

LIVING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: RIGHTEOUS RETALIATION

SERMON DISCUSSION FOR SUNDAY JULY 26, 2015 | SPEAKER: PASTOR RON GORMONG

SERMON DISCUSSION

Ice Breaker (Everyone):

SCRIPTURE; MATTHEW 5:38-42 ESV

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 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. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

THE DIFFICULTY OF THIS TOPIC

Pastor Ron shares his thoughts on the Sermon on the Mount thus far, namely that it is just plain HARD. The current topic on retaliation is one of the most challenging of all the teachings of Scripture and so while it is difficult, it cannot be ignored. Pastor Ron shares that he himself struggles especially with this topic because he has a deep desire for justice.

If you were to put yourself on a teeter-totter with one side “grace” and the other “justice”, which side would you shift toward? Why do you think that is?

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS

As with the other sections of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is bringing fulfillment and correction to the understanding of the Old Testament Law. In this case Jesus references three passages:

Exodus 21:23-25 ESV: “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.”

Leviticus 24:19-20 ESV: “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.”

Deuteronomy 19:21 ESV: “Show no pity; life for life; eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

This system is called a system of *lex talionis* or *exact retribution*. Retribution is a payment back in the form of punishment. In this case, exactly what was done to you shall be done to the guilty.

How do you feel about this system? What are the pros and cons?

THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Pastor Ron posits that all humans relate to this system at some level. He then goes on to tell a detailed account of American reactions to Nazi Soldiers. At one point the SS Troops slaughtered over one hundred American Soldiers after they surrendered. When a similar even took place the American Troops showed absolutely no mercy. When prisoners of concentration camps were freed by Allied Forces, so great did they desire vengeance that they facilitated the dismemberment of Prison Guards by former inmates. This was shared not to paint our heroes in a negative light, but to illustrate that what took place in their hearts takes place in our hearts as well. The same desire for judgement and retaliation tempts most souls.

Reflect (don't share out loud): How murderous and hateful have you allowed your thoughts to be when wronged?

THE NEW WAY

Here in our passage, Jesus comes along and fulfills and supersedes the system of exact retribution. Jesus says "Do not resist the one who is evil." Matthew 5:39 ESV. Somehow the justice of God will prevail, divine retribution will be satisfied, but the human part of the equation has changed. Instead of exacting justice, our job has become that of loving non-resistance.

It is also at this point Pastor Ron explains that Jesus is dealing with personal morality and not civil organization. The point Jesus is making was not meant to blueprint the edicts of society. There is still a place for justice in human society.

How will the justice of God prevail if we do not punish those who do evil?

Pastor Ron quotes the Newtonian Law which states *For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction*. While physical laws don't inform philosophy, this Law fits really well in the Old System. How do you think this Law fits in the New System?

FOUR EXAMPLES

Jesus gives four examples of how Righteous Retaliation plays out.

EXAMPLE ONE

"But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matthew 5:39b ESV

In the Ancient Near-Eastern culture Jesus lived in, being backhanded with the right hand on the right cheek was the ultimate insult. The backhand was used to show power and influence over and against a subordinate. Here Jesus hits at a strong nerve. Though we are not backhanded today, people do humiliate us in front of other people, lord their power and authority over us, or say degrading things. How do you respond in those moments? Jesus is calling His original audience and now us to take it and give grace. Jesus Himself practiced this very thing: Matthew 26:67 ESV: "Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him..."

Do you have any practical tips on how to extend love in a situation like this?

EXAMPLE TWO

“And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” Matthew 5:40 ESV

The tunic was what we would today call a “shirt” while the cloak is what we would title a “coat” For those within earshot of Jesus, however the cloak was also a blanket. Exodus 22 describes the cloak as a very necessary item for an individual, something nobody should be deprived of. So for Jesus to share one ought give up not only his shirt, but also something they have a basic human right to have!

How might this play out in today’s legal system? How could a Christian show unexpected love and grace in the midst of a greedy lawsuit?

EXAMPLE THREE

“And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” Matthew 5:41 ESV

Israel was occupied by the Roman Empire. The various ranks of Roman Soldiers roamed throughout the country keeping the peace. As they did so they were allowed to grab a Jew without notice and force them to carry something for them up to one mile. Here, Jesus is expressing the feeling we get when someone is forcing you to do something you don’t want to do, or do something for something you don’t believe in, or with someone you really don’t like. It is in the crux of these moments we can choose to surprise the world with the unique love of God in our hearts.

What are one or two examples of a situation you have felt frustrated? How did you respond—begrudgingly or willingly?

EXAMPLE FOUR

“Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.” Matthew 5:42 ESV

This is self-evident. However, Pastor Ron suggests we ought to give discretion when giving.

All of these examples beg us to ask the question “What would love respond in this situation?” No longer is the question “How will justice be served?”

How do people attempt to rationalize this verse to make it easier to swallow?

What do you think discretion in giving ought to look like for a Christian?

When someone responds to you in love after you deserved punishment, what did that do in your heart?

FOUR MOTIVATIONS FOR LIVING THIS WAY

1. LOVE OVER JUSTICE RESTORES RELATIONSHIPS (SEE II CORINTHIANS 5:18-19)

When wrong occurs, relationships are damaged. Pastor Ron suggests the reason Jesus desires love over justice is so that relationship can be restored between people. Martin Luther King said *“LOVE is the Only FORCE CAPABLE of TRANSFORMING AN ENEMY into a FRIEND—for it has creative and redemptive POWER.”* The victim must experience and endure the pain. And in that moment we join with Jesus’ suffering on the Cross.

Pastor Ron shares a story about a man whose neighbor scratched up his brand new pickup truck. When asked if the man would pursue legal action he responded “I figure I’ll have that neighbor a lot longer than I’ll have that truck.”

Do you agree Jesus’ reason for love over justice is to restore relationships with others?

What is the significance and meaning of “joining in the sufferings of Jesus on the Cross”?

2. REVENGE IS A KILLER

Revenge will kill you spiritually. Pastor Ron shares a humorous story about Amos and Andy. There was a big man who always slapped Andy on the chest. So Andy decided he would put a stick of dynamite in his shirt pocket to play the big man’s hand off. Thankfully Amos pointed out that while he would fix the man, he would also lose his own heart.

How does revenge make us lose our hearts? What does that even mean?

3. GOD WILL BRING JUSTICE

“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.” Romans 12:19 ESV

A quote Pastor Ron mentioned reads “The WHEELS of GOD’S JUSTICE grind EXCEEDINGLY SLOW, but EXCEEDINGLY FINE.” There will be a day when the whistle blows and everybody gets out of the pool. And on that day God’s justice will go forth throughout all Creation and all wrongs will be made right and any unpaid retribution will be satisfied.

Is it easy or hard for you to place justice in God’s hands? Why?

4. YOU DON’T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE

God’s grace is available for you. God’s grace is sufficient for you.

Do you know any Scripture that speaks about God’s grace to help us in the transformation of our hearts and lives?