

Rochester Chinese Christian Church

ECHO

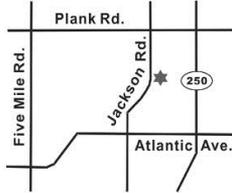
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Rochester Chinese Christian Church
羅城華人基督教會



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English Sunday Worship
9:30 am

中文主日學
上午九時三十分

English Sunday School
11:15 am

中文主日崇拜
上午十一時十五分

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**fellowship, bible study
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Rochester Chinese Christian Church West
羅城西區華人基督教會

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主日崇拜
Sunday Worship
下午 4:00 - 5:15 pm

主日學
Sunday School
下午 5:20 - 6:15 pm





A Gospel-Centered Fellowship

Pastor Mitchell Herring

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Rom. 1:16

Ever since our sermon series through the book of Daniel, we have mentioned from time to time the idea that as Christians we are aliens and strangers in the world, a world that for the most part does not take kindly to the message of the gospel as it is revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. As early as the 1960s and 70s, British pastor and theologian John Stott already observed, "Having largely lost the Christian faith, the western world has lost the Christian ethic also. Society is now confessedly pluralistic and permissive. The institution of the church survives, but is regarded by most people as a relic from the past, an outmoded structure like the superstitions to which it clings" (Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, p.13). Perhaps we may add that the church is now also regarded as bigoted and intolerant as well. We are indeed strangers and aliens! Therefore today it is as imperative as ever that we seek to be genuine about who we are in Christ, and what the purpose of the church is. We need to be a "gospel-centered fellowship."

1. First, we need to understand the gospel ourselves, so that we really know what we believe, and that it really means something to us. The content of the gospel is Christ Himself, his life and His work (1 Cor. 15:1-5). It is all about Christ, the eternal Word of God become flesh, so that all God has to say to mankind, He says in and through Christ.

The essential definition of the gospel is "the good news of God reconciling us to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, imputing our sin to Christ, and Christ's perfect righteousness to us as a gift; and received through repentance and faith." This is expressed most clearly in passages such as 2 Cor. 5:21: "*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (Cf. Rom. 3:21-24). This is absolutely necessary, because sin has so estranged us from God so as to reach to every part of

our being, like ink diffused in water. In this condition, even our best efforts cannot measure up to God's righteousness, because they will be contaminated by sin in some way. And we have to admit, we are not always at our best! Therefore trusting in our own merits or righteousness is a fatal mistake. The apostle Paul sensed this deeply. He previously boasted in his human achievements and righteousness, until he came to see their utter bankruptcy before God. That is why he was willing to suffer the loss of all things in order to be found in Christ, *"not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God..."* (Phil. 3:7-9). Reading through Philippians 3, you see just how keenly he felt this. The righteousness that God puts to our account is rock-solid, unmovable and reliable, because it is His own righteousness, as embodied in the life of Christ. That is why we trust Him alone for salvation. That is why His name is "Jesus," which means "the LORD is our salvation." God provides what we could never provide for ourselves. That is the gospel.



2. Second, we need to live the gospel (Phil. 1:27). The same Holy Spirit who creates faith in us to believe also begins to change our lives according to the righteousness of Christ. The new life He gives us will begin to show itself. There is the desire to read the Bible and pray and the desire for true worship; a delight in the things of Christ and in sharing in them with others; a hunger and thirst for righteousness; and looking to the future with the expectation of Christ's return.

This change is of supernatural origin through the work of the Holy Spirit. It does not come naturally. From a human perspective, this righteousness may even seem counter-intuitive.

Consider a few examples: *"...but whoever will be great among you shall be your servant"* (Mk. 10:43-45); *"...whoever will save his life shall lose it"* (Mt. 16:25); *"...never take your own revenge..."* (Rom. 12:17, 19); *"...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you..."*(Lk. 6:27-28); *"...for when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Cor. 12:10); and *"...with humility of mind esteem one another as more important than yourselves."* (Phil. 2:3). This change in one's life is a supernatural phenomenon, which can effect such change as we see in Paul, *from "breathing threats and murder..."* (Acts (9:1) to *"love is patient and kind..."!*

It is the life and righteousness of the Kingdom of God, and of the age to come. The old nature in us will often resist (Rom. 7:14ff). That is why we seek to *"walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh"* (Gal. 5:16). This implies that the flesh still remains, so that we need the Holy Spirit, who by His presence reminds us and enables us to "over-ride" our natural responses with the Word of God instead in a particular situation.

