

## ✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

After teaching in the synagogues throughout Galilee, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every illness among the people, Jesus became the topic of conversation for lots of people. Health care has been a concern ever since God allowed the sin of man to infect the world we live in. You and I may be tempted to complain about our healthcare because of the cost or the system's inefficiencies, but let's thank God that we live in a time when so many maladies can be treated or even cured. Until modern medicine came along in the last 100 years, getting sick often meant a shorter or a more miserable life. Listen to what the apostle Matthew reports: *News about [Jesus] spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.*

But after they were healed, the people didn't just turn around and go home. They stayed and listened to Jesus teach. *Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.* (See Matthew 4:23-25.) It's a good thing too. Jesus is the Son of God. He knows a thing or two about really important things, things that can make a difference in our lives now, yes, but especially things that can make a difference in what kind of existence we get to experience

after this short life is over.

On a particular day during the ministry of Jesus, crowds of people were following Jesus. So he went up on a mountainside, sat down, and began to teach his disciples (5:1-2). In order for these teachings to have the desired effect on us, it helps to keep in mind who Jesus is. He's our Savior from sin. When he tells us to do this and not to do that, let's remember that he practiced what he preached perfectly. This helps us whenever we fail to obey God's will. We can remind ourselves: Jesus didn't fail. We know that Jesus speaks to the Father on our behalf. We can almost hear him saying things like this: "Father, I ask you not to hold their sins against them. I died on the cross for them. The full penalty for their sins has been paid. Through faith in me they have my sinless life to their credit." The Holy Spirit wants us to know this so that we might not be burdened by any of our past sins, and so that we might be marvelously motivated to do what he wants in the future.

At this point in Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount," he is explaining that God wants us to treat everyone with the same kind of love that he shows to us. "That's hard to do, Jesus. When people treat me bad, there's a part of me that wants to retaliate. In fact, I have a really good rationalization for retaliation, Lord. If I give them a dose of their own medicine, aren't I helping them to see the matter from my point of view?" That might

work on a few people, but it will hurt every person you try it on. Jesus has another way, a better way. LET LOVE TURN THINGS AROUND.

Many Bible teachers and preachers have referred to Jesus as a new lawgiver, someone who came along and gave us new laws to replace the laws that God gave through Moses. But it's much better to understand Jesus as explaining the law in the way that God always intended it to be taken.

Here's an example from our text. <sup>38</sup>*You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth."* Who said, "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth"? Actually the Lord did. Jesus is probably referring to Leviticus 24:17-22, a portion of the law God gave to his people Israel through Moses. Listen: <sup>17</sup>*"If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. <sup>19</sup>If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: <sup>20</sup>fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured."* Sounds harsh, doesn't it? But keep in mind: the laws given through Moses were intended to help a newly freed group of slaves to become a righteous nation. The inexperienced judiciary was going to need to know how to handle the ugly situation where someone had not let love turn things around but instead had harmed. First, notice that there was a limit to the punishment that the judges could mete out. If someone knocked out

your tooth, you would not be allowed to knock off his head. This law was also a way for the Lord to say, "Hey, everyone. The life and health of your neighbor is precious to me. The punishment for hurting your neighbor is severe because I want you to think twice before doing wrong. Better yet, avoid doing evil altogether."

Unfortunately by the time the Savior came along, God's people had turned this law into a license for retaliation. "I want my pound of flesh!"

Jesus has a better way: <sup>39</sup>*I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.* We Christians don't get to fight fire with fire. Nor are we free to hit someone in order to keep them from hitting us in the first place—the so-called pre-emptive strike. "But, Pastor, it sounds like we have to let people walk all over us." Yes, it sounds like that, but Jesus' is a great teacher. He's making his point powerfully: "No retaliation." Jesus shows us how to apply this in a real-life situation. Remember when he was standing on trial before the high priest? When Jesus answered truthfully, one of the officials struck him in the face. Jesus replied, *"If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"* (see John 18:19-23). Notice that Jesus didn't offer to let the official strike him on the other cheek. In fact, he gave the man an appropriate rebuke. But he did not

retaliate—and that’s the point Jesus is making in the Sermon on the Mount: no retaliation! Self-defense is permissible. The apostle Paul twice used the courts to defend his rights against those who persecuted him (Acts 16, Acts 22). But even when he did not defend his rights legally, he did not retaliate. Let’s do the same. We are children of God, saved by Jesus. So no retaliation. Not at home. Not at school. Not at work. Not in the church. Don’t be afraid to be wronged or cheated (1 Corinthians 6:7). God can replace what someone has cheated you out of. And remember: he saw how others wronged you. Entrust your case to the Lord. Lay it out before him, and let it go. He’ll take care of it.

