

Today we talk about retaliation – Desire to get even...it is a complicated truth to understand

It is natural to want vengeance when you're wronged...we want the bad guy to get his
We all love a good Vigilante | Batman...over 60 movies | \$29.8 billion worldwide since 1939

- Have you ever had someone do something to you, and your first thought was
 - "I'm going to make sure they know how that feels"?

- Maybe someone embarrassed you, so you wanted to embarrass them
- Someone spoke harshly to you, so you wanted to speak harshly back
- Someone treated you unfairly, so you wanted to find a way to even the score

We want other person to experience same hurt, frustration, inconvenience they caused us

- We tell ourselves that we are simply making things fair
- After all, if someone hurts us, shouldn't they have to experience the consequences?

The problem is retaliation rarely ends civilly | One insult | Act of revenge

Before long, both people are trying to prove who can hurt the other person more

Jesus is teaching His followers to respond differently | Not to fight back | Get what deserve

Big idea: When people hurt you respond with Grace instead of getting even

- ³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

In 1567, during the Dutch Revolt, Protestant believers faced persecution under Spanish rule

- Dirk Willems, an Anabaptist was captured and imprisoned for his faith
- One day able to escape from prison...but the escape route took him across frozen pond
- Pursuer – Broke ice – Willems came back to save his life – Could have kept running
- Recaptured and executed for his faith | Willems chose mercy when revenge
 - He refused to treat an enemy's hostility as permission to abandon compassion
- It is one thing to show kindness to someone who treats you well...seek your harm

That is kind of response Jesus challenges His followers to consider in Matthew 5:38-42

Before we get going any further...talk about the difference between retaliation and Justice

Seeking justice is pursuing what is right and holding wrongdoing accountable,
while seeking retaliation is pursuing payback because someone has wronged you

⇒ **God authorizes justice – If someone commits a crime...go to jail...justice...right**

Romans 13:3 – 4 teaches that governing authorities serve God by restraining wrongdoing

- God has given us police officers, court systems, prisons and jails to ensure justice
 - Justice is not unchristian; God has established legitimate authority address wrongdoing
- Reporting crime, protecting abuse, pursuing appropriate legal accountability is legitimate

⇒ **God forbids personal vengeance – Do not get to just get even...leave to authorities**

Romans 12:19 - "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God."

- Principle: You can seek accountability without making personal payback your goal
- Here is how you can tell the difference – Ask yourself these three questions

- Am I seeking protection or punishment? Someone abusing you...seek protection
 - Am I willing to let God handle vengeance? You can want justice w/o nurturing hatred
 - Am I willing to forgive while still seeking accountability? Forgiveness...consequences
- "Justice seeks to make things right; retaliation seeks to make someone pay."

Christians are not called to tolerate evil, but they are called to refuse personal vengeance

Today I am going to give us three ways we can properly view retaliation

1. **Reject revenge 38-39**

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

OT verse Jesus is referencing found 3 places – Deuteronomy | Exodus | Leviticus

Exodus 21:24 — "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

The Pharisees and the Scribes were misappropriating the Scripture and Jesus is confronting

a. **Understand the original purpose of the law**

- They took a law intended to limit punishment and used it to justify personal retaliation

God intended this law to establish proportional justice

If someone took your eye you couldn't take their eye – tooth – hand – and foot

We should believe in proportional justice | Speeding = 10 years prison | Steal bike = Death

- In original setting, law established punishment must be proportionate to the offense
 - If someone caused an injury, penalty was not supposed to exceed the harm committed
- The principle served several purposes:

- **Limited excessive punishment:** Minor injury couldn't justify disproportionate response
 - Someone's cow got away and knocked over your fruit stand...take their house
- **Restrained personal vengeance:** justice was not whatever an angry person wanted
 - Imagine you got to pick the justice next time you're on hold with insurance company
- **Upheld impartial justice:** Same standard of judgment was to apply for weak/ powerful
 - Don't you hate it when someone rich and famous gets away with a crime because...

In ancient world, disputes could easily escalate into cycles of revenge between individuals

OT law placed boundaries around punishment and established a standard of justice

³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.

b. **Understand what Jesus means by resistance**

- Jesus is teaching His followers not to fight personal evil with personal vengeance | **NOT**

⇒ **He does not mean that evil should be ignored**

- Christians should oppose evil through godly means
- Scripture calls believers to expose evil and stand against spiritual wickedness

⇒ **He does not mean that justice is wrong**

- As we talked about...There is a difference between seeking justice and seeking revenge
- Justice seeks what right; revenge seeks make someone suffer because made you suffer
- **He does not mean that Christians must remain in dangerous situations**
- Not commanding someone to remain in danger or passively endure abuse
- Seeking safety and reporting wrongdoing can be consistent with Christian faithfulness

Talk about this more in a minute...but Christians are not to take abuse for abuse sake

But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

One of the misunderstood passages in all the Scripture...if someone hits you...hit you twice

- For centuries, this phrase has been misinterpreted as a mandate for absolute passivity
- To understand, we must look at specific customs of the ancient Near East and Roman law

- **Right Cheek** – Jewish culture left hand was for unclean tasks...have to be a backhand
 - A backhand slap was not an attempt to start a fair fight between equals...superior
 - A master to a slave, a husband to a wife, or a Roman officer to a Jewish subject
 - If you turn your left cheek after being backhanded, what happens? Left hand out
 - Their only remaining option is an open-palm slap or a closed fist...changed dynamic
 - The act of hitting someone was reserved for equals...backhand a servant...hit equal
- "You cannot treat me as an inferior. If you strike me again, must hit me as an equal."
- It robs the abuser of their ability to humiliate | Not just take a punch – Defend yourself
- Refuse to repay insults | Respond to wrongdoing with righteousness | Release right personal vengeance

2. Release your rights 40-41

40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

The phrase refers to a civil lawsuit, not a violent robbery...**knife in your back...give it up**

- The Greek verb suggests someone taking another person to court to claim a debt
- In first-century Judea: Poor people often fell into debt through taxes, crop failures, or loans
- Creditors could sue to collect what was owed – **Similar to today...could sue for damages**
- Person's clothing become part of the legal dispute because owned very few possessions
- Jesus pictures someone who is legally demanding one of your garments**

- **Tunic:** The inner garment worn next to the skin, similar to a long shirt.
- **Cloak:** The outer garment, used as a coat, blanket, and protection from the weather
- Surprising part is tunic was being demanded in court, but Jesus says to give the cloak too**

- The Old Testament protected the cloak | **Exodus 22:26-27**

"If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down."

