



Matthew: The King and His Kingdoms

Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 14: Revenge – How sweet it isn't!

Matthew 5:38-42

May 29, 2011

Pastor Eddie Strickland

“And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “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 is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:2–12, ESV)

““Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:17–20, ESV)

““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.” (Matthew 5:38–42, ESV)

Now we know from what Pastor Nick has told us that Jesus is dealing with the spirit of the law and not the letter of the law. Jesus is not just dealing with the physical acts here but He is getting at our hearts. Remember it is not exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees in

degree that is going to get us into heaven but exceeding their righteousness in kind. The kind that can only be found in Christ. Just think back to the character and conduct that we saw in the Beattitudes that we have studied and read this morning. They deal with our hearts and what should characterize a true follower of Christ.

Character:

-Blessed are the poor in spirit---A true follower of Christ is going to know his spiritual poverty apart from the grace of God. He will understand his sinfulness.

-Blessed are those who mourn---Realization of our sinfulness will make a true follower of Christ be broken over his sin and hate it and will have the desire to battle it and kill it.

-Blessed are the meek---A true follower of Christ will be characterized by a humility that shows God's power in them but under control. They will be submitted to Christ who was the fulfillment of humility and power under God's control.

-Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness---A true follower of Christ will realize that he has no righteousness of his own but his acceptability before God is based on the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed to him and he will thirst for Christ and that will be evident in his pursuit of Christ.

Conduct:

-Blessed are the merciful---those true followers of Christ who understand that they have received mercy that they did not deserve will be characterized by the mercy that they extend.

-Blessed are the pure in heart---True followers of Christ understand that one of the reasons Christ died was to purify a people for Himself and they will pursue that purity in the power of the Holy Spirit.

-Blessed are the peacemakers---True follower of Christ will seek to make peace and not just keep it and they will be unwilling to compromise the Word of God because they know that the Word of God is what we most need even if it is uncomfortable.

Persecution:

-Blessed are those who are persecuted---True followers of Christ know that faithfulness to Christ and intimacy with Him is worth losing everything, even their lives.

-Blessed are the true followers of Christ when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you---True followers of Christ will understand, with an eternal perspective, that their reward and joy are in Christ in heaven and will leave vengeance to the Lord and not seek personal revenge.

And that brings us to today's passage beloved---revenge or retaliation. And as we look at this passage today, I want you to think about the heart not just the physical acts of revenge but the heart of it. And I want us to examine our hearts today for any desire for revenge.

1 – Justice triumphs revenge (vs 38)

““You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ” (Matthew 5:38, ESV)

-If we are honest with ourselves, we love this passage and probably wish that Jesus would have left it alone. In our flesh, we love revenge. We love to retaliate. To our flesh, revenge is sweet---so so sweet. Think about it. We have adopted the statement “Pay back is tough and rough.” Now sometimes we say it in cutting up but sometimes in our heart we mean it with passion. We have changed the Golden Rule from “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” to “Do unto others with more severity than they do unto you.”

-And it doesn't matter who it is. We want revenge against the world. Think about the work place. Someone at work has done you wrong. Maybe they said something or did something to make themselves look better over you or to make you look bad. What was your desire in that situation---probably revenge. We might have done the same back to them only we did way worse. And even if we didn't actually do it ourselves we were hoping that they would get what they deserve. And if it did happen to them we were quick to say just that---they got what they deserve! Or think about road rage---somebody cuts you off, what do you want to do.

-We want revenge the church against our brothers and sisters. We don't like the fact that things don't go as we plan or as we want so we seek revenge or to tear down someone or their ministry. Someone doesn't treat us as we think we should be treated so we make it our aim to treat them more severely and it's usually with words or the cold shoulder or the claim of clicks. And the revenge doesn't have to be physical. We actually find joy and rejoice in their weeping and inside we weep when they have reason to rejoice. We totally forget that they were made in the image of God and that Christ died for them just as He did for us and we don't even see the grace of God that has been poured into them and thus, God hand at work in grace is not seen and so we disregard the glory of God for His redemptive work in Christ.

-We even want revenge at home with our spouses and children. Sometimes we want revenge here more than anywhere else and that should not be. We don't care what kind of damage we do or what we have to do to get it. It may be the cold shoulder, curt words, the pushing of the right buttons or to make one look bad to the rest of the family. We want them to pay for something that they did to us or that we perceive that they did to us and it is our aim and goal to make sure that their punishment is much worse than the offense.

