

Responding to Injustice

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Preacher: Ryan Akers

- [0 : 0 0] We're going to read now from Matthew 5, partway through the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5, again thinking about retaliation and injustice.
- So Matthew 5, and from verse 38. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
- But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.
- And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. This is God's Word.
- Ryan. Thank you to the worship team for that key modulation. So that my voice shouldn't crack because it's loose and ready to go right now.
- [1 : 0 3] We are continuing a series on the Sermon on the Mount. One of the things that we'll talk about sometimes in circles that I'm in is like, if you were king for the day, what would you do? And we usually are talking about if you could control your situation, like how would you orchestrate things?
- Like we'll do this with uni students. So like they're trying to figure out what kind of career they should pursue or a job. It's like, well, if you were king for the day and could do anything you want, like what would you choose?
- And a lot of times the answers that are going to come to our mind that we might give are typically something that's going to make life more enjoyable or at least more comfortable. Definitely less pain and less strain.
- Well, the king in the Sermon on the Mount has actually given us what a beautiful life, as Corey has said, what a life of flourishing looks like.
- The one who's the king for all time has told us what life in the kingdom looks like. And so that's what we're talking about in this series on the Sermon on the Mount. Our passage tonight is one of six passages where Jesus says, you have heard it said, referring to some of the traditions that the Jewish leaders have given.
- [2 : 1 2] But I say to you, and when Jesus is saying that, I say to you, he's actually not giving a new law, like Lewis reminded us a couple of weeks ago, that he's not giving us a new and harder way to live.
- When you read the Sermon on the Mount, you're like, this is impossible. I can't live like this. Like the one who lusts is like committing adultery in his heart. And if I have anger towards my brother, I'm committing murder.
- It's like this is not a life we can live. He's not giving us a new law to obey or making life in the kingdom more difficult. But instead, he's getting at the heart of things and he's teaching as one who has authority.
- In fact, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, you will see in chapter 7, verse 29, that the people were astonished, it said, because he was teaching them as one who had authority.

So he's giving them, this is what life in the kingdom looks like or is to be like. Now, when you approach the Sermon on the Mount, there are a couple of things that you need to understand.

[3 : 13] One is that this was a sermon that was preached all at one time. And we don't know how long it took him to preach this sermon. But when we take parts of this sermon and don't see it in the context of the whole, we can really misunderstand what Jesus is telling us.

So we need to see it as a whole sermon and keep that in mind so that when Jesus says something that seems to us really weird or really hard, we can't just ignore it because he is telling us, for instance, in chapter 7, that he who hears these words and does what it says is like the man who builds his house on the rock.

But if you hear it and don't do it, you're like building your foundation, your house on the sand. So he expects us to obey it, but he wants us to hear the whole sermon and to be able to hear what he is saying life in the kingdom is like as this whole thing.

But also, the second thing would be that when we approach this passage, I mentioned it's one of six passages where Jesus said, you've heard it said, but I say to you, just like in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is getting at the heart of the law.

He's getting at the heart of what God would have his people to do. So keep that in mind when you hear he's giving us the spirit or the intention of the law. So our section tonight, Lewis kind of mentioned, your Bible heading might have retaliation.

[4 : 39] I entitled the sermon Responding to Injustice. A better title might be Responding to Personal Injustice, because that's what Jesus is talking about here.

And he starts out in verse 38, you've heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Now, why was that given in the law?

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? To understand what Jesus is about to tell us, we have to understand why he said that, or why the law said that to begin with. This was something given to the nation of Israel in the law, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, to prevent revenge, retaliation, and excess.

It was actually to prevent chaos from happening. So, for instance, you know, you damaged my eye, therefore I'm going to cut off your arm. Well, then my family member, the other person's family member, is now going to come and take both of your legs.

And then my family member comes and ends a life. It's to prevent all of that from happening. So when it says an eye for an eye, it's basically saying, don't turn this into chaos.

[5 : 52] Don't let this be something that becomes personal revenge and retaliation. But it's actually something that helps society to function as a whole. In fact, many ancient legal codes had this.