- Cloak was essential: Coat During the Day - Blanket at Night – Protection for the Cold
- Even if someone owed a debt, God's Law required compassion by protecting this garment**

Jesus is describing someone who voluntarily gives up more the court could rightly require

Imagine the courtroom scene: The creditor demands your tunic – Judge rules in his favor

Instead of arguing or seeking revenge, you remove your cloak and hand it over as well

- **"My identity is not controlled by my possessions."** | **"I will not be ruled by resentment."**
- **"I trust God more than I cling to my rights."** | **Would you be able to give up the cloak?**

The bottom line in this teaching is not seeking retaliation – You just let it go

In a modern context it could be you're in an argument...you know your right...FROZEN

And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Christ calls His followers to respond to unreasonable demands with willing service

Difference between doing something have to and doing something because you choose to

What does it mean to go the extra mile? You have to understand Roman and Jewish culture

- In first-century Judea, the Jewish people lived under Roman imperial rule
- A Roman soldier could, by law, compel a citizen to carry their stuff for a mile
- So if you're a Roman soldier walking along and you see a Jew...make him carry for a mile**
- Roman soldier had an unlimited right to force any Jew to carry any load at any time**

Unwelcome reminder to the Jewish people that they lived under Roman authority

Imagine being a Jewish man walking a road when Roman soldier orders you carry his pack

You might resent the soldier because:

- **He represented an occupying power:** reminded you that you under Roman control
- **He could interrupt your plans:** Abandon your work or delay your journey to serve him

Jesus says to go the second mile! Some think forces you to go one mile and Jesus says 2!

Consider the difference: The first mile: "I will do what I am forced to do."

- The second mile: "I will choose to respond differently because I belong to Christ."

This is like someone asks you to borrow your truck for a move...you help them move

Three Ways to Go the Extra Mile

- Serve Beyond What Is Required** – Willingly choose to give more than what is expected
- Imagine 2 employees are asked to clean up before leaving 1 Just enough 2 Finishes**
- Respond With Grace Instead of Grumbling** – Go the extra mile joyfully
- We can serve without becoming bitter - Remain gracious when others are demanding
- Seize Opportunities to Show Christ** – Jesus went the extra mile – GOSPEL
- Service points people to Christ – Unexpected Kindness can open doors for gospel

World may compel you to walk first mile, but you can determine how you walk second

3. Respond with Generosity

42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Kingdom-minded Christians should have open hands toward people in need giving with compassion, generosity, and wisdom

Imagine you're stopped at a red light...someone is standing on the corner asking for money

- **You notice the sign, avoid eye contact, and hope the light turns green...approaches you**
- Then the question comes: What does Jesus expect me to do?**

No, this does not mean Christians required to give money to every person who begs

The emphasis is on a generous heart, not an obligation to fulfill every request

- In Jesus' day, there was no modern system of government assistance
- Illness, disability, loss of employment, and the death of a family provider could leave a household in desperate circumstances - Begging was a visible part of life
- We have governmental assistance...pay taxes...no reason...meal / clothing / shelter
- Jesus is challenging His disciples to be people who are willing to sacrifice for others rather than protecting their own comfort at all costs**

This verse does not require Christians to give cash to every person who requests it

Here are several biblical principles that help us understand why

- Jesus commands generosity, not indiscriminate giving**

- **"Give to the one who begs from you."** We should take that command seriously

- But we should also use discernment and wisdom

⇒ **Proverbs 14:15: The prudent person considers his steps**

⇒ **2 Thessalonians 3:10: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat**

⇒ **2 Corinthians 8:12-13: Paul teaches giving should be according to what a person has**
Passages remind us that Christian generosity operates alongside wisdom & responsibility

- Giving money is not the only way to help someone**

Suppose someone on the street asks you for \$20 – Booze or Drugs

- **You might offer to purchase a meal, provide a bottle of water, offer info on a shelter**
- **Or you might support a ministry that serves people experiencing homelessness**

The biblical question is not, "Did I give this person cash?"

It is, "Am I responding to this person's need with genuine compassion?"

- We must recognize that our resources are limited**

Matthew 5:42 does not mean that you must give away money you need to provide...family

- Scripture doesn't teach every individual must personally meet every need encounter
- You are not responsible for meeting every need, but you are responsible for cultivating a heart that cares about people in need**

⇒ **Cultivate a Compassionate Heart**

- **Do not allow repeated encounters with poverty to make you indifferent to suffering**

⇒ **Consider a Constructive Response**

- **Do not assume that giving cash is the only way to obey Jesus**
- **You might provide a meal, offer practical assistance, or support a trusted ministry**
- ⇒ **Continue to Give Generously**
- **Do not let caution become an excuse for greed**
- **We should be willing to sacrifice our comfort to help others**

You Can Say No to Cash Without Saying No to Compassion

Reject Revenge – Release Your Rights – Respond with Generosity

Big idea: When people hurt you respond with Grace instead of getting even