

# Don't Resist an Evil Person



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**M**any of you have been asking how our weekend went last week. Most of you know that we went to Illinois to meet Jason's biological family. For those of you who don't know, Jason is our oldest son and we adopted him as an infant. After 27 years, God opened a door for us to meet his biological family on both sides.

It was like passing through a huge wall into another dimension. Two actual families were living real lives on either side of the wall but no one could get through. Twenty-seven years ago Jason passed through the wall from his biological family to our family. Suddenly last week, we were able to pass through the wall and enter each other's worlds.

We drove up to Jason's mother's house. The little kids ran inside to announce, "They're here!" Out comes a beautiful lady, eight children, and a husband. The last time this mother had held her little boy was 27 years ago for just a few brief moments. Now, unbelievably, she hugs him once again. You can imagine the excitement, the embraces, and the tears as we were meeting everyone. Over the weekend we got to meet dozens of relatives. Jason's biological mother is married to a Baptist pastor and the church was waiting to meet us too.

As the time came to part, Marie had a moment alone with Jenny, Jason's

mother. On Marie's neck was a necklace with a dangling pearl. In her hand was an identical necklace. Marie put the necklace in Jenny's hands and said, "This is for you. I will wear mine and when you wear yours, it will be a symbol that our hearts are forever knit together and that God used two godly mothers to bring about this godly son." We got into the car and drove through tears to Jason's biological father's side of the family. The same kind of warm greeting was waiting for us. On Memorial Day we had a big outing with many relatives and friends. Jason's father, Craig, died last fall at age 44 of cancer. It was incredible to hear them talk about how much they saw Craig in Jason.

On Tuesday morning, we loaded Craig's prized possession onto the trailer—a '69 Camaro. Craig's mother wanted Jason to have it as his only son. We drove away in a sea of tears. We could hardly fathom the reality of what had happened all around us so suddenly. It was the most unusual weekend of our lives and things couldn't have gone any better. Thanks so much for your prayers.

Now to today's sermon. For the month of June, we turn to an interesting series called, "Did Jesus Say That?" It's amazing to me how little we know of what Jesus did and said. It also amazes me how we call ourselves Christians and yet tend not to do much of what

Jesus told us to do. In fact, Jesus posed the question to His followers in Luke 6:46, “Why do you call me ‘Lord’ and do not do what I say?” In this series, we are going to look at some of the teachings of Jesus that are difficult to put into practice but that are important for us if we are going to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matthew 16:24).

Today we turn to Matthew 5:38-42. Jesus says something very amazing. Listen as I read. I’d have to say that doing what Jesus says here is not our natural inclination. We have a hard time with people who hurt us and take advantage of us. I dare say that most of us live as though this teaching never came out of Jesus’ mouth. We have found our own ways to deal with situations like this and to justify what we do.

Preaching texts like this puts us in an ethical dilemma in at least two respects. First, what if we disagree with what Jesus had to say? What Jesus told us to do is not open for debate. It’s only open for obedience. He never asks us to agree with Him. He asks us to do it. The only thing debatable is my interpretation of what Jesus said. But I think it’s going to be really hard for any of us to miss the main point.

Second, hearing the teaching of the Word puts us in an accountable position. Once we hear the teaching, we are responsible to obey it. That means most of us will need to make some changes after hearing this sermon. Once you hear this, you have a higher responsibility than before you came to church today. Does anyone want some music now so you can walk out before I preach?

Our text is nestled in a sermon Jesus preached called “The Sermon on the Mount.” I think it is the greatest sermon

ever preached. In this section He is making a distinction between the standard of righteousness established by the Jewish leadership of His day and the standard of righteousness in the kingdom of God. The people would quote the Old Testament law but yet they found ways to get around it in their hearts. So Jesus addressed this problem in six areas using the formula, “You have heard it said ..... but I say to you.”

