

The Sermon: Teachings From Jesus Christ
Part 7: The Reversal of Revenge
March 22nd & 23rd

Welcome: If you're just joining us, we're spending the first part of this year walking through Jesus' most well known sermon in all of Scripture, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

I'll also let you know that whether you realize it or not, you just walked into a party...thus, the hot tub! This weekend is one of our favorite times of the year when we celebrate what God is doing in the lives of individuals who are confessing their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and King through baptism!

Before we get there, we're going to continue in Jesus' sermon and look at what He had to say about reconciliation, which is very fitting, because at the heart of baptism is the story of reconciliation. When our lives become a broken mess because of sin; God embraces us as we are and covers us in His beautiful grace. Baptism is a celebration that we were God's enemies, but now through Jesus, we have become His friends.

In Matthew 5, Jesus looks at each one of us and says, 'if you're my follower, I want that kind of healing love to infiltrate every relationship that you have! I want you to be so committed to reconciliation that if there is any relationship in your life that is broken or estranged...someone with whom you're at odds...by the grace of God you are working to make it whole again!'

Read along with me...starting in verse 32.

"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow" Matthew 5:38-42

Now...we're going to have to do some work, because most of us aren't going to walk into work tomorrow morning and get a backhand to the right cheek (if so, it's probably time to go job-hunting), and most of us haven't been asked by a soldier to carry their gear for a mile...

Jesus was using common examples from his day to contrast the way in which the world responds to injustice with the way that He calls His followers to respond to injustice in our lives!

First...Jesus says, "You've heard the law that says, 'the punishment must match the injury...an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'"

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This law is found in the Old Testament! It went like this... *“If we get into a fight and I hit you in the face, and out comes your eye...you get to take out my eye.” “If I sneak onto your property and steal one of your sheep and grill it for a family bonfire...I have to pay you back in sheep.” “If my ox gores your servant to death...you get one of my servants, but if your ox had a reputation for goring people to death and you didn’t keep the ox under control, you might lose your life as a result.”*

To which many of us might say... *“That seems kind of primitive and barbaric, don’t you think?”* But you have to keep in mind that God first set up this civil law for His people to lead them toward justice, peace and freedom, and not away from it!

Before this law was put into place, the law of the land was incredibly barbaric, and it was governed by the rich and powerful. If a powerful person wanted to take land, property or servants from the poor or marginalized, he did so, and there was no legal course of action for the poor to take. So...this law put a system of justice into place for the benefit of the helpless.

Furthermore, the law enacted legislation that discouraged downward cycles of violence and retaliation! So...before ‘an eye for an eye’ was put into place, if you knocked my eye out in a bar fight, I might decide to jump you in the back alley and take your life. You took my eye...but I take your life. But then, some of your family might get together and decide to avenge the family name...so they march over to my house and burn it down with all of my family inside. And before long...you have the Hatfield and McCoys...

Violence begets more violence...and revenge and retaliation become the order of the day.

But God created a standard that promoted justice and fairness and helped Israel become a society marked by peace and wholeness.

What does this have to do with me?

Jesus says to us, *“If you’re my follower, you must go further than an eye for an eye. In all of your relationships, before you seek after what is just or fair, I want you to do what is loving. I want you to work for the good of the other person.”*

If we’re being honest today, Jesus’ words will slam into our lives...won’t they? Every one of us naturally leans toward seeking after what is fair! **Fairness is written across the main artery of our hearts.**

Children: I didn’t realize how true this was about me until I had children...and now that we have conversations in our home almost daily about what is fair and what

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isn't fair, I realize how often I think this way! How many of you have heard something like this? *"He did this, and I didn't get to...and it's not fair! She did that to me and didn't get the same consequence as I did when I did the same thing to her, and that's not fair!"*

Children only say what most of us believe to be true. They just haven't developed filters! When something happens to us that we perceive to be unfair or unjust...our hearts cry out for the score to be settled!

You see...if I were to ask you, "How many of you have had someone hurt you?" If you are above the age of three or four, you're going to say, 'Absolutely, someone has hurt me.'

And what I've found to be true is that when we say, '*Someone has hurt me.*' There is a broad spectrum of 'hurt' right?

