

**Message of the Evangelists:
Sermons of Jesus
Matthew 5:38-48**

Intro: Jesus quotes the OT law, and then gives his correction or addition to that law. He stands in contrast to the law in these statements. The King is establishing his moral and legal authority over us as his subjects.

The King instructs us:

I. Break the Bondage of Retaliation—You have heard that it was said, Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:38-39).

A. This is one of the most difficult teachings of Jesus. It has prompted much discussion. It is his engagement of a statement in the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 19-23), Exodus 21:24. Here the principle of justice is laid out clearly: “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...” This “law of retaliation” is given to LIMIT the penalty of personal injury. It is the ancient declaration that the punishment must fit the crime.

This makes sense then and now. We expect that the punishment will fit the crime.

***We are very big on this truth in our culture. America leads the world in rates of incarceration. Here in Louisiana we lock up a greater percentage of our population for a longer period of time than any other state in the union.

New Orleans in particular is the capital of incarceration in America having a larger percentage of inmates than any other city.

B. So this notion of turning the other cheek pushes us into confusion and chaos. We see things devolving, the very wheels of justice falling off. Jesus has taken a central principle of law—the penalty fits the crime—and turned it inside out—“do not resist an evil person.”

C. Folks, that won’t work all by itself. The Bible tells us, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). You have heard the proverb, “All that is necessary for evil to prevail in the world is for good people to do nothing.” This sounds like doing nothing to those who do evil.

This teaching is one of the main reasons that people set aside the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. They discount this teaching by saying it applies only to individuals, not to communities. Or they say that it applies only in the millennium, not in the age of grace. Or they say that it applies only among believers, not in the world.

Jesus has already talked about going to court and even to prison. He has not discarded the penal system of his day or ours. He has suggested that we seek to settle matters man to man rather than going to court. But he has not suggested that courts and law enforcement should be eradicated.

D. So what is Jesus saying here? Jesus is filling the law full. He is expanding it to include the heart. He is pointing to the limits of the law of retaliation.

E. HE IS NOT SUGGESTING INACTION. He is not suggesting passivity. He is suggesting an action, an initiative, that is startling in his own day and in ours. He is telling us that we should not take the eye of someone who has taken ours but instead do good to them.

F. Paul explains this position (he quotes Proverbs 25:21-22) in Romans 12:20-21: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

G. The most powerful force in this universe is not revenge. It is not justice. It is mercy. It is love. This is more powerful than exacting your pound of flesh from the offender. It is more powerful than throwing him in prison until he pays the last penny.

H. We should now take this out of the legal realm and put it in the personal realm where it for certain belongs. Personally, as a follower of Jesus, I cannot be exacting my revenge upon another person. I cannot return evil for evil. I must learn to return evil with good, and so be like my Father in Heaven.

II. Break the Bondage of Materialism—And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you (Matthew 5:40-42).

A. The first word, “tunic,” refers to the garment worn next to the body. The other word, “cloak,” is for the outer garment. Folks, this is all the clothing men generally wore in Israel. To give both the tunic and the cloak leaves the average man naked in the street.

B. This is a literary tool, a hyperbole, used for effect by Jesus. He certainly gained the effect!

C. When INJUSTICE is met with GRACIOUSNESS, God is at work and the possibilities of reconciliation are great.

D. Christ is breaking the yoke of self-interest with this teaching. He is liberating his followers from the dominion of money and possessions. He is setting us free to see human beings in a new light.

III. Break the Bondage of Hatred—43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Conclusion: This is what God has done for us. We are stunned by this truth. It does not fit into our worldly concept of God. We all think of God as just, as dealing evenhandedly. We know that we are lawbreakers.

Our greatest offenses are against God himself. We offend him with our lies, with our language, with our curses and our oaths. We offend him with our dishonesty, our anger, and our verbal barrage of

one another. We must cease and desist with this verbal behavior. We have got to get back to the simplicity of "yes and no" as our word, our promise and our bond.

We were once the enemies of God. But he loved us. And now we have become his friends. How? Through his love.