life.

You have experienced provision.

You have been protected in ways you did not recognize at the time.

Doors opened.

Help arrived.

Strength was available when you thought you had none left.

You have enjoyed friendship, family, beauty, laughter and another morning of life.

But perhaps you have treated the gifts as though there were no Giver.

God's goodness is calling you toward Him.

The rain is not salvation.

The sunshine is not salvation.

Religious familiarity is not salvation.

Knowing the words of Matthew 5:45 is not salvation.

Salvation is found in Jesus Christ.

He died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

And He offers forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who comes to Him by faith.

You cannot earn that gift.

You can receive it.

Ephesians 2:8 and 9 says:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

“Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ, do not mistake God’s patience for indifference.

Do not assume that because the sun rose this morning there will never be an accounting.

Receive His goodness as an invitation.

Turn to Him.

Trust the Savior who loved you while you were still a sinner.

And if you are already a believer, ask the Holy Spirit to show you where your love has remained incomplete.

Is there someone you have decided does not deserve kindness?

Is there someone you refuse to pray for?

Is there someone whose failure would secretly make you happy?

Is there a person you greet with silence because you only salute your brethren?

Is your goodness limited to people who can repay you?

Jesus asks, “What do ye more than others?”

The answer is not found in louder religious language.

It is found in the quiet evidence of a transformed heart.

Blessing when cursed.

Doing good when hated.

Praying when mistreated.

Loving when love is not returned.

That is the family resemblance.

In a few moments, we will leave this room.

Some of us may step outside and feel the rain again.

When you do, do not think only about the inconvenience.

Remember the dry ground receiving water.

Remember the grass beginning to revive.

Remember the roots drinking what they could never produce for themselves.

Remember the farmer looking toward heaven with gratitude.

Remember that the same rain may fall upon the home of someone who loves God and the home of someone who rejects Him.

Then remember why Jesus told us this.

He was not merely giving us a lesson about weather.

He was revealing the heart of the Father.

And He was asking whether His children bear the family resemblance.

It rains on both the just and the unjust.

The question is not only whether we understand the rain.

The question is whether we will love like the God who sends it.

Let us pray.

Father, thank You for every good gift You have placed into our lives.

Thank You for sunshine and rain.

Thank You for food, shelter, breath and life.

Thank You for kindness we did not earn and patience we could never deserve.

Most of all, thank You for loving us while we were still sinners and for sending Jesus Christ to die for us.

Forgive us for receiving Your blessings without gratitude.

Forgive us for wanting mercy for ourselves while demanding judgment for everyone who has hurt us.

Teach us to love our enemies.

Teach us to bless those who curse us.

Teach us to do good to those who hate us.

Teach us to pray sincerely for those who have mistreated us.

Give us wisdom where boundaries are needed, courage where truth must be spoken and grace that keeps wisdom and courage from turning into bitterness.

Let the world see in us something of the character of our Father in heaven.

If someone listening today has never trusted Christ, help that person understand Your goodness and receive the salvation offered through Your Son.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

As you apply this message during the coming week, allow every shower and every sunrise to remind you of the Father's generosity. Choose one person who has been difficult to love and pray for that person by name. Ask God to show you one wise, sincere act of goodness that reflects His character without denying truth or abandoning a necessary boundary.

And if this study helped you understand a familiar verse more clearly, share it with someone who has used this expression during a difficult season. Do not use the correction as a weapon. Begin with compassion, open the Bible together and let the true meaning lead both of you toward the goodness of God and the love He calls His children to demonstrate.

May the Lord bless thee, and keep thee.

May the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee.

May the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

IT RAINS ON BOTH THE JUST AND THE UNJUST

Matthew 5:43–48

*For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. **Matthew 5:45***

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION Matthew 5:45 presents rain as the Father's generous provision, not as a picture of indiscriminate hardship. He gives sunshine and rain to the evil and the good, the just and the unjust, then calls His children to display the same active goodness by loving their enemies.

This Commentary explains the interpretive and pastoral reasoning behind the sermon "It Rains on Both the Just and the Unjust." The familiar wording of Matthew 5:45 is often used to say that trouble affects good and bad people alike. That observation about life can be true, but it is not the point Jesus was making in this passage.