For example, sometimes there is a simple misunderstanding or miscommunication, and our spiritual enemy uses that misunderstanding to drive a deep wedge of suspicion and mistrust between two people that can negatively affect their relationship for years and years!

Then, there are those of us who have been betrayed by a close friend or family member. Someone spoke very cruel words over us. Or, we've been lied to. We've been rejected. Some of us have been harmed physically, emotionally, or sexually.

So...there are varying degrees of hurt!

Regardless of how deep your hurt goes, when someone hurt you, they took something from you. They took your reputation, an opportunity, your joy, your peace, or your innocence! When they took this from you, a debt was incurred.

Our natural reaction when someone hurts us (because justice is written into our hearts) is not to respond with love, but to get even...to settle the score! And there are two ways that we tend to do this! **Sometimes we get even by hitting back.** You hurt me, so I'll hurt you. You took something from me, so I'll take something from you. You insulted me in this way, so you just wait until you hear what I say about you!

We get even by hitting back...literally taking out their eye!

But some of the times we don't hit back, we pull back.

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Occasionally, relationships end in fistfights and shouting matches. (And when they do, it's awful). However, many close relationships end because they grow cold.

Some of you grew up in a loud, violent home, and that's what you knew your entire life! But many of you grew up in a cold home where your parents said to each other, *"Because you hurt me...I'm going to pull back! I'm not going to give you my love any longer. I won't talk to you. I'll stop coming around."* **The same is true for some of our marriages, isn't it?** If your marriage is growing cold, there's a good chance that there are un-forgiven offenses that are piling up, and you've responded by pulling back from one another. So you don't talk at the heart-level any longer. You begin avoiding one another. He comes home late. She always goes out with her friends. And over time, it dawns on you that you don't have a marriage, you have a roommate!

Some of us have friends, brothers, colleagues we haven't talked to in years because there was a wound and we pulled back!

Why is this?

Jesus is saying, *"It's possible that you've allowed the letter of the law (eye for an eye) to become a dominant force in your life."*

If this is true of any of your relationships, you have allowed revenge and retaliation to create a cycle of hurt, mistrust or brokenness. And unless you respond to Jesus, that relationship is on a downward spiral toward decay and destruction!

And here's the crazy thing...that relationship will spiral out of control all in the name of fairness! He got what was coming to him. She got what she deserved!

Jesus says...there is another way to live! And this way is the only way that your relationships...and the world will ultimately be put right! **What is that way?** Let me explain just how extreme Jesus' point is! How far He asks us to go...

"Don't resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also." – In the first century, to be slapped on the cheek was the ultimate insult. So, Jesus is saying, 'when someone insults you verbally, when they damage your reputation, when they are condescending toward you...don't strike back, but turn your face and be willing to take another blow.'

"If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to

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those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow." – All of these are extreme examples that Jesus is using to make the same point...and here it is!

If someone takes from you what rightfully belongs to you, show them that you care about peace so much that you're willing to give them what they'll never have a claim on!

Does this mean we become a doormat? That we allow people to hurt us, or those we love? No...Jesus isn't talking about abuse here, or about not protecting yourself or creating boundaries...**He's talking about how we respond in those situations!**

Now...anytime we talk about something as personal and sensitive as loving someone who has wronged us, someone is going to say, *'Jed, you don't know what this person did to me. Do you actually think that I can forgive them...be nice to them?'*

I want to acknowledge very honestly that I don't pretend to know what your hurt is! And I don't know what I'd do if I was standing in your shoes...I do, however, know that there are a lot of very terrible and heartbreaking things that go on today. And I understand what it's like to be hurt and mistreated, and to hold onto those hurts for a very long time...and to see those hurts cause a lot of pain.

Which is why Jesus says that if we're ever going to see God's Kingdom of peace, wholeness and reconciliation invade our world that is dominated by grudge holding, name calling, division, discrimination, and retaliation, it will happen when we begin to place other people's rights ahead of our own, and cheerfully give away to those who don't deserve it! This is the hope of the world - loving our enemies, overcoming evil with good, forgiving those who have hurt us!

How do we love like this...consistently...all of the time? If you're saying to yourself... "I could never do it!" You're absolutely right...unless you have a resource that comes from beyond you!

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch woman living in the Netherlands during WWII. She and her family hid Jews from the Nazis before being arrested and sent to the concentration camp. In Ravensbruck, Corrie's sister Betsie died, but Corrie survived, and eventually traveled the world telling her story!

In her autobiography, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie shares her journey of learning to forgive those who had caused her, and the people she loved, so much pain. **She describes one story that stands out...**

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"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein." he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself. – Corrie ten Boom, The Hiding Place
Do you know what Corrie ten Boom is saying?

If you're ever going to forgive the people in your life who have hurt you deeply...

You must first understand that this kind of love and forgiveness doesn't come from you...it comes from God! Not a single one of us has what it takes to obey Jesus. Only Jesus can do this for you. You see...He already has!

Gospel – On the cross, God turned the cheek. Jesus took the insults of the guards and the jeering of the crowds, but he also took the backhanded slap of our disobedience and rebellion. And he didn't strike back! He remained silent (Isaiah writes, like a lamb being led to the slaughter...he remained silent).

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On the cross, Jesus went the 2nd mile. He gave us what we needed, not what we deserved! He is our Creator, worthy of our affection and love and loyalty, but we've walked away from Him! Yet, He gave us a 2nd chance when we deserved judgment.

On the cross, Jesus loved his enemies by praying for them!

"Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.'"
Luke 23:34

He was praying for us...he prayed for you!

Jesus Christ loved us when we were at our worst! It cost Him His life! But He was willing to do it for you...to make an enemy a friend! That is the beauty of the gospel!

I don't know what you're facing today...but only the love of Jesus in you can spring you from the prison that your anger has held you captive in. Only the love of Jesus can take your desire to get even and transform it into a willingness to extend mercy. Only the love of Jesus in you can stop the cycle of revenge and retaliation. Only the love of Jesus can soften cold, hard hearts.

When this truth makes its way into our hearts, it has the power to change the world!

Where do we begin?

At the funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr., King's professor and mentor, Dr. Benjamin Mays, said this about King's life.

"If any man knew the meaning of suffering, King knew. House bombed; living day by day for thirteen years under constant threats of death; maliciously accused of being a communist; falsely accused of being insincere...; stabbed by a member of his own race; slugged in a hotel lobby; jailed over twenty times; occasionally deeply hurt because friends betrayed him – and yet this man had no bitterness in his heart, no rancour in his soul, no revenge in his mind; and he went up and down the length and breadth of this world preaching non-violence and the redemptive power of love." Dr. Benjamin Mays

In a sermon on Matthew 5:43-45, entitled 'Loving your Enemies,' writing from a Georgia jail cell, wrestling with the question of why and how Christians are to love, King wrote that 'love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend' for it has 'creative and redemptive power.' For over three centuries American

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Negroes had suffered oppression, frustration and discrimination. **But Luther King and his friends were determined to 'meet hate with love.'** In doing so, King dreamed that they would win both freedom and their oppressors,' and *"our victory will be a double victory."*

Don't you see...Jesus calls us to be world changers by ushering in His kingdom! It starts when we determine to meet hate with love, in our homes. In our marriages. It starts in our neighborhoods. Our workplaces. One relationship at a time.

Application

As we end our time together, I want to start with one very practical step!

In verse 44, Jesus commands us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. What would happen if we decided to take him at his word? Today, will you begin by praying for the person who has wounded you? For the relationship that is broken? Will you pray for him...for her.

Pray the prayer of Corrie Ten Boom... *"Jesus, I cannot forgive them...give me your forgiveness."*

Reach out your hand, and let Him do it!

Pray!

Communion

Baptism - A celebration that we...enemies of God...become his friends!

People being baptized tonight are saying two things!

First... *"Jesus, I need you...to be my Savior." To do for me what I can't do for myself...*

Second... *"Jesus, I want you...to be my King from this day on."*

Jesus says, *"Come...everything I have is yours. My love. My forgiveness. My perfect record. My protection. My ongoing mercy...my life in yours...all of it!"*

Pray