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Showing Love Toward our Enemies: Jesus, Our Model to Live By

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One of the most interesting and captivating miracles of the bible concerns the healing of the centurion's servant by Jesus the Christ (Matthew 8:5-13). The centurion was an officer in the Roman army, and the historical record indicates that tension, which often led to violence, existed between the authorities of Rome and the early Christian and Jewish communities. Christians would not adhere to the religious traditions or customs of Rome; therefore, they were often killed by those who were in authority. Jesus understood the hostile and complex relationship between the dominant and subordinate cultures of his day, yet he said to the centurion: "... Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, do be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour (Matthew 8:13)." The Romans were oppressive toward the early church, and Jesus could have ignored the request of the centurion. Also, Jesus

could have entertained the centurion's request, but refused to heal his servant. Instead of allowing to the power of hate to inform and guide his action, Jesus employed the power of love to help someone who represented an enemy to the early church. Jesus acknowledged that Christians will have enemies; however, he said: "... 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 (Matthew 5:44)."

I believe that most people have enemies. We may not always acknowledge these people as enemies; however, by the way they have treated us, they have definitely identified themselves as enemies toward us. Some people have mistreated you and I for personal gain. Others have simply found pleasure, delight or a sense of satisfaction in doing harm to us. In the book of Matthew, Jesus provides

us with a realist and holistic model of showing love toward our enemies. When we have the opportunity to harm them as they have harmed us, Jesus says that we should try to help them or show love toward them. Dr. Martin Luther King affirms the sayings of Jesus for he reminds us that only love can conquer hate. Jesus also reminds us that we should pray for them. Our enemies are victimizers but they are often victims themselves. We may pray that God would bless them, help them, heal them, deliver them, change them and restore them. We may also pray the prayer that Laban prayed after the disagreement and deception occurred between he and Jacob: "... (may) the Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another (Genesis 31:49)." Let us continue to embrace the ideal of love as we encounter our enemies wherever they may be found.