

Turning the Other Cheek

Matthew 5:38-42

INTRODUCTION

- A. An elementary school boy was doing a report on wars for a history class.
1. He came home & asked his father, "Dad, how do wars begin"
 2. "Well, take the First World War," said his father. "That got started when Germany invaded Belgium."
 - a. Immediately his wife interrupted him: "Tell the boy the truth. It began because somebody was murdered."
 - b. The husband drew himself up with an air of superiority & snapped back, "Are *you* answering the question, or am I?"
 - c. Turning her back upon him in a huff, the wife walked out of the room & slammed the door as hard as she could.
 3. When the dishes stopped rattling in the cupboard, an uneasy silence followed, broken by the son when he said, "Daddy, you don't have to tell me more; I know now!"
- B. Why do wars start?
1. James says, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel" (Js 4:1-2).
 2. James' words ring true whether we speak of a German invasion of Belgium or an argument between a husband & wife.
- C. How do we **prevent** wars from starting?
1. In this morning's text, Jesus informs us how we can prevent war.
 2. READ TEXT.
- D. These words sound so foreign to our ears, and they have, therefore, been interpreted in two major ways.
1. Some have taken these words to mean precisely what they say & have refused any sort of retaliation.
 - a. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. often used this text to speak of the non-violent nature of the Civil Rights Movement.
 - b. While there can be absolutely no doubt that this text teaches non-violence & non-retaliation, the language Jesus uses suggests he's speaking about something else.
 2. Others have suggested that this really is hyperbole. Jesus is simply exaggerating & he doesn't really mean that we're to turn the other cheek.
 - a. People will say, "If someone hits you, you can't just stand there & be a door-mat. You've got to defend yourself. Sometimes, you just have to hit back."
 - b. Not only do these words of Jesus stand diametrically opposed to any such teaching, but his reaction when he was so brutally crucified demonstrate such an understanding is out of harmony with the teachings of Jesus.
 3. If neither of those interpretations is entirely accurate, what is Jesus teaching?
 - a. Jesus speaks dealing with adversaries through legal means.
 - 1) The term "resist" in verse 39 means to oppose in a courtroom.
 - 2) Jesus says that if someone wants to sue you & take your tunic, you not only willingly give

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your tunic, but you hand over your cloak as well.

- 3) If a Roman soldier wants to compel you to go a mile, you go a second mile.
- b. The picture Jesus paints here is of one where we are so meek & humble, we don't care about getting even, we care about people.
4. This morning, we want to explore these words of Jesus in their original context & seek to understand how these words apply today.

Jesus first speaks of—

OLD PUNISHMENT, v 38

- A. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'"
- B. God put retaliation in the Law of Moses.
 1. If I were working out in my field & you came up and accidentally swung a tool and plucked out my eye, I had every right to take out your eye.
 2. If I were running home because my wife had rung the dinner bell & you had left an instrument in the field and I tripped and fell chipping a tooth, I had every right to come along & chip your tooth.
 3. That's the way the Jews of Jesus' day read these words & I'm sure that's the way we've often read them, too.
 - a. But, that is a grossly inaccurate way to read these words.
 - b. The purpose of these words from the Law of Moses was not to encourage retaliation; the purpose was to **limit** retaliation.
 - 1) Lev 24:17-20.
 - 2) The point in the Old Testament was to keep the judges from imposing on you any more severe a judgment than you deserved.
 - c. Those living under the Law of Moses could not take justice into their own hands.
 - 1) Instead of taking justice into their own hands, they were to love their neighbor as themselves: "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" (Lev 19:18).
 - 2) God certainly allowed for justice, but it was the judges who were to carry out that justice.
 - a) "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" (Ex 21:22-25).
 - b) The only time I could ever "take the law into my own hands" & execute judgment was if a family member was accidentally killed, I could kill the one who had committed the act, provided he was outside one of the city's of refuge.
 - c) Otherwise, it was the judges who meted out judgment & they were limited by "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."
 4. The Jews of Jesus' day, however, took these words to refer to personal vengeance, something they were more than willing to mete out.
 - C. Sometimes, aren't we just like these Jews & more than willing to mete out vengeance against those who have wronged us?
 1. Isn't the old cliché: "Don't get mad—get even"?
 2. How many times do we try to "get even"?
 - a. How many times when we're angry do we think, "Oh, yeah, well I'll show you"?

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- b. How many times do we try to carry out that vengeance?
 3. For the disciples of Jesus, there is another way.
- Jesus tells us of—

