

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Mark Twain wrote these words: “It ain’t the parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts I do understand.”

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” “Give to everyone who begs from you and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.”

Raise your hand if you cannot understand what Jesus is commanding.

That’s what I thought. We can understand what Jesus is asking – but I want no part of doing what he is commanding. It would be marvelous if my faith and your faith were so strong that Jesus’ words would be our way. In a few moments we are going to sing, “Goodness is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hate; light is stronger than darkness; life is stronger than death: victory is ours, victory is ours, through God who loves us. Victory is ours, victory is ours through God who loves us.”

I believe in the words of the song – when the end of history comes, goodness and love and light and life will win and evil and hate and darkness and death will all be thrown into a lake of fire. God wins – that is how the story ends. I believe that. But an illustration that I first heard from a pastor named Edward Marquart comes to mind.

A man strung a rope across the Niagara Falls. A crowd gathered. He asked the people in the crowd, “Do you believe that I can walk out on the rope and go over the falls and come back again?”

The people shouted, “Yes, we believe.” And then he did it.

When he had returned he pointed to a wheelbarrow. “Do you believe that I can push this wheelbarrow out across the falls and back again.” Once more they shouted, “Yes, we believe.” And then he did it.

Then he asked, “Do you believe that I can fill this wheelbarrow with bricks and push it out over that falls and back again? A third time the crowd shouted, “Yes, we believe.” And then he did it.

When he returned he emptied the wheelbarrow and asked, “Now who is willing to ride in the wheelbarrow as I push it on the wire across the falls?”

No one came forward.

Victory is ours – God wins – so easy to sing and say and believe.

So risky to live.

On the night Jesus was betrayed the apostle Peter vowed to Jesus, “Even if I must die with you I will never deny you Lord.” But then came the moment – Peter was warming himself at a fire outside the palace where Jesus was on trial. A young girl asked him, “Are you with Jesus?” This was the moment for Peter to get into the wheelbarrow – Peter said, “I swear to God I do not know Jesus.” Yet when Jesus was raised from the dead who did Jesus seek out – ask to care for his lambs? Peter.

There is hope for you and me even if we have refused to ride in the wheelbarrow.

Jesus once said, “With humans it is impossible but with God all things are possible.” He was talking about wealthy people who love their money more than they love Jesus. He could have been speaking about someone like me or you when we are afraid to turn the other cheek or give to the one who begs.

“Goodness is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hate; light is stronger than darkness; life is stronger than death: victory is ours, victory is ours, through God who loves us. Victory is ours, victory is ours through God who loves us.

Victory will be yours, is yours already through Christ.

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” “Give to everyone who begs from you and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.”

“With humans it is impossible but with God all things are possible.” Amen.