It's called the Lex Talionis, or the Law of Retaliation. A very ancient legal code found in many ancient societies. And it was to prevent chaos from happening, or even personal revenge.

However, what is happening, when Jesus says, you have heard it said, he's addressing an error that's happening, the Jewish leaders have done a couple of things with it.

they've, one, turned a negative injunction into a positive one. Meaning, they've basically said, yeah, you should actually do this to people if they've done it to you.

If you have been injured, you have every right to take their eye as well. A tooth has been knocked out, you have every right to take their tooth. And they've used it to actually promote retaliation, revenge, instead of preventing it.

[6 : 55] And then the second thing is, they've encouraged the people to take out justice for themselves. Which, the eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, that was given to the nation of Israel for the judges to make sure that bad things don't happen and society runs properly.

And the Jewish leaders here have made it a matter of personal revenge, retaliation. You have every right to do this. So Jesus comes along the scene, and he says, but I tell you, verse 39, but I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil.

But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Now, this is a passage that pretty much everyone in Western civilization knows this saying about, turn the other cheek.

What is this talking about? What is Jesus saying to us when he says, do not resist the one who is evil? This passage has been one that has been very misinterpreted.

Every commentator kind of happens to pull out something that Tolstoy wrote about that basically said, we shouldn't even have police and judgment systems because we shouldn't resist evil.

[8 : 15] Corey would have probably read Tolstoy after reading that. I just kind of Googled it. So, but basically, that is like completely misunderstanding and misinterpreting what is being said here.

He's talking about personal injustices. And just like Jesus was getting to the heart with these other passages when he said, you've heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you, he who lusts after a woman commits adultery in the heart.

He's getting to the heart right here of what's going on. So what lust is to adultery and what anger is to murder, instead of practicing self-justice, we entrust ourselves to the judge and the one who brings justice to the world.

We're instead of insisting on our own personal rights, we're entrusting ourselves to the giver of rights. God is the judge and vengeance belongs to him. And so Jesus is saying, we're not to avenge ourselves, but entrust ourselves to the one who will bring vengeance for us.

So, do we literally turn the other cheek when someone slaps our right cheek? Before we answer that, what is, when Lewis read that, did anybody find it odd that the passage says that if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, or did we just kind of gloss over that?

[9 : 37] If someone slaps you on the right cheek, like most people are right-handed and if you were left-handed, you were probably back then taught to be right-handed because it was really kind of a faux pas.

If I'm to slap someone, what cheek am I going to slap? The left cheek, right? Tom's figuring it out up here, right? It's the left cheek. But if I backhand you with my right hand, I'm going to hit your right cheek.

Back in Jewish society at this time, one of the biggest insults you could give to someone was to backhand them in their right cheek. It was an ultimate sign of humiliation.

There were even laws that if you did that to someone, there could be like a double portion of judgment on you for doing it because it was such a humiliation, such an offense.

It was a massive deal in an honor-shame culture. This was one that brought complete shame on you. So Jesus is saying, if someone does that to you, ultimate shame, completely offensive, dishonors you, probably in public, give him the other cheek also.

[10 : 52] So this would be a big deal for Jesus to say that. It's kind of like the statement of, you know, if your eye offends you, pluck it out because it's better to go into heaven with missing an eye than to go to hell with both eyes.

That drastic, cut your arm off, pluck your eye out. This would feel like that same thing. You mean someone insults me like this and I'm just supposed to take it and turn the other cheek?

What is Jesus saying? The point is not necessarily to follow this literally as much as, one, we do need to take it very seriously.

But also to understand that to be salt and light, as he's mentioned in chapter five, to be kingdom people, we must let go of our rights to say, it's not about me, it's about King Jesus, I can do as he tells me to do and entrust him with that.

Do we trust him even in situations like this? Now you might be saying, okay, you just let me off the hook there, just wait. And Jesus is not saying you can't protect yourself and you can't protect your family.

[12 : 11] He's giving us the spirit of the law and the spirit of the law here is don't seek revenge for yourself. Don't cling to your right to retaliate. That was something that was being promoted.