3. Finally, a gospel-centered fellowship needs to proclaim the gospel. This will be by both active witness (Acts 1:8) and in the effect of our lives (Mt. 5:13-16). Not that these are so different, but are actually just two aspects of one witness to Christ that go hand in hand. This is not just the mission of the church as an institution, with its programs and activities, but even more so a mission of the church as an organic entity, by the lives of her individual members in their different stations in life.

This follows naturally from our new belonging in Christ, and is a result of it: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"* (1 Pt. 2:9). And it is motivated by the love of Christ, (Mt. 9:36-38), desire for His commendation (Mt. 25:21), and the desire for a part in a mission whose results will never pass away, but have eternal value that transcends this world.

In Rom. 1:16, the apostle Paul says, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..."* We need to seek the Lord for a genuineness that will bear fruit for the gospel in both conversation and

lifestyle, to live the gospel in a manner that is evident to others. In this way we demonstrate that the church is not an "outmoded structure," but a dynamic and relevant fellowship; that the gospel is not a "superstition to which we cling," but a transcendent, life-transforming reality; and that we are not bigoted and intolerant, but hold to the righteousness and truth of Christ in love and humility.



“I Am Fine.”

Pastor Peter Ho

What would be a comforting text message that parents can ever receive from their far away children? It is “I am fine.” The status of this text message is going to be elevated to *the* most comforting text message when it comes at a time of catastrophe from a loved one who lives in a disaster area, such as the Boston marathon bombing or the recent tornado alleys of Texas and Oklahoma. What do parents do as soon as that text message is received? The external reaction is going to vary from person to person, from hysterically jumping up and down to a stoic smile, but the internal reaction is usually similar: a huge sigh of relief, as in a dislodging of a thousand-pound load from one’s back.

Why would such a brief message create such a huge psychological impact? I would venture to guess that it is because all parents are concerned about the well-being of their children. In general, parents will do all they can to protect their children, yet there are areas where their hands are tied. As a result, they can only keep their fingers crossed, hoping for the best to happen to their children. No wonder the good news is such a huge relief to them, not knowing when they will desperately look forward to read or hear the same reassuring message again in

the future. The sense of helplessness, if not anxiety, just cannot be swept under the rug. In fact, it stands out so boldly before us all as our loved ones are scattered all over the country, if not the world, and every now and then, catastrophes happen here and there.

What are our options? On a horizontal level, or humanly speaking, we do need to continue to hear from or say to one another that we *are* fine. It is a clear manifestation of our bondedness to and involvement with one another rather than aloofness and detachment. It is a broadened understanding of God's pronouncement *that "it is not good that the man should be alone"* (Gen. 2:18a). It is the foundation of a loving and caring community (the church), which looks not only to one's own interests, but also to the interests of others (Phil. 2:4). It is asking of one another, "How are you *really* doing?" and not being satisfied with pat answers.

As a matter of fact, in our day to day interactions, the polite answer, "I am fine, thank you!" or "I am fine, and you?" is what we encounter most of the time. It could be that the inquirer does not really mean to probe, much less to show any real concern, but asks "how are you?" as a way to greet a person in his or her path. It could also be that the answer is given because the inquirer is not the right person, or the timing is not right for one to pour out one's heart as the question is asked. "I am fine" has then morphed into a standard response which is devoid of meaning. One could probably say it even with an expression of pain, confusion, or loss.