-That is almost always true with our revenge---it is always greater than the offense against us. Why? Because revenge is rooted in our pride and our perceived entitlement to our rights. Jesus is dealing here with our attitudes toward ourselves. We think, "Who are you to mess with me!" Don't you know who I am! And we feel we can take justice into our own hands and do whatever is necessary to get what we think we deserve and dish out to others what we think they deserve and so we do just that and we come with all kinds of excuses to justify it.

This is why the law that Jesus addresses here and the law that the Pharisees were abusing was put into place to begin with---to prescribe justice and to restrict personal revenge. We need to understand the context of the Mosaic Law here so let's look at it.

““A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges (very important) shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” (Deuteronomy 19:15–21, ESV)

-So we see here a prescription for justice so that the punishment is found in the crime.

“If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.” (Leviticus 24:19–20, ESV)

-Again we see the prescription for justice put into place so that the punishment is found in the offense.

““When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman’s husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. ” (Exodus 21:22–25, ESV)

-Same thing here concerning justice. But also in these laws we see not only the prescription for justice in that the law is not principled in literal mutilation but in that the punishment should fit the crime or offense. The principle of the law was grounded in the fact that human life was made in the image of God. This would control anger, violence and the desire for revenge that would exceed the crime. The law was set in place to set a limit on the thirst for revenge and to provide justice. And true justice is never excessive in its demands but revenge is. We see the excessiveness of revenge in Lamech killing a young man because the young man struck him and Lamech is basking in his accomplished revenge (Gen 4:23-24). So we see in the law that it was prescriptive in that it defined justice but it was also restrictive in that it restrained this kind of revenge. This principle would make the decision the end of the matter so that unrelenting revenge from one party to the other would cease.

-There is one more piece to this that we must understand to get the full context of what Jesus is saying in this passage. Remember when I told you that the use of this law by the judges were important. Well, that is the premise of the use of this law. It was to be a guideline for the judges to be used in the context of civil law and moral code and never was intended to be used in the context of ordinary daily relationships. This law was not meant to be taken into the arena of personal relationships and to be enforced by the individual. It never even came close to meaning that.

-But that is exactly what the Pharisees had done. They had extended the use of this principle from the law courts where it belonged to personal relationships where it does not belong. They were using this law to justify personal revenge even though OT law forbade this specifically.

- “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. ” (Leviticus 19:18, ESV)

-So the Pharisees were using this law and the principle of just retribution as an excuse to do the very thing that the law was put in place to prevent. They had interpreted the law as prescriptive but only marginally restrictive so their question became “How far may my personal retaliation go before I break the law? This way they could bring this law into the arena of personal relationships and justify their personal revenge and still see themselves as holy.

-And so Jesus responds in verse 39a:

2 - "But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil." (Matthew 5:39a, ESV)

-Now we need to first know what Jesus is not saying here. Jesus is not saying that there should not be a civil system anymore to restrain evil such as a government or police or a military system. That is not what Jesus is saying here. Paul tells us in Romans 13 to submit to our authorities because there is no authority except from God and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. And Paul goes on to say that the rulers are to be a terror not to good but to bad or evil and that the civil authority is the avenger who carries out the wrath of God on the wrongdoer. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2 to be subject to every human institution that has been sent by God to punish those who do evil. God's Word is absolute truth and it does not contradict so those who interpret this verse to mean that Jesus is forbidding civil authorities are just wrong. That is not what Jesus is saying here.

-Jesus is also not saying that we are to tolerate sin by overlooking it. I have a friend that told me of a time when he was eating in a restaurant and overheard a lady next to him bragging on the fact that her church was acceptable of the fact that they had two members of the opposite sex living with each other. She was appalled that any church would address them and get involved with their personal life and she was glad that her church was not that way. Evidently her church does not study scripture because that is totally against the testimony of scripture. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5 that tolerance like that is arrogance and God hates arrogance. And people misunderstand what tolerance is---they think it is the loving thing to do. Tolerance is not love but hatred. If you see me in sin and you don't confront me on it then you don't love my soul but you hate me. And you don't care anything about my fellowship with God because if you know that I am in unrepentant sin then I am not in fellowship with God and you refuse to love me enough to care. In fact, if you don't say anything to me then you show a deep hatred for my soul and a selfish desire to just be comfortable. And if a church ever gets to that point then you might as well go to the country club that morning and not just for lunch because you are not at church. Jesus is not saying that we as the church are to overlook sin and not address it.