Take vengeance for yourself. Retaliate. You have the right. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. He's telling us that's not the way of the kingdom. If there's been a personal injustice done to you, entrust yourself to the Lord and his provision for you to take vengeance for you.

Everything in us wants to make people pay for it when they do something to us. Even something as small as being cut off while we're driving or if you're walking the scaffolding up here above Victoria and someone just will not turn and they expect you to kind of get out of their way, that can kind of stir.

Is this just me and my personal confession here? What does it stir up in us? One time I literally was like, I am not turning.

I'm going to make them turn. That's terrible. That's not the kingdom way, right? The kingdom way says I'm not going to make you pay for it. I'm going to let go of my rights in order to promote the way of King Jesus.

[13 : 25] And really, do we believe what Jesus has just said in verses 11 and 12? Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Can we entrust ourselves to Jesus even when we're being reviled?

Even when we're being persecuted. He says rejoice and be glad? Jesus, are you crazy here? Jesus himself resisted evil.

You can think of the story of the money changers in the outer courts of the temple where his commentators say he's probably preventing women and Gentiles from praying in the temple and that made him angry, righteously angry.

He resisted that evil. evil. So do we need to not resist evil and turn the other cheek? Sometimes.

[14 : 31] But sometimes not. Back to our question, do we literally turn the other cheek? Remember what I said about looking at the sermon as a whole?

If you wait just a little bit in the sermon, Jesus is going to tell us this in Matthew 7, verse 12. So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them for this is the law and the prophets.

We know that as the golden rule, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And so the question would be, if you were doing something evil, would you want another person to just let you continue to do that evil?

Or would the loving thing be to resist you, to confront you, to help you do the right and righteous thing? What would it look like to follow the golden rule here?

If someone struck you, would you want, sorry, if you struck someone in the right cheek, would you want them to just let you persist in your anger right after Jesus has just said, if you're angry towards your brother, you've committed murder in your heart?

[15 : 43] Would you want that friend, that person, to let you persist in your anger? Do we turn the other cheek? Sometimes, but not always.

And Jesus is giving us a way to have some wisdom in these circumstances by saying, first and foremost, the default mode is to let go of your rights in order to think about love of my neighbor, in order to think about the way of the kingdom and being salt and light.

Jesus gives us a great example in John chapter 18 when he is before the high priest. He's being questioned by the high priest. The high priest questions him about what he was teaching and Jesus says, I did nothing in secret.

Ask those who heard me. And when he said this, an officer struck him in the face. Presumably, this could have been a backhand. The passage doesn't tell us that, but it could have been.

It could have been to the right cheek. But instead of turning the other cheek, in this moment, while he's still under trial, still on trial, chapter 18, verse 23 says, Jesus answered him, if what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong.

[16 : 58] But if what I said is right, why do you strike me? Instead of turning the other cheek, he actually confronts the guy with the fact that basically he's broken the law because when someone's under trial, you're not allowed to strike them.

You have to treat them with dignity and respect. It would not have been loving to let the officer continue to slap him when he had done something that was clearly wrong.

Before judgment has been rendered, he's not allowed to actually punish Jesus. He has to wait for judgment to be rendered. So Jesus confronts, very lovingly it seems, but just says, if what I said is right, why do you strike me?

Verse 40, if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let them have your cloak also. What is he saying here? It was actually illegal to take someone's cloak.

Someone could give it as a pledge, but they would have to then return it at sundown. Why is that? Because the outer cloak was used sometimes as a blanket, sometimes as a bed.

[18 : 09] It was to keep warm at night and Jerusalem being a mile high city, like it would get cold. You couldn't take someone's cloak. And they're saying, if someone sues you for your inner garment, go ahead and give him your outer garment.

The pattern is, let go of what your rights are and give. Let go of your rights and give. Now, again, taking this literally could cause us to do something that's unwise.

Just promoting something that's evil behavior even. However, he says that we are to be reconciled to our brother. He just said that in chapter 5, verse 25.

