

Matt: 5:38-48: Teachings on Retaliation and Love of Enemies

Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Are we really meant to love our enemies, turn the other cheek, give without expecting repayment, refuse to pass judgment, pray for those who are unkind to us?

If we turn the other cheek, after all, won't we just get hit on that one too? It is certainly a risky proposition.

Jesus calls us to move heart and mind and soul away from the morals of the world and into the Way of His Kingdom.

As we heard in our 1st reading from Leviticus"

"Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy. You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart...Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In the Gospel, Jesus clarifies his meaning about Teachings about Retaliation and Love of Enemies with examples:

1. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well.
 - During Jesus' time: A backhand slap was the normal way Masters would admonish inferiors, and show dominance over someone of the lower class.
 - Why does Jesus tell these already humiliated people to turn the other cheek?
 - Because this action robs the oppressor of power to humiliate them.
 - By turning the other cheek, he is saying you cannot demean me.
 - The Oppressor would not perform a backhand strike on the opposite cheek with the left hand because it was used for unclean purposes.
 - The other alternative would be a slap with the open hand as a challenge or to punch the person, but this would be seen, as a statement of equality - equals.
2. If anyone wants to go to law with you (Sue) over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well.
 - The poor hated the system that subjected them to humiliation by stripping them of their lands, their goods, finally even their outer garments.
 - Why does Jesus tell them to give over their inner garment as well? This would mean stripping off all their clothing and marching out of court stark naked!
 - There would stand the creditor, beet-red with embarrassment, with your outer garment in one hand, your underwear in the other. You have suddenly turned the tables on him.
 - Public nudity was viewed as bringing shame on the viewer, not the naked.
 - This unmasking offers the creditor a chance to see, perhaps for the first time in his life, what his practices cause--and to repent.

3. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles.

- Refers to practice of limiting the amount of forced labor that Roman soldiers could levy on people.
- A soldier could impress a civilian to carry his pack one mile only; to force the civilian to go further carried with it severe penalties under military law.
- But why walk the second mile?
- Imagine the soldier's surprise when, at the next mile marker, he reluctantly reaches to assume his pack (65 to 85 pounds). You say, "Oh no, let me carry it another mile."
- The soldier is thrown off-balance wonders if you trying to create trouble for him.
- Imagine the hilarious situation of a Roman infantryman pleading with a Jew, "Aw, come on, please give me back my pack!"

In the Gospel, Jesus is speaking to the victims who have been subjected to these indignities and forced to stifle their inner outrage at their dehumanizing treatment.

Then He says:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

In these passages, Jesus calls His followers to a higher standard – much higher than what is found in the OT.

Someone once said to Abraham Lincoln, "Mr. President. I cannot understand you. You treat your enemies with such kindness. It seems that you should want to destroy them." Lincoln's answer was, "I destroy my enemy when I make him my friend."

Jesus is asking us to Love our Enemies. He is really saying in these times of Trial - Bring My Love and My Mercy to the situation.

- Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Jesus wants us to embrace His love.
- Not a superficial huggy-feely love, not an all-accepting generic love that fails to ask anything of us or the other.
- A new kind of Love – one that is so deep that it leads all the way to the Cross.
- A love so powerful that it can transform not only us as individuals, but even of the whole world.

So how do we love someone we do not like? We are not to wish the worst for the person, but the best.

- What is the Best – To know God's Love and to have eternal life. Pray that they come to know God's love in their hearts.
- Overcome evil with a double dose of good. An evil response only creates even more evil.
- The only real, lasting, long-term antidote to the violence and evil in our world is the love and forgiveness of God – as expressed by those who believe in Him.

What do we do, when confronted by someone who dislikes us? Do we show mercy and love, or do we talk about them behind their backs and tell everyone about what they did to us?

Can we give a little more to those in need, forgive a little more those who hurt us, love a little more?

He says today, "You have followed me this far; and now join me for the extra mile."

Two friends were walking through the desert. They had an argument; and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

Later they came to an oasis, where they took a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone: "Today my best friend saved my life."

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "after I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?"

The friend replied, "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away.

But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

Learn to write your hurts in the sand and to carve your blessings in stone.

Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- God is not calling us to perfect in our own right – He does not want us to become a perfectionist!
- God is calling us to be Perfected in His Love.
- We need to give God permission to perfect us in His Love.
- The goal after we die is not gold, it is not silver, it is not cabins or fine cars – IT IS HIM! And this is how we obtain Him.
- God Loves You – So you should Love other people
- God Sacrificed everything for you – So you too should sacrifice.

Praise Be Jesus Christ, Now and Forever, Amen!

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