

Jesus on Relationships

Text: Matthew 5:33-42

Introduction: I want you to think about all the people you interacted with this past week. If you're married, that list probably starts with your spouse. If you have children at home, they are certainly on the list. You have coworkers. Fellow church members. Friends. Neighbors. There's the person you may have bumped into at the grocery store. Or the driver you blew your horn at because he cut you off in traffic.

Kids and teenagers, your list would include your parents and your siblings. Your friends at school. Teachers. Teammates on your sports team. Your peers in children's ministry or youth ministry.

My point is that if you are like me, you interact with a lot of people over the course of a given week. And in each of those interactions you have choices to make about the nature of those interactions. Choices about your attitude and demeanor. Happy or grumpy. Pleasant or disagreeable. You have choices to make about the words you will say. Truthful or untruthful. Encouraging or demeaning. You have choices to make about the actions you will take. Help with the household chores or leave them for someone else. Hold the door for someone or rush through it because you're in a hurry.

I think we all agree that followers of Jesus should be different from the world around us. The Beatitudes say that we are poor in spirit, meek, merciful, peacemakers. Jesus went on to say that we are the salt of the earth. The light of the world. People should see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

That's kind of high level, big picture stuff. But as we've seen over the last few weeks, Jesus does get down to the practical. Anger and murder. Lust and adultery. Marriage and divorce. This isn't theoretical for Jesus. It's real life. And that continues with our text this morning as Jesus talks about relationships. So, how should we interact with others as followers of Jesus?

We're in Matthew 5. We're making our way through the Sermon on the Mount. Go ahead and turn in your Bible to Matthew 5 if you haven't already. We're going to be looking at verses 33-42. It's on page 760 in the black pew Bible in front of you. And if you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read Matthew 5:33-42...Pray)

Followers of Jesus obey God's commandments by speaking truthfully, refusing retaliation, and responding generously.

So, let's look at these three ways followers of Jesus relate to others...

I. Followers of Jesus speak truthfully (Matthew 5:33-37).

Jesus says... (Read vs. 33)

A. Perhaps you immediately see connections with what Jesus says they had heard and a couple of the Ten Commandments (vs. 33).

- 1. The third commandment says, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Ex. 20:7).**
- 2. And the ninth commandment says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16).**
- 3. All of those listening to Jesus, both His disciples and the crowd, were familiar with these two commandments.**
- 4. They also would have known that in applying these two commandments, the Old Testament Law had even more to say about oaths specifically.**
 - a. In Leviticus 19:12 God says, "You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD."**
 - b. Numbers 30:3 gives instruction concerning vows made by a woman who is still in her father's house under his authority.**

- c. And Deuteronomy 23:21-23, which was read for us this morning during our Scripture reading, says that if you make a vow to the LORD your God, you should not delay fulfilling it. God's people are to do everything they promise to do.
5. The people Jesus was speaking to would have been familiar with these commands of God. Jesus gives a good summary of the Old Testament's teaching concerning oaths when He says in verse 33... (Read vs. 33)
 6. But remember that the issue was not just what the Old Testament says. It was also what the scribes and the Pharisees taught about what the Old Testament says.
 7. Let me read verse 33 again. This time in the CSB. And you see if you can identify a potential loophole or two that the scribes and the Pharisees might try to exploit. The CSB says, "Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your OATH, but you must keep your oaths TO THE LORD."
 - a. Do you see it? The first part of the command specifies that it is dealing with OATHS. So, someone looking for a loophole might say, "Well, yes, what I said wasn't true, but I wasn't under OATH."
 - b. What about another loophole? The second part of the command specifies oaths that are made TO THE LORD. So, again, someone looking for a loophole might say, "Well, yes, I wasn't truthful in what I said, but I wasn't speaking TO THE LORD, and I didn't invoke His name."
 8. Surely you see the problem with this way of thinking. God's Law has never been about looking for loopholes so that we can maintain obedience to the letter of the law while disobeying the spirit of the Law. It has always been about God's people seeking to walk in full obedience to God and His Word.

B. Sadly, however, the scribes and Pharisees had devised an elaborate system of loopholes to get around God's requirement in His Law that His people be people of the truth.

1. We know this in part because of what Jesus says to them later in Matthew 23. It was read for us this morning during our Scripture reading. But let me read it again. Matthew 23:16-22, "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it."
2. Chuck Quarles writes, "According to the rabbis oaths were deemed valid and legally binding only when they involved the name of the Lord" (Quarles, 139).
3. The Mishna, which I mentioned last week and is a collection of Jewish oral laws, devotes a whole section to an elaborate discussion of when oaths are binding and when they are not (Hughes, 129).
4. For example, "one rabbi taught that if one swore BY Jerusalem one was not bound, but if one swore TOWARD Jerusalem, it was binding—evidently because that in some way implied the Divine Name" (Hughes, 130).
5. It was kind of like a child who holds his hand behind his back and crosses his fingers and thinks that he doesn't have to tell the truth because his fingers were crossed.