The Pharisees had turned the Word of God into external rules and that’s how they measured their righteousness. Jesus said that we would not enter the kingdom of God unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). Genuine righteousness comes from a relationship with God by which His life pours forth through ours. Rules will always ruin genuine righteousness. In today’s text, we will see what a relationship with God will do for us in the face of personal injury and loss at the hands of someone else.

So let’s look at what Jesus said. Verse 38 says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’.” Everyone knew this verse in the Law of Moses (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy. 19:21). We refer to it today as the *lex taliones*, the law of retaliation. This law was about making the punishment fit the crime. When someone injured someone else, unjust things could happen because of revenge. This law was designed to protect the innocent and to limit the liability to correspond with the nature of the damage. You need to know that the law of retaliation was not a requirement. A person could forgive the violation and not exact the penalty.

While this law limited vengeance, it became a platform for revenge. There’s something in us that wants retaliation.

“If you wrong me, I’m going to get even. I’m only doing what you did to me.” That’s the state of our natural heart and that law gave an excuse to hurt someone in return and not to forgive. You could comply with the Law of Moses and still have a vengeful heart towards others. Jesus says there’s something fundamentally wrong with that.

So Jesus tells us how we are to respond when people actually intend to hurt or take advantage of us. We are not naturally going to like this. Jesus makes His key point and gives four illustrations. His key point is in verse 39. Jesus says, “Do not resist him who is evil.” Is Jesus telling us let people do whatever they like and not to take any action to stop them? Is He telling us to aid people in their less than noble designs on us by going above and beyond with them? Does Jesus not care about our well-being? What kind of advice is this to those who are in abusive relationships?

The word “resist” means “to stand in battle array, to strive for victory,” and in some cases, “to take legal action against.” As best I understand it, Jesus is saying that we are not to meet aggression with aggression. We are not to impede a person’s inappropriate advances against us with any kind of resisting force so as to overcome them. We are rather to be wronged and to respond with more than the person tried to exact. Just remember, this is not going to make sense in the kingdom of this world. Thus is the conduct of those who live under the Lordship of Christ in the kingdom of God.

Jesus gives four illustrations concerning non-retaliation. In verse 39, if someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other as well. At the heart of this statement is the idea of insult and indignity. It was not the idea of beating

someone up but of putting them down. Be willing to take insults.

In verse 40, someone sues you and takes your shirt. You throw in your cloak as well, the more expensive and larger of the garments. The cloak also served as a coverlet that could be used at night for a blanket.

In verse 41, if someone forces you to go a mile, you add one more. In those days, the Roman army or couriers could require you to carry something for them up to one mile. Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service to carry the cross of Christ. Jesus tells us to go the un-required extra mile.

In verse 42, someone asks you to give them something they want or to borrow what you have. You grant their request. The idea here is the likelihood that you will not see it again and you will lose it. But you give it anyway.

Friends, this is difficult teaching. When someone calls the office and asks for money, should we give it to them? If someone is about to commit rape, do you resist? If someone is physically abusive, do we continue to let them strike us? If someone sues me, do I hire a lawyer? What is Jesus saying here and is what He is teaching hazardous?

Christians in all ages and at all levels from scholar to layperson have tried to understand what Jesus is saying. Some have been very literal in their obedience. Many have found ways to dance around this so that they don’t have to apply it. I want to give this my best shot as to what Jesus is teaching.

How we feel and what we do when people willfully insult us or take advantage of us is a matter we must all deal with. I think Jesus is taking us beyond literal illustrations. He wants us to capture the spirit of His teaching. I

think Jesus is telling us to do three things.

## Shed any spirit of retaliation or revenge.

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When we are wronged, something happens to us internally. There is an intense feeling of displeasure. We feel something rise up inside. There is a sense that the injustice needs to be compensated. We want to inflict pain and loss on the person who hurt us. Underneath there is a spirit of revenge.