The controlling context is enemy love. Jesus commands His followers to love, bless, do good and pray for people who oppose them. He then points to the Father, who gives sunshine and rain to people across moral categories. The weather illustration is therefore an example of active goodness toward the undeserving.

The Commentary also preserves an important pastoral distinction. Correct interpretation should never become an excuse to dismiss a suffering person. The woman whose statement prompted the study was facing a real fear concerning her employment. Her use of the verse needed clarification, but her fear still deserved compassion, prayer and practical support.

Jesus was not using rain as a picture of universal misfortune. In the dry agricultural world of His listeners, timely rain and sunshine were life-giving provisions. The Father supplies those gifts to people across moral categories, including those who are evil, unjust and unthankful.

The interpretation is confirmed by the immediate command to love enemies, by the Old Testament witness to rain as provision, by Acts 14:17 and by Luke's statement that God is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Rain in Matthew 5 is therefore an example of undeserved goodness.

The sermon must move beyond correcting a familiar saying. God's children are called to bear the family resemblance by blessing, doing good and praying for people who oppose them. This love does not erase truth, boundaries or justice. It rejects personal vengeance and seeks an appropriate good.

1. Title and Cover Question

The title retains the familiar language because it allows the listener to recognize the statement immediately. The study then asks what those words mean within the sermon of Jesus. The purpose is not to embarrass people who have used the expression differently. It is to recover the larger and more demanding message that has often been overlooked.

The cover question supplies the necessary turn. Many listeners expect the sermon to explain why innocent people suffer. Instead, the passage asks how the children of God will treat people who have behaved like

enemies. The correction is therefore not merely lexical. It changes the destination of the message from resignation before hardship to imitation of the Father.

2. The Immediate Context Controls the Rain

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” **Matthew 5:43–45 KJV**

Verse 45 cannot be interpreted responsibly without verses 43 and 44. Jesus is not answering a question about random suffering. He is correcting a limited view of love and commanding conduct that reaches beyond reciprocity.

The sequence is clear. An enemy curses, hates, despitefully uses or persecutes. The disciple answers by blessing, doing good, praying and loving. Jesus then identifies the Father’s treatment of the evil and unjust as the reason and model for such conduct.

The phrase “for he” is especially important. It connects the command to the illustration. The children are to love their enemies because their Father continually gives good things even to people who do not honor Him.

3. “Hate Thine Enemy” and the Teaching Jesus Corrected

The Old Testament commands love for one’s neighbor, but it does not contain a direct command saying, “hate thine enemy.” The added phrase reflects a conclusion drawn by narrowing the identity of the neighbor and treating outsiders or opponents as proper objects of hatred.

“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.” **Leviticus 19:18 KJV**

The same law also contains provisions of practical mercy toward an enemy. An Israelite who encountered an enemy’s wandering animal was not permitted to use hostility as an excuse for neglect.

“If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.” **Exodus 23:4 KJV**

Jesus does not weaken holiness or declare moral distinctions irrelevant. He exposes the attempt to make personal hostility spiritually respectable. The righteousness of His kingdom refuses both false approval and personal hatred.

4. Four Active Commands

The command to love enemies is immediately explained through action. Love in this paragraph is not sentimentality and does not depend upon warm feelings.

- Love your enemies: seek what is genuinely good without calling evil good.
- Bless them that curse you: refuse to answer verbal injury with another verbal injury.
- Do good to them that hate you: move beyond non-retaliation toward an appropriate act of goodness.
- Pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you: bring the offender before God without disguising revenge as prayer.

Each response moves toward a person who appears not to deserve it. This is precisely why the Father's sunshine and rain are relevant. God's generosity is not limited to those who first demonstrate gratitude or righteousness.

5. Rain in the Biblical World

Modern listeners often experience rain chiefly as inconvenience. It can ruin outdoor plans, slow traffic, soak clothing and require an umbrella. Those experiences make it easy to hear rain as the unpleasant event in Matthew 5:45.

In the dry agricultural lands of the Bible, timely rain ordinarily represented provision. Families depended upon fields, fields depended upon seed and seed depended upon water. A prolonged absence of rain could produce crop failure, famine and death. Rain meant that dry soil could soften, grain could mature, livestock could feed and communities could live.

This does not mean every occurrence of rain in Scripture symbolizes blessing. It means the ordinary agricultural meaning, the pairing with sunshine and the argument of Matthew 5 all point toward blessing in this particular passage.