C. But Jesus will have none of it (vs. 34-36).

1. Look at verse 34. (Read vs. 34-36)
2. Jesus says, “Forget all your rules. Just tell the truth. You don’t need all these stupid oaths. And who do you think you are anyway? Swearing by heaven or earth or Jerusalem. Don’t you know it ALL belongs to God? The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof (Ps. 24:1)! Even the hair on your head belongs to God!”

D. Now, all of this does raise the question as to whether Jesus is forbidding all oaths under all circumstances.

1. What about if you are called into court to testify under oath? Jesus says, “Do not take an oath at all.” Does that mean that you should refuse to testify under oath?
2. Some Quakers and Anabaptists teach that you should not take an oath even in a court of law (Quarles, 143). But that doesn’t seem to be what Jesus intends here.
3. Chuck Quarles writes that “the oath formulas that Jesus condemned were formulas used in ordinary speech, not the formula employed in court” (Quarles, 143).
4. Also, Quarles points out that Jesus even testified under oath before Caiaphas the high priest in Matthew 26:63-64 (Quarles, 143). Jesus could have continued to remain silent when placed under oath, but instead He said, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”
5. And even apart from legal settings, both Jesus and Paul often used special formulas such as “truly, truly” to emphasize the truthfulness of a statement (Quarles, 144).
6. So, Jesus did not intend to prohibit all oaths. Rather, he prohibited misleading oaths that came from a heart that seeks to play fast and loose with the truth.

E. See, the principle behind the 9th commandment is that God is a God of truth, and we should be people of truth. God always speaks what is true, and we should too (vs. 37).

1. This is why Jesus says in verse 37... (Read vs. 37)
2. James writes something very similar in James 5:12, “But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.
3. Goshen, our God is a God of truth.
 - a. In Numbers 23:19, Balaam said, “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”
 - b. In his letter to Titus, Paul refers to God as the God “who never lies” (Titus 1:2).
 - c. Hebrews 6:18 says that it is “impossible for God to lie.”
 - d. And in John 17:17, Jesus prayed to the Father, “Your word is truth.”
 - e. Our God is a God of truth.
4. And if God is a God of truth, we ought to be people of the truth.
 - a. Let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no.
 - b. This is so important for our witness as Christians.
 - c. Have you ever known someone who had a very loose relationship with the truth? They’d just as soon lie to you as look at you. What did you think of that person? Did you trust them? No! Of course not!
 - d. Many of you know that I am a big fan of the hit reality show Survivor. Every time I mention Survivor, I am reminded why it is still going after 50 seasons. Because many of you watch it too. And if you’ve ever watched Survivor, you know that there is A LOT of lying in Survivor. Really, it’s part of the game. It’s extremely difficult to do well on Survivor if you don’t lie at least a little. But some players are known for being compulsive liars. As I was preparing this sermon, I thought about one

particular player from just the seventh season of Survivor back in 2003: Survivor Pearl Islands. His name is Jon Dalton. He's actually from Danville, VA near where I grew up. But on the show, he was called Jonny Fairplay. Which was a misnomer if there ever was one. Because to gain sympathy from the other players, Jonny Fairplay concocted this elaborate lie about the death of his grandmother. And then later in the game, to get the other players to believe him, he swore on his grandmother's grave. Now Jonny Fairplay is infamous for lying while swearing on his grandmother's supposed grave.

- e. But how do people think about you? Can they take you at your word? When you say something, can people have confidence that it's true? When you say you will do something, is there any reason to doubt that you will do it?
- f. Do you find yourself saying something and then saying, "I swear!"? Why? Is it perhaps because without those words people may not know whether they can trust you or not?
- g. See, the issue for us isn't so much the words that we say. It's the heart behind our words. Are we, as followers of Jesus, people who are committed to the truth?
- h. There's no loophole for the heart. God doesn't need a polygraph machine to know whether or not we are people of the truth. He sees our hearts.
- i. God is a God of the truth. And we should be people of the truth. God always speaks the truth, and we should too.

Followers of Jesus speak truthfully. Number 2...

II. Followers of Jesus refuse retaliation (Matthew 5:38-39).

Jesus says... (Read vs. 38)

A. Now, Jesus doesn't quote a specific one of the Ten Commandments here, but He does quote something that was clearly taught in the Old Testament as an application of God's Law.

- 1. Exodus 21. The very next chapter after the Ten Commandments. Verse 23 says, "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. 21:23-25).
- 2. Leviticus 24:19-20, "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."
- 3. Deuteronomy 19:21, "Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."
- 4. This is the Old Testament Law. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

B. Now look at what Jesus says next.

- 1. Look at verse 39. (Read vs. 39)
- 2. What in the world are we going to do with this? We know, as we've seen, that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.
- 3. So, if the Old Testament Law says, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," why does Jesus now say, "Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."?
- 4. There's something very fundamental that we need to recognize about the Old Testament Scripture verses that I read from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.
- 5. When the Old Testament Law says, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," it's talking about justice not vengeance. It's saying, "If you do the crime, you do the time." It's saying that the punishment has to fit the crime.