NEW PARDON, vv 39–42

- A. “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.”
- B. Jesus encourages his disciples not to resist the one who is evil.
 1. As we mentioned earlier, the idea in the word “resist” is to “take to court.”
 2. The idea of taking the evil doer to court becomes quite clear when Jesus says,
- C. “If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”
 1. With apologies to my mother-in-law, President Obama, & other left-handed folks, the vast majority of people in this world have always been right-handed.
 2. That’s important, because the only way for a right-handed person to strike you on the right cheek is to do so back-handed.
 - a. The back-handed slap in the culture of first-century Jewish Palestine was the ***ultimate*** insult.
 - b. In fact, the insult was so grievous that both Jewish & Roman law permitted taking the perpetrator to court & the fine was twice that of a slap with an open palm.
 3. Jesus declares, “Don’t take one to court over such. Just take it.”
- D. “If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”
 1. The poorest people in the Roman Empire only had two garments—their tunic, the inner garment, & their cloak, the outer garment.
 2. What Jesus says here is radical, for the outer cloak that Jesus tells his disciples to give away, was an inalienable possession.
 - a. “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, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep?” (Ex 22:25-27).
 - b. No one, under any circumstances, ever had a right to my cloak. Yet, Jesus says, “If someone wants to take your tunic, let him have the cloak, too.”
- E. “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”
 1. We are all quite aware that Roman soldiers had every right to compel someone to carry his gear from a Roman mile, about 1,000 paces.
 2. Such an action could hardly sit well with Jesus’ hearers.
 - a. One of Jesus’ disciples as “Simon who was called the Zealot” (Lk 6:15). The Zealots were those who advocated revolution vis-à-vis the Roman occupation of Palestine.
 - b. When Jesus told the Jews who believed in him that they could have freedom through him, they declared, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone” (Jn 8:33). If you think you’re not enslaved to that Roman soldier making you carrying his supplies, you’re going to become quite agitated as you go that mile.
 3. Jesus says, “Forget about what’s legally required of you. Go twice as far.”
- F. “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”
 1. The Old Testament required interest-free loans: “You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor

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give him your food for profit" (Lev 25:37).

2. Jesus goes beyond that & teaches his disciples to be generous.
 - a. Being generous is an important part of our Christianity.
 - 1) When Luke is praising the still non-Christian Cornelius, he says of him, "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God" (Acts 10:1-2).
 - 2) Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of the words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).
 - b. Let us, as the people of God, be committed to being a generous people!
- G. What's the point of all that Jesus has said?
 1. This is an intriguing text, for Jesus begins by speaking about matters of legal recourse and then speaks of dealing with those oppressive Roman soldiers and he closes by speaking about generosity toward the poor. There are several factors at work here:
 2. This passage certainly speaks of forgiveness.
 - a. How could I ever forgo taking someone to court unless I have forgiven him/her?
 - b. God expects us to be a quite forgiving people.
 - 1) Unless we are forgiving, God will not forgive us: "If you forgive others their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt 6:14-15).
 - 2) Because of the mercy shown us in Christ, we are to forgive.
 - a) "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph 4:32).
 - b) Many years ago, someone greatly wronged me.
 - i. I was struggling greatly with resentment; it came to the point that I was truly resenting the fellow brother.
 - ii. It finally dawned on me: "Justin, if God can forgive you for your multitude of sins, surely you can forgive this fellow Christian for what he's done to you."
 - 3) There cannot be a limit to our forgiveness.
 - a) "Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'" (Mt 18:21-22).
 - i. Some Jews in Jesus' day limited forgiveness to three offenses; Peter, being really generous, ups the ante & goes for seven offenses.
 - ii. But, Jesus replies with "seventy times seven" or possibly "seventy-seven times." But, however Jesus' statement should be translated, seven is the number of perfection in Judaism; thus, Jesus points Peter beyond a specific number to a completely forgiving spirit.
 - b) How forgiving are we?
 - 4) It is said that one time a friend called a Christian lady & mentioned some cruel thing that had happened to her years previously, but the Christian seemed not to remember it.
 - a) "Don't you remember the wrong that was done to you?" asked the friend.
 - b) "No," answered the Christian, "I distinctly remember forgetting it."
 - c) Shall we forget the wrongs done to us?
 3. This text also speaks of the kindness we are to show others.
 - a. Instead of rushing to court or refusing submission to authorities or shutting up my heart against

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- the needy, I'm to show kindness & compassion.
- b. God expects his people to be compassionate.
 - 1) "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh" (Is 58:6-7).
 - a) But, do we not have a true tendency to hide ourselves from our own flesh?
 - b) When someone bearing the image of God becomes ill, do we offer assistance? When someone made in the likeness of God suffers financially, do we do what we can?
 - c) Do we seek to help the downtrodden, or do we seek to hide from our "own flesh"?
 - 2) We remember the "Good Samaritan," because he—unlike the priest & the Levite—was willing to involve himself in the life of a total stranger to help.
 - a) Are we willing to do likewise?
 - b) Do we seek to help those who are "down and out"?

CONCLUSION

- A. The word of Jesus here call us out of our comfort zone & urge us to show kindness, compassion, & forgiveness.
- B. But, Jesus is not asking us to do anything other than what he has done.
 1. The Lord is full of kindness, compassion, & forgiveness.
 - a. After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus withdrew to be by himself, but crowds followed him.
 - 1) "When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Mt 14:14).
 - 2) Jesus didn't just "feel" compassion, but he acted on that compassion & healed their sick.
 - b. When a harlot knelt before Jesus & washed his feet with her tears, the Lord said to his dinner host, "I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven" (Lk 7:47).
 2. The Lord is waiting to demonstrate that kindness, compassion, & forgiveness toward you. Will you allow him to do so this very morning?