6. The Former and Latter Rain

The Biblical writers sometimes speak of the former rain and the latter rain. These expressions refer to the seasonal pattern upon which agriculture depended. The early or autumn rains softened ground for plowing and planting. Continuing winter rainfall replenished the land. The latter or spring rains assisted the grain as it matured before harvest.

“And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.”

Deuteronomy 11:13–14 KJV

The significance lies not merely in water falling from the sky but in rain arriving in due season. Agricultural abundance depended upon timing and sufficiency. The image carried the language of provision, fruitfulness and covenant care.

7. Old Testament Witness to Rain as Blessing

“Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof.” **Psalm 65:9–10 KJV**

Psalm 65 describes rain through a series of divine actions. God visits, waters, enriches, prepares, settles, softens and blesses. The shower is not presented as misfortune. It is the means through which God sustains the earth and supplies food.

“Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.”

Jeremiah 5:24 KJV

Jeremiah treats rain as a reason to fear and acknowledge the Lord. The tragedy is not that rain fell but that people received the gift without honoring the Giver.

8. Acts 14:17 Gives an Inspired Explanation

“Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” **Acts 14:17 KJV**

This verse supplies one of the strongest cross-references for Matthew 5:45. Paul and Barnabas say that God gave rain because He “did good.” The sequence moves from rain to fruitful seasons, from fruitful seasons to food and from food to gladness.

Rain is also described as a witness. Ordinary providence testifies to divine goodness. People may ignore that testimony or attribute every benefit to nature, luck or human ability, but the gift continues to reveal something about the Giver.

9. Why Jesus Paired the Sun and Rain

The pairing of sun and rain is decisive. Both are required for a field to become fruitful. Sunshine provides light and warmth. Rain supplies water. Too little of either can damage a crop. Jesus selects two recurring provisions that would have been visible to every listener.

He also calls it “his sun.” The phrase emphasizes ownership and agency. The world is not an independent system from which God is absent. The Father causes His sun to rise and sends the rain.

The cloud crosses the property line. It waters the field of the worshiper and the field of the rebel. The sunrise reaches the home of the grateful person and the home of the unthankful person. Created provision continually displays a generosity broader than immediate human deserving.

10. The Evil and the Good, the Just and the Unjust

Jesus does not erase moral categories. He openly speaks of the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. God’s gifts do not transform wickedness into righteousness or make conduct irrelevant.

The force of the statement depends upon the moral distinction remaining real. The remarkable truth is that the Father gives good things even to those whom Jesus calls evil and unjust. Blessing is therefore not identical with approval.

This guards the sermon against prosperity reasoning. A fruitful field does not prove that its owner is righteous. Material success does not certify divine endorsement. Present provision demonstrates God’s goodness, not the recipient’s innocence.

11. Theological Language: Common Grace

The term common grace is often used to describe non-saving benefits of God’s goodness experienced broadly throughout creation. The phrase itself does not appear in Matthew 5, so it should be explained rather than merely asserted.

Common does not mean unimportant, ordinary in value or independent of God. It means broadly shared. Life, breath, weather, food, beauty, relationships, ability, restraint of evil and opportunities for repentance are not distributed only to those who have saving faith.

Grace in this sense must also be distinguished from saving grace. Sunshine cannot forgive sin. Rain cannot reconcile a rebel to God. Temporal provision is not the Gospel. These gifts reveal the goodness of the God whose saving mercy is offered through Jesus Christ.

12. Luke's Parallel Makes the Meaning Explicit

"But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." **Luke 6:35 KJV**

Luke states directly what Matthew displays through weather. The Father "is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." The word kind interprets the action. God's sunshine and rain are manifestations of benevolence toward people who do not respond with gratitude.

The parallel also protects the sermon from stopping at an explanation of providence. God's children are commanded to love and do good because that is what the Highest is like. Doctrine moves toward resemblance.

13. Kindness Is Not Approval

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" **Romans 2:4 KJV**

God's goodness has a moral purpose. It should lead the recipient toward repentance. The fact that judgment is not immediate must never be interpreted as indifference toward sin.