6. It's not saying, "If someone hits you, you hit them back." It's not saying, "If someone steals from you, then you get them back and steal from them."
7. Rather, if someone steals from you, it is good and right for them to endure a civil penalty that is commensurate with the crime that was committed.
8. There is an authority that God has given to the state to enact justice. But you as an individual are not the state, and God has not given you the authorization to pursue vengeance.
9. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is not about personal vengeance. It's about justice.
10. The problem was that, just like today, people in Jesus' day were misusing God's Law as a license to pursue vengeance. And apparently, they were learning this from the scribes and the Pharisees.
11. To which Jesus responds, "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'" (vs. 39).

C. So, what does Jesus mean by this? What is the lesson that you and I need to take away from this as followers of Jesus?

1. Listen to what the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 12, "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21).
2. Jesus is not, in the Sermon on the Mount, giving a prohibition against self-defense. But He is giving a very clear prohibition against vengeance and viewing other people as our enemies.

3. I think we can also understand what Jesus means here in the Sermon on the Mount when we look to His example near the end of His life. Peter writes in his epistle, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."
4. Goshen, followers of Jesus refuse retaliation because we have a Savior who refused retaliation.
5. This isn't pacifism. It's justice. But not vengeance. Jesus came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.

Followers of Jesus speak truthfully. Followers of Jesus refuse retaliation. And finally...

III. Followers of Jesus respond generously (Matthew 5:40-42).

Jesus says... (Read vs. 40-42)

- A. What do you do when you've wronged someone and they take you to court?**
 1. That's the question Jesus answers in verse 40.
 2. It's similar to what He said earlier in verse 25. There He said, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison."
 3. Here Jesus says, "And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well" (vs. 40).
 4. The point in both verses is reconciliation. Do whatever it takes to make things right.

5. The historical background here is that Jewish law permitted an opponent to sue for possession of a person's inner garment. That seems kind of weird to us today. No thank you, you can keep your underwear. But that's the way it was then. However, the outer garment was exempt from seizure by the courts. From their perspective, a person could do without their inner garment but not their outer garment. But Jesus commanded His followers to make things right with an opponent by paying more than the court ordered (Quarles, 153).
6. See, as followers of Jesus, we don't just do what is required of us, we go above and beyond. We do whatever it takes to make things right.
7. Think about this in the context of your relationships with other people. What about at work? Have you ever failed to do something you were supposed to do and it impacted other people? Of course you have. We all have to some extent. How would Jesus have you respond? Apologize? Commit to doing better next time? Yes, but more than that. Jesus is teaching us here that as His followers, we should be willing to go above and beyond to make things right.

B. Now look at verse 41. Jesus says... (Read vs. 41)

1. You've heard the saying, "Go the extra mile." This is where that comes from.
2. The historical background here is that the Roman government had the legal authority to compel a person to perform menial tasks. In this case, it's to carry a load for 1,000 paces or one mile. What do you do when you get to the end of the mile? You don't just drop the load and leave. Jesus says, "You go the extra mile" (Akin, 69).
3. And if that's true in response to an oppressive authority like the Roman government, how much more is it true in our everyday lives at work and school and home and church.

4. Kids, what do you do when your parents ask you to clean your room? The bare minimum? You clean up your own stuff, and that's it? No, you go the extra mile. You clean up your brother's stuff too.
5. Adults, what about at work? Your boss asks you to finish a project. Do you do the bare minimum just so you can get it done? Or do you do everything as to the Lord and give your very best effort to make the finished project the best it can be?
6. Followers of Jesus go the extra mile.

C. Finally, verse 42. Jesus says... (Read vs. 42)

1. The Old Testament Law is full of commands for God's people to assist the poor.
2. And Proverbs 28:27 says, "Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse."
3. If this was the case under the Old Covenant, how much more does God expect from us who have received so much in Jesus?
4. If in our need God has been so generous to us in Christ, how can we then refuse to be generous to others who find themselves in need?

Conclusion: Followers of Jesus speak truthfully. Followers of Jesus refuse retaliation. And followers of Jesus respond generously.

Do you see how each of these was exemplified in the life of Jesus? No matter what, He always spoke what was true. He said I am the way and the TRUTH and the life. When He was mistreated by the scribes and the Pharisees, He refused retaliation. Instead, He prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And ultimately, He generously gave His life for you and for me.

Now, He calls us to follow His example. To always speak truthfully. Let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no. He calls us to refuse retaliation. And He calls us to extend to others the same generosity we have received in Him.

What about this week? Who will you interact with this week? What situations might arise where you will be tempted to speak something that is less than true? Maybe to get yourself out of a bind. Maybe to gain an advantage for yourself. Commit to speaking truthfully.

Who might you be tempted to seek retaliation against? Kids, maybe your brother or your sister will do something that upsets you. You'll be tempted to respond with retaliation. Maybe someone will speak an unkind word to you, and you'll be tempted to say something hurtful to get back at them. Ask the Lord to help you extend grace and forgiveness instead.

And who might the Lord put in your path this week who needs your generosity? Maybe it's a friend. Maybe it's a brother or sister in Christ. Maybe it's an acquaintance or even a stranger. Whoever it is.

Let's ask the Lord to help us.