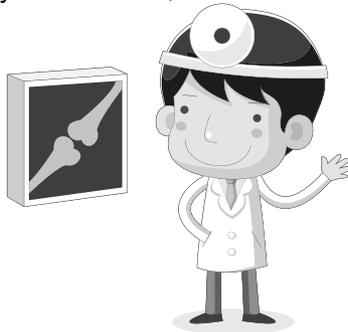
The local church as God-designed, loving and caring community is certainly meant for a believer to be open and truthful with regard to his or her deepest needs, rather than to declare blandly that he or she is fine. This is portrayed clearly when the body metaphor is used for the church in such a way *that "the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together"* (1 Cor. 12:25a-26).

Yet the local church has grown from first century house churches to present day mega-churches, and in-betweens, where it is not at all unusual for believers to feel alone with people around. It is

not uncommon, either, for believers to deal with their private sins and to cope with their personal sufferings while other members of the body have no idea what is going on with this member. It is therefore important for believers to be a part of a close-knit group within the church, where members feel free to admit that they are *not* fine, are then led to be accountable to and care for one another in a way that is deeper than the mere surface level.

If saying “I am fine” to one’s own care group is, in a way, refusing to be in one body with the rest of the group, as well as a denial of one’s neediness before the group, it is even more so when, on a vertical level, it is blatantly said before God. Saying “I am fine” to God could either mean “I don’t need you,” or “You can’t help me,” or “Leave me alone,” just as saying the same to the group, except that it now carries much more serious consequences. In practice, most Christians do not say it explicitly, but it is certainly implied in what they say or do, whether they realize it or not.

“I am fine” is, first of all, a direct rebuttal against God’s assessment of our dire condition. God has decided from the very beginning of human sinfulness that our spiritual condition would require nothing less than his Anointed One (Christ) to come into the world to remedy. This alone is an indication of the seriousness of our dire spiritual condition. When Jesus did come, he made it clear to those who think “they are fine” by using a medical metaphor, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”* (Matt. 9:12). In other words, he was saying, “If you were fine, I need not have come.”



Do you say to your doctor, “I am fine,” when the doctor’s diagnosis says otherwise? Do you refuse to take the prescribed medications because you think you are fine? Do you realize the seriousness of your spiritual condition as God sees it? If you are

not aware of your current spiritual condition, you need to be reminded of the proverbial frog in the kettle. The frog will jump out of the kettle if you put it in a kettle filled with boiling water. Yet, if the kettle is filled with tap water and has just been put over the stove, the frog will think that it is fine, and will stay in the kettle until it is too late. God knows you and I are not fine, so he sent Jesus Christ the great Physician to “fix” our spiritual condition by restoring our relationship to God our Creator.

“I am fine” is, secondly, a toddler’s declaration of independence from the parents. Just like toddlers, you and I are far too fragile to live on our own in this violent and brutal world. Yet, when we say to God, “I am fine,” we are in effect saying that we are self-sufficient, an attribute which belongs to no other creature but God alone. So, like any parents, God lovingly says, “My child, you are sufficient only in me.” Just as he has sent Jesus Christ into the world to restore our relationship with him, he continues to guide us to walk according to his will.

To use the medical metaphor again, a physician once told me that some of his high blood pressure patients stopped taking their medications once their blood pressure was under control. Sure enough, they were soon back in his office because their blood pressure went up again. In order that their blood pressure continues to be under control, they cannot afford to stop taking their medications. In the same way, we were once separated from God and living in the world without hope. Now that we are restored to God through Jesus Christ, we want to be closer to Christ and more reliant on him on a daily basis, rather than to put him at arm’s length.

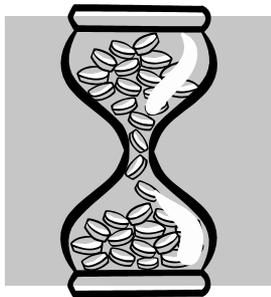
The moment we say to God, “I am fine,” we are straining our relationship with him. We are in effect saying that I don’t need your daily provision any longer, I don’t need the forgiveness of Jesus Christ any more, and I don’t need the guidance of the Holy Spirit in my life. On the contrary, a true believer would say on a daily basis, “I need you, Lord Jesus!” so that he or she could truly say, “I am fine, in Christ!”

