



WEEK 3 – TURN MY WHAT?!

CHECK-IN

How are you? What's one cool thing God has done in your life in the last week? And... today's topic is going to get a little personal, so let's jump right in. What's something you've done to get even with an enemy? Did you T.P. the bully's house after he pantsed you in the school yard? Maybe you unscrewed the salt-shaker when the waiter sassed your request for a B.L.T. minus the L and T? Share!

OPENING PRAYER

God of the Unexpected, help us to love even our enemies with your extraordinary love.

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we began talking about what Jesus had to say about loving our enemies, specifically on *why* this is important for us to do. It was challenging, but we got through it... or did we? Nope, this is Part 2 of that discussion, because Jesus had more to say on the topic in his

Sermon on the Mount. And it's worth exploring because if we are to love others extraordinarily, (as Jesus called us to last week,) then it's not enough just to know *why* it's important. We have to learn *how* to do it, which is what we'll look at today.

Warm-up Question: Did you have any interaction with the “enemy” you identified last week? What did it look like? Did you offer extraordinary love? How did it go? Or are you still working on it? (If you weren't with us last week, consider your interaction with the person who pops into your mind when you hear the word, “enemy.”)

SCRIPTURE

“Wait, did we skip a section last week? We read up to verse 37, then the guide was about verses 43-48. What happened to verses 38 through 42?? I need to know!” Well, if you actually noticed that we skipped those verses, you get a gold star. We went out of order for a reason. See, the verses we looked at last week, 43-48, set up the *why* of Jesus's teaching on loving our enemies. And verses 38-42 give us a good description of *how*. (In fact, these sections might make more sense if they were flipped, but Jesus didn't ask us to critique his rough draft.) Let's take a look.

Read Matthew, chapter 5, verses 38 through 42.

Do you see how these two fit together now? Verses 43-48 tell us *why* it's important to love our enemies (as we discussed last week,) namely, because it's how we show others the extraordinary love of

God. Verses 38-42 give us some tips on *how* we are to go about it, which we'll dive into in the next section.

Question 1: What catches your attention about this section of Jesus's teaching? Do you find it challenging? Maybe it's convicting, causing a little twinge of guilt? Maybe it's off-putting and your first impression is to reject it? What does this "flipped" teaching bring up for you?

REFLECTION

Jesus does it again. He starts with, "you've heard it said...", gives them a teaching they knew, flips it with, "but I tell you," and then drops the bomb. And in this case, he went big. Yes, this one was another Law of Moses like some of the others, but an "eye for an eye" was more than that. It was the precedent for the entire Hebrew justice system for a thousand years. It references "case law" from Leviticus, chapter 24, verse 19. A situation arose, and Moses was called in to adjudicate. And this is what he came up with because it seemed fair.

¹⁹ Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: ²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. (Lev. 24:19 NLT)

And so, in this section, Jesus wasn't expounding upon or challenging just any law... he was confronting the entire Jewish Justice System. This would have been radical, at best, scandalous at the middle, and criminal, at worst. (Do you see why this was so revolutionary, and why

it would have blown their minds? And, subsequently, why the Teachers of the Law didn't like him?)

But here's the thing, this teaching is just as counterintuitive to us today as it was for them then. The idea that "the punishment should match the crime" is something that seems fair to us, as well. But let's take it out of the legal world and make it personal. If someone hurts you, offends you, or insults you, what do you want to do? You want justice. You want fairness. You want reparation. And we try to get our "eye for an eye" in all sorts of other, less obvious, ways. When someone criticizes your abilities at work, maybe you go and share some gossip about that person with a coworker. When you have an argument with a family member, you get even by giving them the cold shoulder for a week and a half. A neighbor is making your life miserable, so you let your dog poop in his yard. It just seems to be a natural human tendency to want the scales to balance.

Question 2: What's your "eye for an eye" *modus operandi*? Are you passive, and just write them off as if they're dead to you? Are you passive-aggressive, giving them the cold shoulder, but in a way that they'll KNOW you're giving them the cold shoulder? Or are you aggressive-aggressive, and they should sleep with one eye open? How do you seek justice when you're wronged?

