

# “A Tall Order” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Independence Day (Observed) July 3, 2022

- I. **Matthew 5:48** - <sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
- II. **Perfect.**
  - a. That is the highest standard of anything.
    - i. Jesus tells us to be perfect in our Gospel reading today, and I’m sure some of you are thinking that’s a tall order... even, that’s impossible!
    - ii. Not only that, but you may have even heard me say that no one is perfect... we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)
    - iii. It seems much more reasonable to say something like, “You all need to strive for perfection... strive for the perfection of your heavenly Father.”
  - b. I’ve heard it said around 12 step meetings, “progress, not perfection.”
    - i. The idea is we can get so caught up in getting it just right that we stop doing things altogether.
    - ii. Especially if someone is working the steps of AA, they will often feel like they missed something, or didn’t do it right.
    - iii. Some people might give up if they were told to do everything perfect...
    - iv. Progress, not perfection means that a person desiring sobriety can only do so much given the circumstances, and they trust that God will continue to work in them through the process.
  - c. Certainly God calls us to holiness... as He says in Leviticus 19:2, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy,” and Deuteronomy 18:13, “You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.”
    - i. If God the Father expects us to be holy and blameless, Jesus is only repeating the words spoken 1500 years before He was born.
    - ii. But rather than thinking of Jesus saying it like this... “You better be perfect or else...” which weighs on us heavily...
    - iii. Consider it this way, “God wants more than anything for you to be complete and perfect in the way you love others... just like He is!”
  - d. By the way, how did God the Father love others?
    - i. For one, He consistently and patiently stayed with His chosen people, the Israelites, through centuries of sinful behavior.
    - ii. Not only that, but God didn’t require a pound of our flesh for His gift of saving grace to us...He took it from His Son Jesus.
      1. In fact, it says in Romans 5:10, “while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son...”
      2. God chose to reconcile us, to forgive us through Jesus, in spite of our sinful nature...

- 3. Even though we were enemies, He loved us.
- e. As Christians, the ones He chose to forgive and love, we are able to share that love in a world of God's enemies.
- III. **Jesus turns our freedoms upside down today.**
  - a. He uses the example of loving those who love us.
  - b. Now, I doubt Jesus was ever sarcastic, but this might be a time we could imagine it...
    - i. So, you love the ones who love you? Well hallelujah! Don't break your arm patting yourself on the back...
      - 1. Even the despised of all society can do that – but here's something to consider – love your enemies.
    - ii. Wait... who loves their enemies? God! That's who.
    - iii. That, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is the perfect love of God to which He calls us... and wants us to be mature and complete in this same love.
  - c. God gave us freedom in Christ – as Galatians 5 says – but don't use your freedom to keep on doing what the flesh wants.
    - i. Our flesh wants to toss our enemies out of a moving car
    - ii. Our worldly desires are purely selfish and could care less about the other guy
    - iii. We see the "other side" – whoever that might be – and we look at them with disdain.
      - 1. Just read a few Facebook posts about the abortion issue, the Supreme Court, the liberals and conservatives... and people see the other side as enemies.
    - iv. What does Jesus call us to do? Love.
- IV. **What is love?**
  - a. It's not the sappy, romantic love... or when we like something.
  - b. Love is not so much an emotion as it is mindset... even a choice.
    - i. Actually, you don't even have to like the other person to still love them... to do things for their good.
    - ii. Love is a decision to give of ourselves like God was willing to give for us... more than for our basic needs, but even for our salvation and eternal life.
  - c. Jesus says that God cares for the evil and the unjust, just like He did for us before we came to faith.
  - d. God chooses to love by action.
    - i. I cannot imagine the brutality and hate that was spewed out at our Savior Jesus leading up to and while on the cross.
    - ii. Without mercy, He was beaten and mocked... tortured to the point of death... and forced to carry His cross to His own execution.

iii. And what is the response to all of this? Jesus words seeking forgiveness and life for His enemies!

1. “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” Luke 23:24

2. That is love... not only a willingness to die for our sins, but also a willingness to reconcile ALL people to God.

e. God is perfect, yes, but our faith is the starting point for our tall order to be perfect also... through faith we can...

V. **Live out the perfection of God’s love!**

a. “God wants more than anything for you to be complete and perfect in the way you love others... just like He is!”

b. We are free.

c. We are called right by God.

d. We are filled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

e. When we go out to love others it is not about their worthiness or merit... it’s not about qualifying them...

f. In fact, they might be the worst of the worst, but Jesus says pray for them... love them.

i. People who are hating Christians and hating the God we stand for... they need our prayers and love.

ii. People who are constantly rioting and destructive – even attacking churches need our prayers and love.

iii. People we disagree with completely – especially in today’s political climate – they need our prayers and love.

g. At some point, when you continue to pray for and love these people, the Christ in you will impact them, or the people around them.

h. We are free to act like the world does – getting even, being selfish, ignoring the needs of others – but when people see the way of Christ through us, God’s perfect love shines through.

i. A few years ago, many of you watched the trial of a police officer who walked into her apartment after a long shift, only to find two black men on the couch...

i. She shot one of them thinking they were intruders – but the problem was she was on the wrong floor... her apartment was upstairs.

ii. At the trial, the surviving brother who witnessed this terrible shooting tearfully explained that if it were up to him, he would not sentence her to prison... and that he forgives her.

iii. She asked if she could hug him, and they embraced in front of the court – and tears flowed because this man forgave in the name of Jesus.

iv. In contrast to the world’s ways, when people see this kind of love, they see Jesus in us.

- j. We pray for and love even our enemies so that all people may know that we are children of the heavenly Father...
  - i. That they may give thanks that there really is a God in this world.
  - ii. So, be perfect in your love just like our Father's love is perfect! amen