-So what is Jesus saying here when he tells us not to resist evil? Well, Jesus is addressing our attitudes toward ourselves and He is addressing the fact that the Pharisees had misinterpreted the law and brought it into personal relationships. In this we see that Jesus is in the context of personal wrongs and what He is saying is that we are not to resist evil by seeking to exact our self-determined revenge. Jesus is addressing our personal conduct in the context of being wronged or unjustly treated and forbidding our tendency to get personal revenge. Remember that Jesus has described for us what a true follower of His looks like and that we should be different from the world and one area of difference is our desire to get personal revenge. And

remember that this is not just the letter of the law but the principle of it. Jesus is not just addressing our physical acts of revenge but our heartfelt desire for it also. We may not actually and physically seek revenge but in our heart do we have a desire for it to happen even if we are not the ones to do it? What is our heart---that is what Jesus is addressing. And He gives 4 examples to us to get His point across. Lets's look at them.

3 – The illustrations:

A-“But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (39b).

-Again we need to know what Jesus is not saying here. Jesus is not prohibiting the use of self-defense if attacked or to flee from evil. This also is not the testimony of Scripture. What Jesus is addressing is the issue of being personally insulted. In the context of Jewish mindset, the slap talked about here is a back-handed slap that would be considered a personal insult. What Jesus is saying here is not to return an insult with an insult of your own and thus seek revenge in that. Jesus is saying that as true followers of Christ we will not seek revenge by retaliating with an insulting slap of our own but we will be prepared even to turn our cheek and take another insulting slap on the other side. We would rather reflect the nature and character of Christ than retaliating and reflecting the fleshly response so accepted by the world.

Application question: So how do you respond when you are insulted? If not physically how about in your heart?

B – “And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” (40).

-So is Jesus just telling us not to sue each other over our clothes? Although some of the clothes we wear we should get sued over. No, this is much deeper than any lawsuit.

-Think about the Jewish culture. The tunic was the inner garment which would equate to our modern suit of clothes. The cloak was the outer garment and was considered by Jewish law to be an inalienable right or possession.

““If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, ” (Exodus 22:25–26, ESV)

-This is the garments that Israel was judged by God for not returning in Amos 2:8.

“Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,” (Amos 2:6, ESV)

“they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge” (Amos 2:8, ESV)

-They didn't return the cloaks taken in pledge before sundown and this displeased God who loves obedience and He judged Israel for it.

-So what is Jesus saying here? Well, it is not a lawsuit over clothes but He is saying that to the true followers of Christ, even those things which we consider and regard as our rights by law we must be willing and prepared to abandon to reflect His character and to not seek revenge. Think of what Paul says to the Corinthian church which was in the context of lawsuits.

"To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!" (1 Corinthians 6:6–8, ESV)

-Application Question: In order to reflect Christ, are you willing rather to suffer wrong or be defrauded and give up your rights or are you holding on to those no matter what has to happen? But especially, are you doing the same things yourselves in retaliation which is exactly what we do when we have a heart of revenge? Are you willing to give up your liberties for the sake of others? Do you consider yourselves as having no rights but consider yourselves as slaves to Christ?

C – "And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." (41)

-Ok, how many of you have been forced to go a mile lately? I know, I know, what do you mean?. What is Jesus saying here?

-So far in Jesus's examples he has introduced a person that would seek to do injustice to us. The first with a personal insult, the second with invading our rights and now one who seeks to force us into service. This example would have been well understood in Jesus' day. Roman law gave soldiers the right to force a civilian to carry his pack or luggage or bags or whatever for a million, or a Roman mile which is slightly shorter than our mile. This law was designed to give the soldiers some relief but it could cause great inconvenience to the civilian because he could not refuse. He couldn't say, well I don't have time right now I will catch you next time. He couldn't do that. So it could cause great inconvenience. Now add to that, that sometimes, probably most times, the people that were commandeered were the ones under oppression by the soldiers and in this case the Jews were under the rule of the Roman government. Think about having to be inconvenienced and carry the equipment of your oppressor---outside of combat the Roman soldier was probably never hated more than when he forced someone to carry his pack. A good example of this was when Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross of Christ. He had no say in the matter---had he refused he may have had his own cross to carry.

-And what does Jesus say in this situation that a true follower of Christ, one whose righteousness is internal, should do? He should carry it willingly. And we should not only willingly go the required one mile but we should willingly go two. And don't be legalistic here--- we don't go two miles and then throw the equipment at the person and say---Im done with you now! We should go to the end. What Jesus is saying here is that our rights and freedoms should not be cherished and protected at the expense of reflecting the righteousness of Christ and ruining our witness. When we are robbed of our cherished liberty, we should willingly give more instead of retaliate. We as followers of Christ are not to feel like we have been ripped off and had one pulled over on us but we are to double our output and accept the imposition cheerfully. When we do this we testify to the Lord and we show His righteousness knowing that by Him not retaliating we have a freedom that can never be commandeered.