If we all lived by the premise "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," we'd all end up blind, only able to eat apple sauce through a straw. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and flip our natural desire to

get even. So, how do we do that? Well, Jesus gave us one last week: pray for our hearts to be softened toward them. But that's just the start. He gives us two more steps today.

First, he says, "turn the other cheek." (Disclaimer: Jesus is not suggesting you stay in an abusive situation, and simply let someone do whatever evil they want to you. That's a different discussion for a different day.) When Jesus says, "turn the other cheek," he's simply asking us to give up the desire to get revenge. When we are wronged, we become consumed with balancing the scales. Our blood boils and we can get obsessed with getting even, getting revenge. And Jesus knows that this only punishes ourselves, allowing our anger and desire for justice to consume us and destroy our lives. And so, when Jesus says to turn the other cheek, he's asking us to break the cycle of "an eye for an eye," to flip our natural tendency to want the scales to balance, and give up the obsession to get even. Because when we do, we free ourselves from the chains that obsession has placed on us.

Question 3: What makes "turning the other cheek" difficult for you? Given the personal tendency you identified in Question 2, what does "giving up the desire to get even" look like for you? That is, to keep the metaphors, how can you raise the dead, warm up your cold shoulder, or cool off your hot head? How can you swallow your pride and turn the other cheek?

That's enough, right? Step 1, pray that our heart changes toward them, and step 2, give up the desire to get even. Done and dusted. We can go on about our day, right? Well, no. Jesus gives us a third

step. If all we do is pray and turn a cheek, are we showing the kind of extraordinary love Jesus called us to last week? It's easy to think that praying for the person and not getting even is sufficient. "I'll pray for their soul and not slash their tires. Good enough." But Jesus says, "nope, if you're going to love your enemies and show them the heart of God, you gotta be extraordinary. Yes, pray for your heart to change toward them. And sure, turn the other cheek, giving up your desire to get even. But add this third step, if they take your tunic, give them your cloak, as well. And if you make it one mile with them... go on for a second one. That is, I'm calling you to turn that enemy into a friend." And you can just hear the crowd go, "You want us to do what?! I don't want to walk one *yard* with them, let alone *two miles*! And they don't *deserve* my coat! Jesus, don't make us be nice to them!"

But Jesus knew that most people aren't evil. Most people operate out of some hurt or anger or brokenness, causing them to act the way they do. And when we work to turn that enemy into a friend, we learn about their life. We learn what makes them tick. We develop an appreciation for the human and gain an understanding of their pain and why they act the way they do. And in that way, we might develop compassion for them and maybe the conflict diminishes. You'll be blown away at the beginning of the reconciliation that can happen when you do something nice for that family member who's driving you nuts. You will be amazed at the change when you start bringing a scone to work for that coworker who you've had conflict with. It doesn't always work, but at least you can say you showed that person

extraordinary love. If we approach every “enemy” with an “eye for an eye” mentality ignoring Jesus’s call to show extraordinary love, maybe that broken, hurt, angry human never feels the presence of God. Maybe it’s up to you to show them they are loved.

Question 4: Consider the person you identified as an “enemy” last week. What practical thing can you do to try to turn that “enemy” into a friend? What is the proverbial “cloak” you are to give them? What would “going the second mile” look like?

CLOSING

As we said, this might be the most difficult teaching in the entire sermon, which is why we spent two weeks on it. So, to wrap up this two-parter, *how* do we go about loving our enemies? How do we flip our natural human tendency to want an “eye for an eye”? From last week, we start with prayer, praying that *our* heart would change toward *them*. We then “turn the other cheek” giving up our desire to get even. And then we go the next mile, turning that person from an enemy into a friend by showing them extraordinary love. This is no easier for us today than it was for Jesus’s listeners 2000 years ago. But of all the “flipped” teachings of Jesus, there’s nothing that will do more to show other’s the heart of God than when we love our enemies. So, take that to heart this week. Love your enemies. And in this way, we’ll be showing others the extraordinary love of God.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.

Close in prayer.