

Compassion for an Enemy

If you ever tour Washington, D.C., be sure to go to all the traditional sites – like the White House, the Smithsonian and the halls of Congress – but don't miss the Lincoln Memorial.

There is something about standing in the Lincoln Memorial and reading the *Gettysburg Address* and the *Second Inaugural Address* that gives you goosebumps.

One line in the *Second Inaugural* reminds anyone what a caring and compassionate man Lincoln was. He was speaking about the coming end of the Civil War, and he said: "With malice toward none; with charity for all."

Lincoln put this idea into practice on the day that news arrived in Washington that the war was over. A crowd gathered at the White House, and a military band was playing festive music. Lincoln stood on the balcony of the White House and spoke.

Instead of lashing out against the South, he spoke of the horrors of war. He spoke of families getting back together. He spoke of a time of peace.

Then he said, "In a few moments, I want the band to play, and I'm going to tell them what I want them to play."

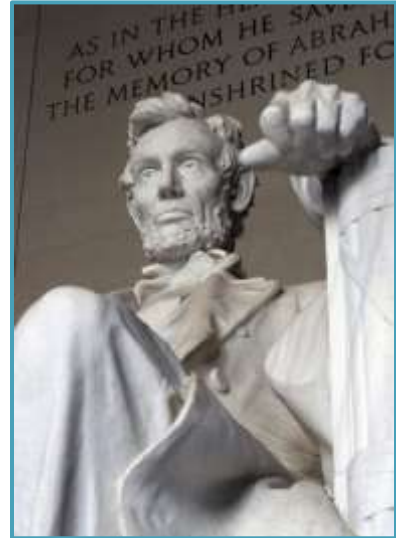
The band, of course, started getting *Battle Hymn of the Republic* ready to play. This had been the theme song of the North throughout the Civil War.

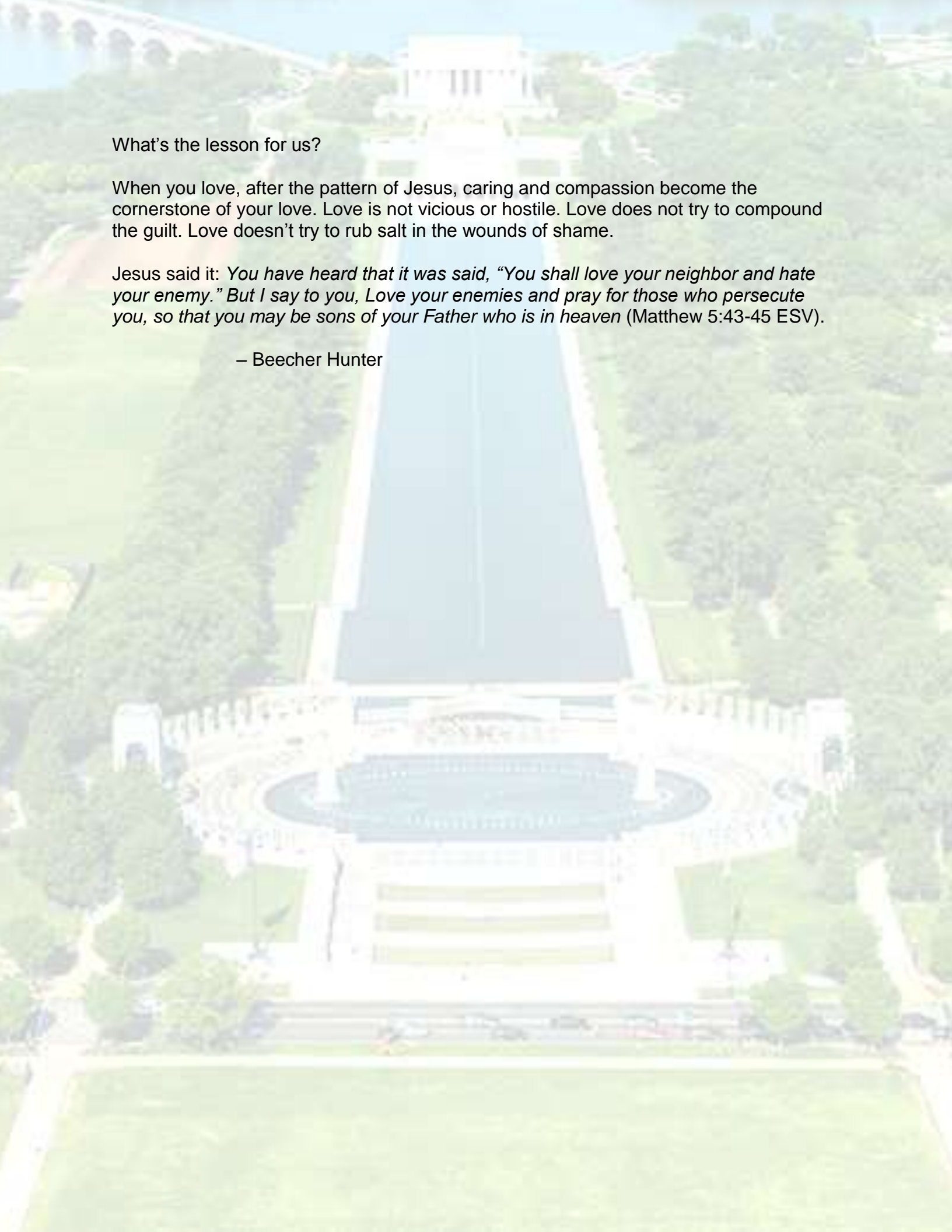
But Lincoln crossed them up. He stood there and declared, "The band will now play the theme song of the people we have called our enemy. They are not our enemies anymore! We are one people again. I want the band to play *Dixie*."

Historians say there was a long, awkward pause. The band didn't have the music to *Dixie*, but they finally got together and played *Dixie*.

Lincoln knew the South was not only hurting because of the horrors of war, but also because of the shame that accompanies defeat. Lincoln was sending a clear signal to the South. Lincoln was telling everyone that there would be no punishment upon the South. Lincoln was saying that the South would be treated with love and compassion.

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What's the lesson for us?

When you love, after the pattern of Jesus, caring and compassion become the cornerstone of your love. Love is not vicious or hostile. Love does not try to compound the guilt. Love doesn't try to rub salt in the wounds of shame.

Jesus said it: *You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:43-45 ESV).*

– Beecher Hunter