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

Jackson Kwok

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager, found in Luke 16:1-15, warrants a more complete study and explanation than other parables, given its unorthodox nature. Most of the characters in Jesus' parables are people who commit themselves to upstanding actions, and in so doing demonstrate the principles which Jesus intends to convey. The alternative to this affirmative presentation is usually seen in characters that have clearly committed wrongdoings, and what follows is a reprimanding of their behavior.

What distinguishes this parable are the obviously unlawful and deceitful actions of the protagonist, who reduces the burdens of his master's debtors with the selfish purpose of building favors for himself as a safety net for his dismissal. The master discovers his servant's plan, but instead of the normal reaction of anger that the reader would expect, he instead commends the manager for his shrewdness. Neither does Jesus chastise the manager, but instead continues right into his lesson, discussing the handling of worldly wealth and commanding his followers to use worldly wealth to make friends and a place for themselves in eternal dwellings.



By any measure, this parable is confusing; Jesus seems to be supporting or, at the very least, glossing over the manager's very obvious fraud, and some might even say that there is in this Parable an encouragement to use money as a way to earn entrance into eternal life, contrary to many other passages which hold up faith as the only key to salvation.

Though puzzling at first glance, several interpretations of this parable exist, each with their own merits. For the sake of brevity this article will only summarize a few of these viewpoints, seeking to present an understanding of the story relative to the time period, as well as clarifying several passages and the overall message that Jesus is presenting.

Even without knowledge of Jesus' audience or the historical context in which he is speaking, the Parable of the Shrewd Manager still expresses a very valuable message. Verse 8b of Luke 16 states that "the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light." The steward was wise when it came to his selfish needs, developing a method of deceiving his master. Jesus proclaims that those who are immersed in a material lifestyle are wise concerning the sinful ways of this earth. In comparison, the wisdom of those in the light is lacking with regard to the life beyond this earth.

Jesus follows this observation with a claim in verse 10 that *"whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."* When considered alongside his statement in verse 8b, Jesus' parable can be interpreted as a demonstration of what non-believers consider to be wisdom, the shrewd actions of the manager to save his own skin. Following this illustration, there is a comparison between those that deal in the world and those that are in the light, understood here to mean believers. This wisdom of the physical world is more prevalent than the believers' wisdom of the world to come, but it is this godly wisdom which is infinitely more important.

The wealth of this world are not "true riches," Jesus proclaims, and those who are not trustworthy with these earthly assets, who commit themselves to the worldly wisdom of selfishness and greed, are not prepared to cope with the power and significance of God's wisdom, for verse 15b states that *"what is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."* And so this explanation leaves the reader with the understanding that they must be responsible with their treasures, to use their possessions as a means of furthering God's kingdom, committing what is less

important to the cause which is more important, and in so doing replacing the world's wisdom with God's wisdom.

Such an interpretation, while valuable in its own right, neglects the historical context of a first-century Jesus preaching to his audience. The Pharisees, in particular, are mentioned by name in verse 14 as a group *“who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.”* With this in mind, the entire parable can be viewed as an allegory of the Pharisees, the stewards in the story, and their relationship with God, or the master. God is the provider of Israel, and the power of the Pharisees is derived from his provisions, tasking them with the duty of managing God's household, much as the steward was responsible for his master's household.

But the Pharisees were actively shirking their responsibilities as go-betweens for the people and God, using their wealth and power to further their own personal desires and agendas. In the parable, the steward, when called upon to give an account of stewardship, wisely blesses the tenants and reduces their burdens; for these actions he is commended by the master. But the Pharisees are condemned for placing too much value on money and for the mismanagement of God's household, with Jesus proclaiming in verse 13 that *“no servant can serve two masters... you cannot serve both God and money.”* Jesus demands of his listeners, and of the Pharisees in particular, that they use their wealth to bless others on this earth, to use such God-given gifts for God-driven purposes.

