

Matthew 5:43-47

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?

Luke 6:27-34

²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

Jerry White was running right on schedule, as he hopped into his car Saturday morning – right on “his schedule” – in other words, going to cut it close to being late. He pulled the gear shift into drive, hastily looked both ways and pulled out quickly onto the street. It was just a thirty minute drive to work, if he met no obstacles, and his shift at the radio station did not start for another 34 minutes. “No problem,” he thought, and he might be able to shave a minute or so off the drive time.

He opened the console, pulled out the rechargeable electric razor, and shaved as he drove, and as he said his morning prayers. He was a champion multi-tasker, and he surely would not want to begin his shift behind the WIBT microphone without having prayed. He needed that divine connection to sustain him as he represented the WIBT owners and Jesus to the world.

Jerry was in his fourth year at WIBT, his third radio talk show gig, since he began right out of college. He had received a double major: communications and Bible/Religion. He originally had planned on going to seminary, until he had that summer job at the little radio station in his college town. Then he fell in love with the air waves. And, he WAS good, too.

WIBT – his third station in an upward market spiral. He was only 31, and he was pretty sure that God would bless him with a major market gig before he was 35. Then

he could settle down, find the right woman, have some children, and live the abundant, blessed life.

WIBT. Well, I Believe, Therefore... where the music was pleasant to hear and the talk as smooth as the scripture itself.

Ownership, management and staff were all Christian – they took care of one another, and saw their work as ministry. Their task, in a rough and tumble world, was to provide an alternative to the consumeristic, me-centered culture. They didn't preach; they didn't try to convert; they just provided the kind of sound that good Christian folks would be comfortable playing in the background, along with a place for folks to call in to discuss contemporary issues facing Christians. The music was not too conservative – no Mormon Tabernacle or Tennessee Ernie Ford – but light and upbeat, ranging from his parents' stuff: Amy Grant and Steven Curtis Chapman, to more contemporary artists like Matthew West, Unspoken, Toby Mac, and Natalie Grant.

But where Jerry really excelled was in his talk show. People called in asking him for advice. And whatever their problems, somehow he always managed to be able to give them 2 minutes of air time and fix them. 40 seconds to hear their problem, 20 – 30 seconds of Q & A, and then in a minute, he could lay out the way that Jesus would be able to fix their life. He was, in his own very objective opinion, quite amazing.

He slid behind the microphone this morning, with 35 seconds to spare. Barbie handed him a cup of hot coffee. He pulled up his computer driven Bible, so he could quickly find scriptural references to season his talk show, and he was ready to go. 20-seconds left. A quick prayer to connect him to Jesus, and 3-2-1 he was live.

“Good morning Asheville. This is Jerry White of WIBF, here to share the next four hours with you, as you go through your Saturday morning. We've got all the music to light up your soul and all the talk to smooth away whatever is troubling you. Sit back, settle in, and come to Jesus. Amen. Here's a new tune from Toby Mac. Listen as he helps us understand that everyone we meet has a gift to bring us. We'll come back with our first caller. [and cut to music.]”

And now, let's hear from Becky in Spartanburg. What's going on in Becky's world?

Good morning Jerry. I'm so glad to talk with you. I've got a decision to make. I'm going on a trip to the beach in a few weeks. And I've got six really close friends that all want to go with me. But the beach condo I'm using only has enough room for four of us. How can I choose which ones to take, and how do I keep my other friends from getting angry that I didn't select them?

Wow, Becky, that could be tough. You want to have a good time, and you don't want to make trouble. Sometimes the best way for a Christian to handle life's problems is to think outside the box. [Jerry was punching in word search on his Bible Computer, as he talked.] And when I want to think outside the box, the two places I find most helpful are (1) scripture, and (2) talking to God, Himself – in prayer. Now, I want you to listen to this scripture:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

So, here's what I'd do, if I were you. You've been blessed to have usage of a beach condo. There are lots of folks who don't have a home to live in, let alone a vacation place at the beach. You're don't work for the IRS, do you, Becky?

[Giggling] "No. I'm a college student."

That's what I thought. OK, Becky, since you're not one of those tax collectors Jesus talks about, this is what I want you to do. You go down to the Work Release Center there in Spartanburg. I want you to go there and let Jesus lead you to one or two folks there, who would never be able to repay you for a vacation to the beach, and I want you to give them the dates of your vacation, and invite them to come with you. Then you go to your friends and ask them which one of them would like to go with you and your new friends.

That way your friends can to solve your problem for you, AND you can have a vacation like Jesus would want you to take.

Really, Jerry? Do you think that's a good idea?

Becky, would I have told you so if I didn't know so. That's what Jesus would want you to do. Now, you call in to ol' Jerry on WIBT (I Believe Therefore) Radio when you get back, and let me know how this Jesus vacation went. Alright?

OK, Jerry, I will.

And that's pretty much how a whole shift would go. Jerry loved it. He'd spend four hours after his shift listening to Christian music and picking for the next day that which he thought best captured the Spirit of Jesus, and then during his four hour shift, he'd play good music and give good advice.

And they paid him right well to do it.

It's a shame that other talk show hosts didn't have "IT" like he did. He was going to make it to the top and serve Jesus as he rode the ride. Not a bad life.

It was another ordinary day, two months later in July, when Jerry took a call from Walter in Spartanburg.

Good morning, Walter in Spartanburg. Having a good day with Jesus; how about you?

Is this Jerry, from W- I'm Better Than You?

Whoa. Hold on there, Walter. This is WIBT. "I believe therefore." What's on your mind?

Well, Jerry, I thought the WIBT stood for "Well, I'm Better Than"

Jerry remained cool. Every now and then, you get a crackpot. But he was good at talking them down. **OK, Walter, what's on your mind.**

Well, I just wanted to call in and introduce myself. I'm Walter, and I work for

the North Carolina State Tax Department. It's just a job, that's all. And my daughter, Becky called in here a few weeks back. You talked to her about the vacation I'd bought her for a graduation present. I'd saved all year long to be able to afford this trip for her.

Well, thanks to you, Mr. "Jerry I'm Better Than the Tax Collector," my daughter took two complete strangers on vacation with her, so she wouldn't be like one of those tax collectors. All because you said so. And she got beat up by these thugs at the beach and, well, I can't tell you what all they did to her. And so she ended up in the hospital for three weeks. And I just wanted to call in and thank you for your "Well, I'm Better Than" advice. That's all, Jerry. Have a blessed day!

Buzzzzzz. Jerry sat there. Dead phone line buzzing. He didn't know what to say. He was paralyzed. Nothing like this had ever happened. His engineer realized that something was very wrong, so she began to play "Lift My Life Up," by Unspoken.

By the time the song ended, Jerry White the consummate professional had recovered. And he'd even found a piece of scripture to read. It's our real Gospel lesson appointed for today. He read it over the air:

[Luke 18:9] [Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

And then he said to all his radio listeners. **Lord, please forgive me. Walter, Becky, please forgive me. Lord, please forgive me. This is Jerry White, for WIBT, signing off.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.