The point is to be reconciled to your brother and make sure that he has what he needs. In Christ's kingdom, instead of fighting for personal rights, we lay down those rights for the sake of others.

Are we willing to do that? Verse 41. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. What is this all about? You've probably heard this. That it relates to a common practice whereby in Roman law, a Roman soldier could require a person to carry his gear.

[19 : 22] Now, the gear might be weapons, supplies. They estimate that that might have weighed like 60 to 80 pounds. definitely enough to be a burden. And you can just imagine that this was something that was done to actually humiliate other people sometimes.

It was abused. A Roman soldier might do that just to be a bully. In fact, if anybody is like me growing up in the 80s, there were these movies where the bully would make you carry their book bag.

It's kind of that same thing where it's like, this is not okay. This is not fair. And Jesus says, instead of just taking it that one mile, take it another mile.

Take it two miles. Now, if you take this literally, that could mean that after I take it the two miles, I just drop it on his foot. Is that the way of the kingdom?

But instead, he's getting at the heart. Let go of your rights and give. Give more than is actually required. The kingdom life means you would do this even for those that would be your enemies.

[20 : 30] Think about who he's talking about here. Who were the Romans? They were intruders. They were oppressors. They were my enemies. In fact, the Jewish people were looking for a Messiah who would come to deliver them from the Romans or other oppressors.

Even to your enemies, you give. In the kingdom, you are blessed when you're persecuted for the sake of Jesus. Verse 42.

Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. What's he saying? Don't cling to your money and possessions.

What would you want someone to do for you? Now, you're in this situation. Because the golden rule says, hey, what would we have them do for us?

Right? How do I want to be treated? What if you were the one that was begging? What if you were the one that was wanting to borrow? Would you want them to give? Sometimes yes.

[21 : 39] But what if you've gone into debt because of something sinful? You didn't obey the law in the way that you borrowed money or you borrowed resources?

What if, which could happen back then, you had a gambling addiction and you owe a lot of money? What if you had other self-destructive behaviors that would cause you to be a beggar?

Some of these are found in Proverbs. Proverbs talks about sluggards, drunkards and gluttons, lovers of pleasure. They will all come to poverty. Several passages that talk about that.

What if you were in a self-destructive behavior? Would you want someone to help you persist in that? Is that the loving thing to do to let you borrow money when you beg or ask them at that time?

Sometimes yes. Sometimes no. But are we willing to let go of our rights in order to give to someone? And sometimes when someone asks us for money, it feels like a personal injustice.

[22 : 46] Jesus, I'm working hard for my money. I'm doing what God's called me to do. And you're just going to sit there and ask and beg?

Why don't you go get a job? We have these thoughts, right? Why don't you go do this? The way of the kingdom says we let go of what is owed to us and we give. But we do what the loving thing is.

We are willing to inconvenience ourselves in order for others to have what they need. Now do you see the pattern in these four things?

Give the other cheek. Give also your cloak. Give another mile. Give to him who asks. In other words, give your resources.

When you are facing personal injustice, don't focus on the rights that you have to retaliate, but have a spirit of giving. How can I love this person and treat them the way in which I wish they would treat me?

[23 : 53] Now, this sounds like one of those things, like, I'm not sure, Ryan, if you're trying to let me off the hook here of having to actually obey this, or, like, this seems like a very gray area thing, like, help me know what to do.

The way of the kingdom is learning the heart of the master, and when we learn the heart of the master, we can obey him, because we can entrust ourselves to him, even doing things that seem really, really hard.

So we entrust ourselves to him to do what he's calling us to do, because he does expect us to obey him in the Sermon on the Mount. One illustration that has been given from the pulpit since I've been here, so sorry for the repeat, but I couldn't help it, that I think one of the best illustrations of this going the extra mile, giving your cloak also comes from Les Mis.

When Jean Valjean comes into the church, they invite him in as the guest, they give him the warm fire, they give him wine, they give him food, they give him a place to sleep and restore himself, and what does he do?

He steals the silver and he leaves. He's caught by the authorities, they drag him back to the priest, and they say, we caught the one who stole from you.