The steward, though he may be an unrighteous gentile, still deserves more praise than those “sons of light”, the Pharisees who are called to act on God's behalf. In an attempt to curry favors, the steward was shrewd enough to use his master's wealth to reduce the burdens of his fellow servants. But the Pharisees, for all their knowledge and power and understanding of the law, have squandered God's wealth and have done nothing to manage God's kingdom and bless others. Jesus, of course, would rather that we all act as good stewards in managing the kingdom of God on earth. But in comparison to the Pharisees, even an unjust steward who slashes the burden of debtors is more deserving of praise.

To tackle a complex parable in such a short space lends itself to necessary brevity, and these explanations are, unfortunately, cursory at best. But the pursuit of biblical understanding does not end here: with the coming of Christ the believers have taken the Pharisees' place as sons of light, God's stewards in Jesus. And our role as managers comes back to faith in God and understanding of the scriptures. Faith is the source of our salvation, and it is our drive in the pursuit of his heavenly goals.

In the Bible we find our basis for God's kingdom, our understanding of his commands and exhortations. And from this knowledge our faith finds direction and commitment: the commitment of believers to forwarding God's purpose as revealed through his holy word, the commitment to action, and the commitment towards being the righteous steward which he has called us to become.

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The Lord Removes Sadness from My Life

Dona Watkins



Several years back I had a dream depicting a sinful flaw. In the dream, I was desperately trying to remove several inches of blue make-up from my face. Inquiring with my husband, Michael, about what the dream meant, he said, "That's easy – a blue face – stop being blue."

I was stunned, “Really, I have a problem being sad?”

Lovingly confronted with this correction, I couldn't deny it. I had a general disposition of being sad throughout life. While accomplished professionally, family and friends relations and even in faith toward God, I battled being sad. While believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for His truths, contrary to scripture, I did not have inner peace and contentment. I prayed for years for rest, joy of the Lord, peace, but it escaped me.

After the dream, I increased my prayers to seek God for a solution. Then I had a second dream about a book. No title and author were given. Yet the dream directed me to research an ancestor on my father's mother's side and suggested the book was at the Library of Congress.

Sure enough it was. Through genealogy research and an online search at Washington D.C. Library of Congress website, I learned a book existed about overcoming sadness by one of my ancestors. A brother to my grandfather 13 times removed, William Bridge, preached sermons now in book form inspired by Psalm 42.

Psalm 42:5, *“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.”*

Bridge's work was used by God to remove iniquity and the sins of being blue. Bridge single handedly instructed me on how to satisfy and defeat the temptation of being sad.

This book is medicine for any soul battling depression or disappointments of life. Bridges exposes ways of thinking and the know-how to spiritual, emotional and mentally overcome dismay, disappointment, agitation, dejection, failure, discouragement, sadness or depression. Given he was a pastor the writings are actually 13 sermons from the year 1648 preached in Stepney, London.

As Bridge writes, "the great work of faith is to bring God and the soul together."

Many different forms of temptation cause someone to yield to sadness. The book exposes these. Bridge not only exposes a correct understanding of the topic of being down but provides the biblical remedies. The ministry of the Word of God to achieve freedom is powerful. Now I overcome life's challenges without robbing myself of peace and do this through the good Lord's grace and mercy, in His truth.

Having been a born-again Christian since 1993, but never reaching the place where my soul was at rest or living in peace, wasn't the Lord's way. But I never understood the roots of my discontent and how to overcome it. Spots and blemishes can be dealt with before the living God as this great work of sanctification under the blood, grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Bridge makes it very practical. Thank God for His revealed Word through my distant cousin, William Bridge. Thank God for His dreams to us, one way He chose to guide me, His daughter. If anyone wants a copy of **A Lifting Up of the Downcast**, let me know. As a tribute to my ancestor, I give free copies, as freely as the LORD has given this freedom to me. It's not an easy read because of the old-style English but promises anyone the keys to unlocking peace, joy and contentment only God can give.

Love for Enemies

Burninglamp4J

LOVE FOR ENEMIES

A day of terror could happen anywhere in the United States. On April 15, during the Boston marathon race, two bombs exploded at the sideline where many people stood watching and cheering the runners cross the finish line. It was supposed to be a joyous and triumphant moment, but when the bombs exploded in the crowd, it shattered their dreams. It was a bloody massacre, killing three innocent spectators and wounding over 200 people.