Application Question: How do you respond when you feel you are or have been taken advantage of? How do you respond when you are being inconvenienced by someone who is only looking out for themselves and you got in the way? Do you do that to someone else? How are you reflecting the righteousness of Christ when you find yourselves in these circumstances?

D – “Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.” (42)

-Now, again, we first need to know what Jesus is not saying here. Jesus is not commanding us to give to anybody who asks without any discernment. Jesus is not saying that we have to give foolishly. Think about it---if we did this then there would be many times when we did more harm than good. If we just gave and gave without discernment, there comes a point when we are enabling a person even to sin and especially when we have intimate knowledge of the specific situation. Think about Paul's words to the Thessalonians concerning the lazy person.

“For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. ” (2 Thessalonians 3:10–15, ESV)

-Paul says don't feed the lazy person who is not willing to work. And some would inevitably say that this is not loving when in all reality, it is the best thing that we could do for them and what they need most. Loving someone is looking out for what they need and not necessarily what they want and what we all need is to be confronted with our sin. So Jesus is not saying give foolishly and to everyone who comes along so what is He saying here?

-Well, Jesus is addressing our heart to give and in doing that he is also addressing our tendency to hold on to our possessions especially our money to the point that we overlook those who are truly in need. We are entitled to what belongs to us, our possessions, but they should go on the altar of obedience to Christ if the need arises. When we see genuine needs and requests come before us, we are to meet them if within our power and means and we are to do it willingly and not begrudgingly. We should display true generosity that truly wants to see the needs of others met. And we should do this when we hear of the need even if that occurs before the request comes to us personally. Jesus is not speaking about a begrudgingly response to a plea for help but a genuine concern for others in need. But how does this tie into the eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth principle? D. A. Carson says it in a great, clear way.

“Jesus’ last example demands giving and lending that is cheerful and willing. The issue is not the wisdom or foolishness of lending money to everyone who comes along...The burden of the passage is this: Christ will not tolerate a mercenary, tight-fisted, penny-pinching attitude which is the financial counterpart to a legalistic understanding of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

That is about as clear as it can be stated beloved. Jesus said “Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

Application questions: How is your attitude toward giving? Do you penny pinch and overlook real needs that you know about or do you truly desire the need to be met and give even if you are not asked? Do you ask these questions in these situations---What’s in it for me or what can I get out of it? Do you have possessions or do possessions have you?

4 - Overall application:

-Jesus is teaching in these passages that His followers will not seek revenge or retaliate but will willingly die to themselves to reflect His righteousness and that is an issue of the heart not some outward conformity.

-A person who is not vengeful and defensive and doesn’t bear a grudge or has no spite in his heart is the person who has died to self. To fight relentlessly for self is to give evidence that self is still on the throne of the heart and it is impossible to live for self and for Christ at the same time.

-George Mueller wrote this, “There was a day when I died, utterly died to George Mueller and his opinions, his preferences, and his tastes and his will. I died to the world, to its approval and its censure. I died to the approval or the blame of even my brethren and friends. And since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.”

-Beloved, this is the spirit that Jesus teaches us this morning. Does this describe your spirit today? Is this you? Have you truly died to yourself?

So how do we battle our pride in these situations. How do we fight our vengeful heart? Well, it's pretty simple.

-Consider the gospel of Christ. Where would we be if Jesus had not applied these principles to the cross.

-Had Jesus retaliated against the insults and slaps to the face,

-When He was struck in the face and asked to prophesy who hit Him He could have done it. He could have vindicated His claims and took up His divine prerogative but He did not---for our sake.

-Had He retaliated against the false charges against Him, when He was accused of blaspheming God He could have retaliated and proven His claim right then and there that He truly was God but He did not do it right then but proved His claims and fulfilled Scripture by being obedient to death even death on a cross and He did it for the joy set before Him and pleasing the Father.

-Had he retaliated against carrying His cross and had He not been willing to give His life to meet our desperate need for a Savior---we would be lost forever. He died in our place for our sin and became our curse and bore the wrath of God that was reserved for us and He did it in humility and obedience. And He did it without claiming His divine rights.

-Praise Him today and worship Him.

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2011

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.