

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 5:38-42 | Retaliation, Rights, and Vengeance
November 27, 2022

WELCOME:

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 5.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.

REVIEW:

We continue our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Last week, Jesus taught us about making promises.

Scripture also calls promises— oaths and vows.

LW KEYPOINT:

Failure to keep our word/promises is a sin.

It's important to know that today—or to be at least reminded of it.

What Jesus taught us last Sunday about keeping our word is so simple and gracious.

Jesus said, *"Let your yes, mean yes, and your no mean no."* (Matt. 5:37)

In other words, your integrity should vouch for itself—you don't need to make a promise to keep your word.

The apostle James reiterates Jesus' words, and pleads with us, and says, *"Above all... let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no,'" (Jas. 5:12)*

Then I ended last Sunday's sermon with a personal plea.

I asked that when you sign up for Bible studies or any service opportunities here at the church that you would make these things a priority.

I was surprised by the feedback regarding my plea.

I'm so grateful that many of you want to help serve. Thank you!

It also showed me that I'm not doing a great job of letting you know what's available for service opportunities—so please forgive me for that.

So I'll be working on how to communicate our needs to you more clearly in the near future.

But aside from those weekly duties—cleaning the church, administration, etc.—

I want to remind us of the primary reason we're here.

The main reason we're here this morning is to learn the Word of God so that we can share the Word of God. ^{① worship led} _②

At RBC, we pray that you catch a glimpse of our vision— *Experiencing God... Verse By Verse.*

Why is that our vision?

So then you can join us in the mission— *Sharing Jesus... Day By Day.*

This little church on the hill strives to fulfill the Great Commission in the Verde Valley.

We are not a programic church — we're a missional church
My prayer is that you'll join God with either where He already has you—

Or where He's leading you.

When it comes to being men and women of integrity and keeping our word—

The things we do, the places we go, the things we possess—every aspect of our life is a sermon.

That sermon either contradicts or confirms what you say.

If we're working—then our jobs are our pulpits.

If we're retired—then how we spend our time is our pulpits.

If we're in school—our studies is our pulpit.

What's my point? My point is that this building is not the church—

You're the church!

And yes, the building is important.

But the church building and the church service and learning the Word of God is not an end in itself.

Meaning we don't come here for entertainment or to make God happy.

We come here because we are the *ecclesia*—we're the ones that God has called to be salt and light in the Verde Valley.

We are not only called but commissioned by Jesus to share the Good News with others.

I'm not too fond of sports illustrations, but I'll give you one anyway.

Sunday morning for us— is like the huddle for a football team.

We come here to worship God and to be fed the Word of God.

When we all leave here, that's when we start running the plays.

There's no point huddling every Sunday morning if we're not going to run the plays God has given us.

When you watch a football game, you watch for ACTION - not huddles

So all that to say this—yes, we want you to help and serve around the church.

Thanks again for your willingness to serve - need all the help we can get.

But let's not forget our primary responsibility—to share Jesus day by day.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, Jesus changes the subject again in His Sermon on the Mount.

He moves from the subject of making promises to retaliation and rights.

Now, these five verses that we'll look at today are probably five of the most misunderstood verses within Jesus' sermon.

If you would ask an unbeliever to quote any Bible verse, they may say the one we're studying today—“*an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth.*”

So what does that mean?

What does it not mean?

What does it mean for you? Let's find out!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:38-42 CSB

Matthew 5:38—“You have heard that it was said, **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.**”

Matthew 5:39— *But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

Matthew 5:40— *As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well.*

Matthew 5:41— *And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.*

Matthew 5:42— *Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

**This is the Word of the Lord for River Bible Church.

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 5:38—“*You have heard that it was said, **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.***”

You have heard that it was said— refers to various interpretations about vengeance.

Keep in mind that Jesus is preaching to His Disciples and is referring to the scribes and Pharisee's interpretation of this OT passage that Jesus just mentioned.

Now, we've all heard what the world says about revenge and retaliation:

- An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.
- Don't get mad. Get even.

But we're here this morning to learn what God has to say about these things—not what the world thinks.

Now your Bible should have verse 38 in bold or italics.

Matthew 5:38—“You have heard that it was said, **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.**”

The reason that this verse is in bold or italics is because Jesus is quoting the OT.

There are three places in the OT where this language is used.

Exodus 21:23—If there is an injury, then you must give life for life,

Exodus 21:24— eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

Exodus 21:25— burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.

—

Leviticus 24:19— If any man inflicts a permanent injury on his neighbor, whatever he has done is to be done to him:

Leviticus 24:20— fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Whatever injury he inflicted on the person, the same is to be inflicted on him.

— Most extensive passage

Deuteronomy 19:15— One witness cannot establish any iniquity or sin against a person, whatever that person has done. A fact must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Deuteronomy 19:16— “If a malicious witness testifies against someone accusing him of a crime,

Deuteronomy 19:17— the two people in the dispute are to stand in the presence of the Lord before the priests and judges in authority at that time.

Deuteronomy 19:18— The judges are to make a careful investigation, and if the witness turns out to be a liar who has falsely accused his brother,

Deuteronomy 19:19— you must do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from you.