[25 : 24] He had the audacity to say that you had given this to him. He said, he is correct, the priest says, but why did you leave so early, sir?

You left the best part and he reaches over and gives him the candlesticks that are worth more than all the other silver. He gives him more. And you just see, like, I watch this scene and it just, I know you're not going to believe this as an American, it makes me really emotional, probably doesn't do the same thing it does for you, but I just get emotional even watching this to say, this is the gospel of grace that we stole and deserve complete condemnation, yet he lavishes his grace on us.

You left the most expensive part. Jesus tells us, give the other cheek, give your cloak also, give another mile, give your resources.

All of us here can think of someone who's tried to humiliate us, or take advantage of us, or maybe has just asked too much of us. So we can just think of those times where, man, how could I let go of my rights and give?

And the answer is, how could we best love our neighbor? What is the right thing here that would, how would I want to be treated in this so that would lead me in the way of the kingdom?

[26 : 57] Jesus said, you are blessed when others revile you on his account? Do we believe that? Do we believe that when we suffer persecution for doing what's right, we are blessed?

What should you feel when you face personal injustices? Could we do what Matthew 5 12 says when it says rejoice and be glad? Could we rejoice in facing personal injustices because we're suffering for doing what is right?

Paul says something similar to this in Romans 12 17-21 He says, Repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourself, but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head.

- [28 : 07] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Does all of that sound ridiculous? Overcome evil with good?
- ultimately, Jesus didn't resist evil, but he suffered the greatest injustice that has ever been known to man, and he did it for us.
- Ultimately, he willingly gave the other cheek in order to be the sacrifice for our sins. He didn't just give his tunic, he gave his outer cloak, he was stripped down of all of his clothing in order to bear our shame.
- Jesus not only went the extra mile, he went the whole way to suffer the wrath of God on our behalf. He gave his very life, the only one who deserved honor and glory and praise.
- Gave it all up so that we could have life with him, a relationship with God. God because of this, we have life.
- [29 : 25] He took on our sin and gave us his righteousness so that through repentance and faith we could be redeemed. Does all of this sound ridiculous?
- That's how life has been given to us. Follow in the way of our master. How could he do this? Peter addresses that in 1 Peter chapter 2 so I'm glad you asked.
- When he was reviled he did not revile in return. When he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.
- He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.
- He kept entrusting himself to the one who judges justly. Jesus is not just giving us laws to obey. He's not giving us a new law.
- [30 : 26] He's calling us to life as he says in John chapter 10 abundant life. The kingdom life. A life of flourishing.
- Life as it should be as Corey has reminded us. Jesus says I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. People of the kingdom are people who give even in the face of personal injustice done to us.
- This should be our default mode. We're not getting let off the hook by saying well if you take this literally you can do some unwise things. We're not being let off the hook in that way.
- Instead we're being called to something higher. The default mode is to give. to entrust ourselves to the righteous judge. And you never know it could lead to someone else having life.
- And that would be our hope that we would be salt and light and that people would see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. Like Jesus said in chapter 5 verse 16.
- [31 : 35] So let's follow our Lord into this abundant life. Let's pray. Our Father when we read your scriptures when we read this passage it can lead to a sense of how in the world could we ever obey Jesus' commands?
- How could we ever lift the life he's called us to? And that poverty of spirit is where we're supposed to be. We say we can't live this. We have to rely on you.
- We are completely dependent. We are completely helpless and hopeless without Jesus. And Lord Jesus you live the life that we couldn't live.
- So that you could exchange your righteousness for our sin so that we could become the righteousness of God in you. So thank you Lord Jesus.
- Thank you for your sacrifice for the way that you didn't resist evil that you turned the other cheek that you went the extra mile that you gave everything in order that we might have life.

[32 : 54] Now empower us we pray to live that life in our community in our city before our family and our neighbors our co-workers our friends. Help us to be salt and light not so that people say man what a good guy what a good awesome person she is but they would glorify you our father who is in heaven and we pray all this in the precious name of Jesus.
Amen.