The Boston police and FBI tracked down the A majority of Americans expressed anger and hate towards them, and they want to bring them to justice.

In these tragic events, we grieve for the victims, but our hearts burn with hatred for the murderers. We desire to spit-out accusations, blame the evildoers and to show no sympathy towards them. Depending upon individuals, our initial reaction toward criminals, or our gut feeling towards them is "hate, revenge or indifference" because criminals sometimes show no remorse for killing their victims. We only sympathize with the victims.

But, Jesus....Jesus was sympathetic to anyone. Even enemies. He tells people to have love for enemies. Why should we love our enemies? What did Jesus mean by this?

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:43-45a) Love your enemy. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for those who persecute them.

When he was crucified and dying on the cross He said aloud, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* He said this when they divided his clothes by casting lots. The soldiers may not care about Jesus. But, Jesus asked his Father to forgive their actions for executing him. Jesus also showed mercy to one of the criminals dying next to him on the cross. One criminal confessed his sins and he prayed for salvation. After he repented, Jesus told him that he will be with him in paradise.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Luke 11:2-4)

I find it interesting that we say this prayer in the church a lot, but, do we take it to heart to ask God to, *"Forgive us our debts, as we*

also have forgiven our debtors?" In another translation, let's go to Luke 11: 4, it reads – *"Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us."* Jesus taught the disciples how to pray and ask the Father to forgive their sins as they also forgive those who sinned against them. This is like a pledge that we promise to God. We must forgive those who sinned against us. Jesus asked us to:

- 1) Love your enemies.
- 2) Pray for your enemies.
- 3) Forgive your enemies.

God sent His Son, Jesus, to love us, to heal us, to teach us and also to forgive us. Jesus came to save the lost. We are the lost. We are enemies of God in our sins. But Jesus died on the cross so that we, who "were still sinners" or "God's enemies," could be forgiven through the reconciliation of Jesus' death. Jesus bled and died to buy our pardon, our sin. Jesus wants us to reconnect with God in a relationship in God's love to man. He wants us to relate to Him, and to one another. This is why he wants us to relate to our enemies. In God's eyes, yes, they are sinners and enemies. But, they must repent and find redemption, so they can come clean to become God's son. We, too, will become sons of God in heaven when we seek to lead the lost, the sinners and the enemies to Christ. What are we to do?

- 4) Relate to enemies.
- 5) Show them mercy and kindness
- 6) Lead them to God's love
- 7) Enemies become Sons of God

God shows no favoritism. *"He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* (Matthew 5: 45). God treats evil people with kindness also. Jesus was also kind to the unrighteous. So, we who are righteous should also show mercy and loving kindness to enemies. A footnote in my Bible says, *"We must love our attackers and desire the best for them."* It may seem like the most challenging thing to do.

Now, let's take this tragic story closer to home. What if the bombs happened in your area and the bombers destroyed your

property? Would you still love the bombers? What if the bomber killed your friend? What if the victims, like little victim was your child killed in the bombing? Would you still love your enemy?

This is a hard saying. It is difficult to come face-to-face with your enemy because it brings up so much hurt and horrible memories. I know that I cannot have the strength or desire to love an enemy if I have been hurt. It isn't easy and it is believed to be true, that forgiving someone takes courage. As a Christian, you have to think how Jesus showed us how he loved His enemies when He was humiliated to death. He prayed for them and then asked God to forgive them. Yes, the person(s) who persecuted you or attacked you may not know what they have done, and so our responsibility is not to turn the other cheek, but to show mercy and to build a bridge between you and the enemy so they can turn from their ways and be saved.

These enemies have done a terrible thing, but they were people like you and me. One was a father. The other was a college student who had dreams of success. But, they have fallen from sin and they shouldn't have to become violent. They bring it to themselves to become this way, to become radicals. I have been following this story and I asked myself what can I do to help? I can pray for enemies to turn from their evil ways.