Deuteronomy 19:20— Then everyone else will hear and be afraid, and they will never again do anything evil like this among you.

Deuteronomy 19:21— Do not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot.

At first glance, many people think this law is incredibly harsh by our modern standards of justice.

This law reflects the principle of *lex talionis*.

Lex talionis is Latin and refers to the biblical law of retaliation.

Lex talionis is probably one of the first laws ever created.

The earliest record of this kind of law dealing with retribution is found in the Code of Hammurabi.

Hammurabi was the great Babylonian king who lived a hundred years or so before Moses.

This time frame is fascinating because it's the same period that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived—the Patriarchs. (Gen 12-50.)

In both the law of Moses and the Code of Hammurabi, the principle of punishment was to match the crime that had been committed.

It had two primary purposes.

The first was to reduce, lessen and diminish further crime.

The second purpose was to prevent excessive punishment based on personal vengeance.

We see lots of examples of personal vengeance in Scripture:

Genesis 4:23—*Lamech said to his wives:*

~~*Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;*~~

*For I killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.*

Lamech is boasting about his revenge—not good.

We see another act of revenge in Genesis 34.

Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, was raped by a foreigner.

Dinah's brothers were so enraged by this...

Genesis 34:27—*Jacob's sons came to the slaughter and plundered the city because their sister had been defiled.*

In other words, they didn't only kill the guy the raped their sister.

They killed all the men in the city as well.

Genesis 34:28—*They took their flocks, herds, donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field.*

Genesis 34:29— They captured all their possessions, dependents, and wives and plundered everything in the houses.

And not only did they kill all the men, but they also stole all their possessions.

So this concept of an eye for an eye was a right and just punishment.

This law was to prevent things like this from happening.

We still have this kind of judicial process today—

It's the same idea *tit for tat* and *quid pro quo*.

KEYPOINT: #1

Punishment is to match—not exceed the crime itself.

“Eye for eye” is not that God commands personal revenge but instead desires it to be controlled or limited in the judicial process.

Each OT passage about an eye for an eye is within the context of a fair and legal trial.

Yes, the punishment was sometimes carried out by the victim, but the trial and sentencing were always the responsibility of the judges.

This is where our interpretation of this text can get all wonky.

At first glance, we interpret this passage personally because, by human nature, we are vengeful people.

However, ^{An eye for an eye} ~~this law~~ is for the civil courts.

It's not to be used as a personal vendetta.

The courtroom is not a place for mercy—it is a place of justice.

The courtroom is not a place to carry out Jesus' command of forgiving someone 70 x 7.

The courtroom is not to act like a personal relationship—nor should a personal relationship act like a courtroom. Why?

Because when you give sinful, unrepentant men rights and pity, society as a whole runs toward lawlessness.

Deuteronomy 19:21—Do not show pity...

God never intended for anyone to take things into their own hands.

Just because your neighbor broke your lawn mower, doesn't mean you walk into his garage and break something of his!

Justice must be administered publicly—with an offense, witnesses, judge, and jury.

An eye for an eye stopped the spiral of violence.

The problem, however, is that Pharisees interpreted this law to justify personal retribution and revenge.

They quoted this commandment in order to defeat its very purpose.

Scripture addresses retribution and revenge in other places as well:

Proverbs 20:22—Don't say, "I will avenge this evil!"

Wait on the Lord, and he will rescue you.

Proverbs 24:29—Don't say, "I'll do to him what he did to me;

I'll repay the man for what he has done."

Why Aren't we to repay the wrong
That's been done to us?

Because the Lord says...
Deuteronomy 32:35—Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay.,
 In time their foot will slip,
 for their day of disaster is near,
 and their doom is coming quickly."

Deuteronomy 32:36— The Lord will indeed vindicate his people
 and have compassion on his servants...

Why are we to leave vengeance up to the Lord?

Because we are so selfish that we tend to overreact when we've been wronged.

We see this all the time with road rage.

People are losing their minds because somebody cut somebody off or pulled out in front of them—people are killing each other over a minor traffic infraction!

We don't want to get even—we want to blow that guy's car up.

In no instance did the Old Testament allow an individual to take the law into his own hands and apply it personally.

Yet that is precisely what the Pharisees and scribes had done with an eye for an eye.

And this is why Jesus says...

Matthew 5:39— *But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

Wait for a second! Did Jesus just say that?

—*don't resist an evildoer?*

An eye for an eye

That can't be right because we see throughout the history of Israel where King David resisted armies that invaded Israel (2 Sam. 5:6-25).

BSW Didn't Jesus resist Satan during the Temptations in the desert (Matt 4:1)

If we're not supposed to resist an evildoer, why did the apostle Peter say

1 Peter 5:8/9—*Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. Resist him...*

Why did the apostle James say—

James 4:7—*Submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*
Is Jesus a hypocrite? It sure seems that way on the surface—

Is Jesus talking out both sides of His mouth?

Turn the other cheek? We would rather clench our fist. *↳ get even*

And Jesus knows that—and that's why he once again is being hyperbolic—

Just as he was earlier in His sermon talking about cutting off limbs and gouging out eyes in verses 27-30 teaching on lust.