Every sunrise gives another day in which a sinner may turn to God. Every breath supplies another opportunity to call upon Him. Divine patience is mercy, but it is not permission. To receive God's gifts while rejecting His authority is to increase responsibility rather than remove it.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." **2 Peter 3:9 KJV**

The sermon therefore holds two truths together. God is presently generous toward the undeserving, and God still calls every sinner to repentance. Mercy and holiness are not opponents within the character of God.

14. Can Rain Represent Judgment?

Yes. The Flood brought judgment. Hail may be destructive. Withheld rain may signify covenant discipline. During Elijah's ministry, drought became a sign of judgment upon rebellion. The meaning of an image must be established passage by passage.

This principle is not unique to rain. A lion may represent Christ in one setting and the devil in another. Fire may cleanse, illuminate or destroy. Leaven may picture corruption or expanding influence. Word association alone cannot determine interpretation.

Matthew 5 settles the meaning through four controls: rain is paired with sunshine, the Father actively sends it, the action is used as a model of enemy love and Luke's parallel calls the same divine action kindness. In this passage, rain is beneficial provision.

15. The Sermon Must Move Beyond Correcting the Saying

A sermon can explain the rain accurately and still miss the demand of the text. Jesus did not provide a lesson in weather symbolism merely so His followers could correct other people. He called them to love enemies.

It is easier to explain common grace than to bless someone who curses us. It is easier to identify a contextual error than to do good to a person who hates us. Interpretation becomes complete when the hearer stands beneath the command of the passage.

The movement of the sermon should therefore be correction, revelation and application. The familiar saying is corrected. The Father's generous character is revealed. The disciple is then called to imitate that goodness.

16. Enemy Love and Wise Boundaries

Enemy love must not be preached as permission for continued abuse, exploitation or danger. Jesus commands love, not the denial of truth or the abandonment of wisdom.

- Love does not require calling evil good.
- Forgiveness does not require immediate restoration of trust.
- Prayer for an offender does not require continued access to the injured person.
- Reporting crime or abuse can protect present and future victims.
- A boundary may be necessary without becoming an instrument of bitterness or revenge.

The distinction is between personal vengeance and proper justice. A Christian may cooperate with lawful authority, preserve evidence, seek safety and maintain a boundary while refusing hatred and the desire to destroy another person.

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." **Romans 12:19 KJV**

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." **Romans 12:20 KJV**

Romans 12 joins surrender of vengeance with active goodness. The believer does not become evil in order to defeat evil. The final command is to overcome evil with good.

17. Children of the Father and Family Resemblance

The phrase “that ye may be the children of your Father” should not be taught as salvation earned through moral performance. Scripture presents salvation as the gift of grace received through faith. Enemy love does not purchase adoption.

Within the Sermon on the Mount, conduct reveals allegiance and resemblance. Children often display recognizable features of their parents. A father’s eyes, a mother’s smile, a familiar voice or repeated mannerism may identify the family connection.

Jesus identifies goodness toward enemies as a spiritual family resemblance. When believers bless, do good and pray in response to mistreatment, the world should see a reflection of the Father who gives sunshine and rain to the undeserving.

18. “Be Ye Therefore Perfect”

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” **Matthew 5:48**
KJV

The word perfect must remain connected to the enemy-love paragraph. Jesus contrasts limited reciprocal love with the Father’s complete generosity. Publicans love those who love them. Brethren greet brethren. Such love remains confined within the circle of reciprocity.

Perfect carries the sense of completeness, maturity or arrival at an intended end. The verse should not be used here to claim present sinless perfection. The pastoral emphasis is wholeness. Love is incomplete when it reaches only friends.

The Father remains the standard, which also keeps the believer dependent upon grace. The command is not easy, and no one fulfills it through natural temperament alone.

19. The Woman Facing Trouble at Work

The personal encounter that prompted the study should be handled with dignity. The woman feared that she might lose her job because of circumstances unrelated to her own actions. Her concern represented a genuine possibility in a fallen world.

A pastorally responsible response begins by acknowledging what is true. People do suffer because of decisions they did not make. Faithful employees may be harmed by organizational failure. Families may experience consequences created by one member. Scripture does teach that believers face tribulation.

“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33 KJV

Only after listening and offering compassion should the wording of Matthew 5 be opened in context. The correction can then become an additional source of guidance. The verse may not explain why trouble occurred, but it may reveal how the believer should respond to the people involved.

The mistaken interpretation offers resignation: trouble happens to everyone. The actual passage calls for transformation: when another person becomes an enemy, remember what the Father is like.