Jesus continues: <sup>40</sup>*If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.* Today we might say, “If someone sues you for the shirt on your back, let him have your winter coat too.” Jesus is not saying we have to let people walk all over us. He’s teaching that it’s better to have less than it is to retaliate.

Jesus continues: <sup>41</sup>*If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.* Jesus is referring to a law that allowed the Roman soldiers to stop a private citizen and force him to help carry supplies for a certain distance. The Jews naturally hated this law. I suspect we would too. By nature we might look for a way to strike back at any Roman

soldier who made himself momentarily vulnerable. But Jesus wants no retaliation from his people. “It would be better for you to carry the load two miles than for you to retaliate against the soldier.” Think how the soldier would be struck by your willingness to help him carry his supplies. You might get a chance to tell him about the one true God.

Jesus continues: <sup>42</sup>*Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.* This is really tough to apply in our day because there are so many people trying to take unfair advantage of those who are the trusting sort. Today we don’t know everyone in our village like people did back then. We might have to check out someone’s story. It might take several hours. It might mean taking someone to the laundromat and washing their clothes, or to the store to buy new. It might mean taking someone under your wing and teaching them how to provide for themselves and not make so many life mistakes. This takes the kind of love Jesus showed to us, the kind of love Jesus wants his followers to be known by. It’s better to err on the side of helping someone that is actually just trying to use you than to turn someone away who needs your help. Whatever it costs you—God can replace.

Jesus wants us to love like the Father

loves. <sup>43</sup>*You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” “Love your neighbor.”* You don’t always have to teach people to love others. Many figure out in their childhood, “Hey, you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” That’s why Jesus says, <sup>46</sup>*If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?* <sup>47</sup>*And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?* “Love your neighbor as yourself” is an idea that is known throughout the world. You don’t need the Bible for this one, but the idea is frequently referred to in the Bible. But where in the Bible does it teach, “*Hate your enemy*”? It doesn’t. That is a perversion from the mind of man.

Jesus wants to help us think straight on this. <sup>44</sup>*I tell you: Love your enemies.* “Really, Jesus? Are you sure? No one else in the whole world teaches this. That’s just weird.” No, not really. Think about it. The heavenly Father loves his enemies. He knows that an enemy is not someone that he hates. He loves everyone. He wants us to love everyone. So an enemy is not someone we hate. For all those who follow Jesus, an enemy is someone who hates us. And what does Jesus say? <sup>44</sup>*I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.* He

loves even those who hate him. Want some evidence? Jesus reminds us that the Father <sup>45</sup>*causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* Wouldn’t it be interesting if God sent sunshine and rain only on the crops of believing farmers? Wouldn’t it be interesting if God blessed only the businesses of believers, if only believers could get jobs? Interesting, perhaps, but not God’s way. He sends blessings on everyone. He won’t force anyone into his kingdom. The way into his kingdom is through listening to his Word. That’s the tool the Holy Spirit uses to bring people in and keep them in the kingdom—the Word of God that shows how the Lord loves his enemies, all who ever sinned against them. He sent Jesus to redeem all sinners.

Now he wants us to imitate him, to be loving like he is. That’s why Jesus ends this portion of the Sermon on the Mount with these words: <sup>48</sup>*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Don’t let yourself be lax in loving others. If someone is mean to you, kill ‘em with kindness. Some of the best stories in the history of Christianity are those that relate how hatred was responded to with love so that the hater became a believer in Jesus. LET LOVE TURN THINGS AROUND. Try it God’s way and watch the Lord be glorified through you.