Early in our marriage, Marie and I lived in Chicago. We had this little '67 VW bug. One day an 18 wheeler flagrantly cut me off on Fullerton Avenue. I flared inside and wanted him to know I was unhappy. I managed to stop him and I got out of the car. He got out of the truck. He drew back his fists and said, "Hit me!" I said, "You touch me and I'll call the cops." We had a heated exchange and I went back to my car. Marie said to me, "Did you see the size of that guy? He was about 6' 6" and weighed 300 pounds." I said, "I didn't even notice." Here I was, a seminary graduate in ministry having studied today's text and violated it to the hilt. I should have stopped the guy and said, "Hey, you have an awesome truck. You really know how to handle that rig. I hope your day is going well. In case it isn't, let me be the first to give you a smile."

Maybe you are thinking, I don't retaliate and I'm not vengeful. Let me tell how else it comes out, especially in churches—hurt feelings. How easily we take offense when someone does something against us, real or imagined. We get upset. We tell others about the injustice and rally them to our hurt. We pull away from the person. Hurt feelings are a huge alarm system going off that someone has injured us. And if allowed

to fester, it will become an underground way of retaliating.

Jesus is telling us that we have to deal with our spirit when we get injured. It's more important to keep our spirit from getting vengeful and bitter than it is with making the other person pay somehow for what he has done. Jesus is telling us that our first responsibility is to guard our hearts from the infection of anger, bitterness, and revenge. When someone injures us, we need to claw our way to love and forgiveness, not to seek compensation from the offending party. In the kingdom of God, we need to be free from a spirit of revenge.

So the first thing Jesus is saying is that when someone injures or uses us— we must gain control of our spirit. We must resist the urge to retaliate. But Jesus goes beyond that. And this is incredible.

## Minister to the person who wrongs you by reversing the law of retaliation.

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Under the Law of Moses, if you suffered injury or loss, the person who caused the injury could be required to suffer equal loss. Now instead of demanding anything from them, you also give to them what the law said they should have given you. What is going on here?

When someone hurts us, the last thing we naturally think of is ministering to them. We think of our pain. Our emotions get all heated up and it clouds any thoughts of ministry. Jesus is telling us to manage our emotions and get to the point of being generous with radical grace to those who hurt us. When an injustice happens, we are to move to a ministry mode rather than to retaliation.

If you can overcome the spirit of retaliation and revenge, you will find yourself in a strategic position. You can actually minister to the person who is

wronging you. What is he expecting? Resistance. Retaliation. He is not expecting generosity.

At the heart of what Jesus is saying is a principle a number of us heard in the marriage seminar recently by Jimmy Evans. The way to defeat a bad spirit is by an opposite spirit. If someone is angry at us and we get angry at them, nothing will be gained. When we come towards the person with an opposite spirit, the door is opened for a victory. When someone is mean to us, we need to be kind to them. It takes an opposite spirit to defeat a bad spirit.

Jesus is saying, "The way you used to do it was to inflict on someone else what they inflicted on you. Now give them double what they want from you. Instead of revenge and retaliation, minister to those who hurt and take advantage of you." I Peter 3:9 gets at the same thing: "Don't return evil for evil but give a blessing instead." We are called upon to do good to those who wrong us.

You might be thinking, "This is crazy!" Just remember, God does not run His kingdom the way we run ours. The number one thing we want to protect in the world is our self-interests. And that is not an essentially Christian position. So there's a **third matter** at work here.

### **Be willing to suffer personal loss if need be.**

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We live in a society that glorifies rights. Nobody is going to take anything from me. I have rights. And we have become a lawsuit happy culture. The idea is that if anyone suffers loss, it's going to be the other person and not me. The truth is, most of us live life with self at the center. We are looking out for number one. And we do what we can to fight for our stuff.

Actually, our willingness to suffer loss is an indication of how tied we are to which kingdom. In the kingdom of self, we rule and we own. In the kingdom of God, He rules and He owns. The more we are attached to this world, the more we will hold on to our stuff. The more we are attached to the world to come, the less we will cling to our stuff.