20. The Rain Outside and the Opening Illustration

The rain falling outside during the service provides an immediate illustration. Some people experience it as inconvenience because they are getting wet, traffic is slower or plans must change. Others look at dry grass and thirsty yards and receive the same shower as needed provision.

The illustration should not imply that personal preference determines the Biblical meaning. Its purpose is to expose how modern experience can shape instinctive interpretation. The same listener who calls rain miserable while walking from the parking lot may later thank God for the water reaching the land.

The transition should move quickly from present weather to the ancient setting. Modern inconvenience explains why the verse is easily misunderstood. Biblical agriculture explains why Jesus’ original listeners would ordinarily hear rain as blessing.

21. “Showers of Blessing” as the Musical Doorway

Thanking the choir and music director for singing “Showers of Blessing” gives the opening warmth and continuity. The hymn was requested because its imagery leads naturally into the message.

The hymn should function as a doorway rather than as evidence. The interpretation rests upon Matthew 5, its immediate context and the supporting Biblical witness. The song makes the theme memorable but does not determine the meaning of the passage.

The combination of the hymn and the actual rain gives the congregation something concrete to carry through the sermon. The recurring image can then deepen from pleasant symbolism into a searching question about the generosity of God and the conduct of His children.

22. The Gospel Foundation of Enemy Love

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” **Romans 5:8 KJV**

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” **Romans 5:10 KJV**

The cross is the greatest display of love toward enemies. Humanity was not merely undeserving but opposed to God. Christ did not wait for sinners to correct themselves or love Him first. He died while they were sinners and enemies.

This keeps the command from becoming an abstract burden placed upon people who have never received such love. Believers extend a love they first received. They stand beneath showers of mercy before they are asked to become channels of mercy.

Providential gifts must still be distinguished from salvation. Rain can water a field but cannot cleanse guilt. Sunshine can warm the earth but cannot reconcile a sinner to God. Forgiveness and eternal life are offered through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and received by grace through faith.

23. Questions and Clarifications

Does this mean bad things do not happen to good people?

No. It means Matthew 5:45 is not the passage Jesus used to teach that truth. Scripture elsewhere speaks honestly about tribulation, injustice and undeserved suffering. Sound interpretation supports each doctrine with a passage that actually addresses it.

If God blesses the wicked, does righteousness matter?

Yes. Temporal provision is not final acquittal. God’s kindness displays His character and gives time for repentance. The moral categories in Matthew 5 remain intact, and final accountability is not removed.

Does enemy love mean approving error?

No. Biblical love seeks genuine good and remains governed by truth. It may confront, establish boundaries, report wrongdoing or allow proper consequences while refusing hatred and personal vengeance.

Is common grace explicitly named in the passage?

No. It is a theological label for the reality Jesus describes. The sermon should explain the reality first: the Father gives sunshine and rain to people across moral categories, and Luke says He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

Why does Jesus call it “his sun”?

The wording emphasizes divine ownership and agency. The ordinary created world belongs to the Father and continually bears witness to His provision.

24. Pastoral and Editorial Guardrails

- Do not ridicule the woman whose statement inspired the study or anyone who has used the familiar expression in the same way.
- Do not imply that every reference to rain in Scripture is a blessing. Context governs each passage.
- Do not allow the sermon to end as a correction of a popular saying. Move toward enemy love and family resemblance.
- Do not equate material blessing with divine approval or saving grace.
- Do not preach enemy love in a way that pressures someone to remain in danger or conceal wrongdoing.
- Do not present love for enemies as the means by which salvation is earned.
- Do connect God’s patience with the call to repentance and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

25. Final Commentary Conclusion

Matthew 5:45 is not primarily a proverb about indiscriminate hardship. It is a revelation of the Father’s generosity. He gives life-sustaining provisions to the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. The rain is a blessing received by people who have not earned it.

That interpretation raises a more difficult question than the familiar saying. Will the children of God display the character of their Father when dealing with people who oppose them? Will they bless rather than curse, do good rather than retaliate and pray rather than nurture revenge?

The sermon begins with rain outside and a familiar phrase. It ends at the cross, where God loved those who were His enemies. The final issue is not only whether the congregation understands the rain. It is whether those who call God Father will love like the God who sends it.