He uses hyperbole—an exaggerated form of teaching to get everyone's attention.

We use hyperbole all the time today—This thing weighs a ton!

I have a million things to do, I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.

But how do we know that Jesus is being hyperbolic in this particular text?

Well, let's look at Jesus' life—

Jesus, Himself, did not always turn the other cheek.

Before the crucifixion, Jesus is standing on trial—

John 18:19— *The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.*

John 18:20— *"I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus answered him. "I have always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where all the Jews gather, and I haven't spoken anything in secret.*

John 18:21— *Why do you question me? Question those who heard what I told them. Look, they know what I said."*

John 18:22— *When he had said these things, one of the officials standing by slapped Jesus, saying, "Is this the way you answer the high priest?"*

John 18:23— *"If I have spoken wrongly," Jesus answered him, "give evidence about the wrong; but if rightly, why do you hit me?"*

So Jesus was physically slapped in that text and did not turn the other cheek.

So what's going on here?

Well, Jesus was on trial and was making his case for innocence.

Today's text, however refers to personal relationships. Let's look again.

Matthew 5:39— *But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

The second reason we know Jesus is being hyperbolic is because of the level of violence that Jesus is referring to.

To slap a Jew in the face is more disrespectful than painful.

A slap in the face was an attack on his honor.

Even a slave ^{in the 1st Century} would rather have been beaten across his back with a whip than be slapped in the face.

KEYPOINT:

Turning the other cheek symbolizes how Christians are not to demand daily personal rights.

When someone attacks our pride, we, too, are not to defend that right with retaliation.

We don't have to retaliate when someone gives a certain hand gesture while driving.

We don't have to demand our rights when someone sends a snarky email or text message—we can take a deep breath and let these things go.

Jesus presses in with three more examples:

Matthew 5:40— *As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well.*

Matthew 5:41— *And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.*

Matthew 5:42— *Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

These verses list hypothetical situations in which Jesus's general teaching on non-retaliation applies to our personal lives.

The first ^{example} pictures a personal argument that leads to physical violence and embarrassment with being slapped.

Remember, Jesus is exaggerating—his point is that you should not retaliate when someone hurts your feelings.

You are to de-escalate the situation.

The ^{first} ~~second~~ example in verse 40 refers to a minor legal situation.

Matthew 5:40— As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well.

Is it really worth going to court over?

Is it really worth the time, effort and loss of sleep?

The ^{2nd} ~~third~~ situation in verse 41 illustrates you serving someone you don't care for.

Matthew 5:41— And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

We are to go out of our way to help and serve people whether we like them or not.

The ^{3rd} ~~fourth~~ situation in verse 42 illustrates our attitude towards helping and giving.

Matthew 5:42— Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

All these examples bring us to...

KEYPOINT: #3

In each situation, Jesus commands disciples to go beyond the expected normal human response.

How do we know this to be true?

Because when it came to Jesus personally, He set the example. *for us.*

How would you feel if when Jesus was slapped during His trial, He slapped that person back?

How would you feel when Jesus was spit upon, Jesus spit back?
Wouldn't you have a different perspective if Jesus retaliated like we do?

How you feel about your Lord if He cursed and had profanity and hate spewing from His mouth as the Roman soldiers nailed Him to the cross?

Instead, he prayed for them.

Luke 23:34—Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing."

Now all that is easier said than done.

Not striking back—~~not~~ defending ourselves when wronged defies human nature.

It takes supernatural strength and wisdom ~~not~~ to lash out.

KEYPOINT: #4
We are not to fight over every wound to our pride.

To fight for our rights—every minor offense—proves that myself is still on the throne.

And it is impossible to live for self and for Christ at the same time.

We are to let these things go.

It's quite the burden to prove how right you are to everyone all the time.

PREACH:

It's a good bet to say that no part of the Sermon on the Mount has been so misinterpreted and misapplied as today's text.

People have interpreted it to mean that Christians are to be sanctimonious doormats.

Others have used this text to promote pacifism, conscientious objection to military ~~service~~, lawlessness, anarchy, and a host of other positions that it does not support.

However, Jesus upholds the law and teaches the spirit of the law with an attitude.

And the attitude is this—that we should be willing to suffer loss—whether we're right or not.

Why? Because Jesus did.

The world loves its rights.

In our culture today, we are so big on our rights that we set the law aside.

KEYPOINT:

We are most dangerous when we think we're right.

Here's the thing

When you turn the other cheek, you don't look like yourself. You look like Jesus.

But when we demand our rights, we ^{→ as Christians →} look like the world.

And dear friends, we are not of this world—we are merely passing through.

And along our brief stay here, we are to lay down our rights just as Jesus laid down his.

Philippians 2:3— *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.*

Philippians 2:4— *Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.*

Philippians 2:5— *Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,*

Philippians 2:6— *who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.*

Philippians 2:7— *Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man,*

Philippians 2:8— *he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross.*

PRAYER

BENEDICTION

2 Pe. 3:18—(May you) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

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