When Jesus tells us to give more than someone takes, it is a test of our values. We live in a culture who prizes what we have. Homes that are built today are twice as big as the homes built in 1960. Yet our families are smaller by 35%. And a huge industry has grown up in the meantime—self-storage space. We value things and we don't want to lose them.

Listen, I don't have this down any better than you do. I don't want to suffer loss. I don't want people to take advantage of me. I have filed complaints with the better business bureau on several occasions. Losing something to someone who is trying to hurt or use me is bad enough. But to lose more seems ridiculous. I am not yet close to what it says of the believers in Hebrews 10:34 that they accepted joyfully the seizure of their property, knowing that they had a better and abiding possession.

This idea of suffering loss is not strange to the New Testament. In I Corinthians 6 we are told to rather be wronged and defrauded than to sue a fellow-believer (verses 6-7). In other words, we are to stay out of Judge Judy's court. And most of all, Jesus modeled all of this for us during His passion (I Peter 2:21-25).

### **Conclusion**

They used to tell me in seminary that if you preach to 500 people, there are 501 sermons—the one you preach and the one each person hears. This sermon is

definitely in that category. I don't want you to draw wrong conclusions.

I can say confidently that Jesus is telling us not to retaliate. We are not to have a vengeful spirit and demand loss from those who wrong us. We are to minister good to them by overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:21). And we must be willing to suffer loss rather than demand our rights. Jesus was not rescinding the Law of Moses. He was taking it to a new level that shows what we are to do when we tap into the heart and power of God. Something revolutionary happens! Now having said that we must understand that difficult passages do not stand in isolation. They must be interpreted through the lens of other Scriptures. Jesus is not asking us to be sinned against without addressing the issue. We are told we must take appropriate action. Jesus is not saying that people can break the law and get away with it. If people are stealing from you in any fashion or abusing you, they are breaking the law. You need to take appropriate action. People need to be held accountable for their actions and sometimes it means that a person needs to be turned over to the proper authorities for prosecution or discipline. Not to do so would only enable someone to go deeper into their bad ways.

But this teaching is not about the person who does us wrong. It's about us. What we do when we are wronged shows us clearly the state of our own heart. Is it free from revenge? Is it able to see people who wrong us as an opportunity for ministry? Who is at the center of our lives and what does the stuff of this world mean to us? A lot of marriages are in trouble. They could be improved 70% in a month's time if the partners would do what Jesus taught here in the power of the Holy Spirit!

One day my dad bought me a new baseball bat. I proudly took it to school to show it off and to use it at recess. Some of the guys on the playground didn't like me that well. When I showed them my new bat, they took it and started to hit stones with it. When I got it back, it was full of deep dings. My bat was ruined. I wanted to damage their bats. That would have been a bad idea. Every time I picked up that bat, I was mad at them.

I really wasn't familiar with this passage of Scripture at the time, but I thought, "If they ruined my bat, I might as well bring it when I come to school and let them ding it some more." They did. In doing that, I emotionally released my attachment to the bat. Soon it was no longer fun for them and they saw it didn't bother me. And slowly they became my friends. I had that bat until I went to college as a reminder that if you work it right, you can rise above the level of revenge and retaliation.

I've had my share of challenges along these lines in life. I have found that I'm naturally a *lex taliones* man. I have also found that living out what Christ said is impossible in myself. But as I tap into God's heart and His power, I have discovered without fail that His way is the best way. Jesus said something strange to our ears here. But He's right. My question to all of us is, "What are we going to do now that we know what Jesus is asking of us?"

## Scripture References

- **Exodus 21:24**
- **Leviticus 24:20**
- **Deuteronomy 19:21**
- **Matthew 5:20, 5:38-42, 16:24**
- **Luke 6:46**
- **Hebrews 10:34**
- **Romans 12:21**
- **I Peter 2:21-25, 3:9**

## Notes: