

Matthew 5:38-42

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[0:00] Please take your copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you. It's well read and treasured in your heart. Turn with me to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5. It's Matthew chapter 5.

Our text this morning will be Matthew chapter 5, verses 38 through 42. We've been working on an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, which is found in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7 since mid-February of this year.

And we are getting close to concluding chapter 5. Those of you who were with us in the spring and then not with us in the summer, here we are, still in chapter 5 of this most precious of Jesus' teachings.

Across our study so far, we have considered two prominent themes that I want to remind you of before we look at our text today.

First is the theme of human flourishing, these declarations of blessedness. We commonly call the Beatitudes, found at the beginning of chapter 5.

[1:17] Jesus has this repetition of statements, blessed is. And tells us what it is like, what it looks like to live as a citizen of God's kingdom.

This blessedness that Jesus teaches is not the same as the blessedness of the world. Jesus says, blessed are those who are poor in spirit and mourn and are meek and hungry and thirsty for righteousness and merciful, pure peacemakers.

He even says that those who are persecuted for righteousness call blessed. The second theme is the theme of whole person righteousness.

Jesus has taught us that citizens of his kingdom are keepers of the law. Not that they gain their citizenship by keeping the law, but that they have been granted citizenship and their keeping of the law is the evidence of their citizenship.

And this law keeping, this righteousness is meant to permeate us. It's meant to be every part of our being.

[2:45] We are to be righteous in thought, feeling, intention, as well as action. It's to have an inward expression as well as an outward expression.

And this is what Jesus means when he says in Matthew chapter 5 verse 20, For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The scribes and the Pharisees were seen as the most righteous people of the day, the most outwardly expressive followers of God. They seemed to have everything right.

And they certainly told others that they did and placed burdens upon them. And he goes on then to press this point by using a series of phrases beginning in Matthew chapter 5 verse 21 and 22. You'll see it there. You have heard that it was said. And then in verse 22, but I say to you. There's a repetition of this through the end of chapter 5.

[3:56] Six different times. And what Jesus is doing here is correcting the common misinterpretations of the law in his day. He's saying, see the scribes and Pharisees?

They haven't even gotten this stuff right. Those that you would declare as righteous are not at all righteous. This morning's text is the fifth in this series.

And it concerns revenge. Or as some of your subtitles in your Bibles might say, retaliation. So join me as we look at Jesus' careful correction and application for our day.

Before I read the text, beloved, I want to remind you that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good.

And as such, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. I'll begin reading in verse 38.

[4:59] Verse 38.

Now this morning we will consider this text by employing the following outline.

And I'll repeat these, of course, but I want you to see where we're headed before we even start.

Number one, the original intent of the law.

Number two, the scribes and Pharisees' perversion of the law. Number three, the modern perversion of Jesus' teaching.

And number four, and most importantly, the correct understanding of Jesus' teaching. I find so often, as Jesus finds here, that we have to correct, we have to say the what is not in order to say what is.

[6:21] So let's look first at the original intent of the law. Verse 38, Jesus says, You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, which is a direct quotation from the Old Testament.

So their saying an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was not wrong to say. They just misapplied the law. You can find this in Exodus chapter 21, verse 24.

Leviticus chapter 24, verse 20. And Deuteronomy chapter 19 and verse 21. And this law was given to place limitations on punishments for crimes.

It was meant to place boundaries on the severity of punishments and was given as a limiting law to the judges of Israel.

So God is saying, let's be fair as we enact punishments for crimes that are committed. Let's not go above and beyond the crime itself, but rather an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

[7:35] God, in His graciousness, in His mercy, was putting a line that the judges could not cross. They couldn't create a severity.

If you steal a piece of fruit, we'll cut off your hand would be an example of what this type of thing was limiting. And this is most clearly seen in Deuteronomy chapter 19, verse 18, and then leading up to verse 21, where we see this phrase repeated.

So beginning of verse 18, it says, The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother.

So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear in fear and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

So you see, in the case of a false witness, the judges are charged to enact punishment, but only so far.

[8:50] So God gave a good law that would restrain unfair punishments from being administered by Israel's judges.

But this was not its use in Jesus' day. Jesus says, You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

The previous four times we have seen Jesus say, You have heard that it was said, but I say to you, He has been correcting a misinterpretation and practice.

And this is no different. So let's look at what the scribes and Pharisees were doing with this law in their day. So number two, the scribes and Pharisees' perversion of the law.

The main trouble of the scribes and Pharisees' teaching was that they failed to connect the teaching to judges, but rather made it a point of personal application.

[9:53] They believed the commandment was given for the sake of retaliation and revenge, and in their typically legalistic way, viewed exacting revenge as a duty and an honor.

They were taking a negative injunction, do not punish beyond what is just, into a positive one, punish to the degree of what is just.

Did I say that word? And they took and taught that the power to do so belonged to the individual. What they were promoting was vigilantism, not justice.

It is into this background that Jesus is speaking and says, But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. It's that context he's speaking into, where they would, at every turn, defend their own rights, stand up for themselves.

And it's important to know that, to rightly understand what the rest of Jesus says means. There is much misinterpretation and misunderstanding in our day of what Jesus is saying here.

[11:13] So let's look at what Jesus is not teaching in our contemporary setting in this text. So number three, the modern perversion of Jesus' teaching.

The modern perversion of Jesus' teaching. Certainly there are those of us in our day who want to defend our own rights in the same way that the Pharisees did.

This is typically not the text people run to, though, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth to justify such a thing. But there are many who run to this text to make an argument for national pacifism.

And I suggest to you that that is not at all what Jesus is teaching here. We must be very careful in how we go about interpreting such a text. And there are a number of interpretive principles that must be applied to the Sermon on the Mount to understand it well.

Number one, if our interpretation contradicts the plain and obvious teaching of Scripture elsewhere, then our interpretation is wrong.

[12:27] James chapter 4 and verse 7. James writes, Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil or the evil one, and he will flee from you.

So how are we to reconcile these two things if we're not supposed to resist the evil one? And yet James commands us in the Holy Writ to resist the evil one. Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 17. Isaiah prophesies, Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless.

Plead the widow's cause. So if our interpretation contradicts the plain and obvious teaching of Scripture elsewhere, then our interpretation is wrong.

This text is not a cry for national pacifism. Secondly, if our interpretation makes the teaching appear impossible, then our interpretation is wrong.

[13:29] Jesus nowhere requires something of us that cannot be done by His grace. Tolstoy believed and wrote that our Lord's word should be taken at face value.

And therefore, because soldiers, police, and magistrates all resist evil, to have any of these positions would be to be unchristian.

But Paul writes in Romans chapter 13, verses 1 through 4, Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive His approval. For He is God's servant for your good.

[14:35] But if you do wrong, be afraid. For He does not bear the sword in vain. For He is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Seems that Tolstoy also needed to read Romans chapter 13, verses 1 through 4 at face. To see that those placed in authority, the magistrates, the soldiers, the police, are given to us as a good gift from God to restrain the evil of men.

The world would descend into absolute chaos without the restraining grace of God. And authorities are part of that grace to us.

Not the totality of it, but they are part of that grace to us. So, if our interpretation makes the teaching appear impossible, then our interpretation is wrong.

Third interpretive principle. If our interpretation ignores the context of the text, ignores the context of the text, then our interpretation will likely be wrong.

[15:43] Will likely be wrong. As they say, even a blind squirrel finds a nut from time to time. It is possible to ignore the context and still arrive at the proper meaning. But it's not probable that this will

happen.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is not teaching a new law. He is not explaining a new code of ethics. The Sermon on the Mount is harmonious with the moral law of God.

Jesus rather is working to give his listeners an understanding of the spirit of the law. The scribes and the Pharisees were all about the letter of it.

And they misunderstood it all together. But Jesus is concerned about the spirit of it. An understanding of the law leading to human flourishing and to whole person righteousness.

Further, in the context, Jesus is speaking about what citizens of his kingdom will look like. Citizens of his kingdom.

[16:46] This is teaching meant to be applied to individuals called apart for his praise. Not nation states or local governments. Now I won't labor any longer on the matter of pacifism.

Because it is not really the point. I will say I'm not a pacifist. And I believe in just war theory. But that's a topic for another day. All I mean to show you this morning is that national pacifism is not what Jesus is teaching here.

That is not the point of this text. And I believe it's unfaithful to the text to think that's what it teaches. So, what is he teaching?

The all-important question. What is he teaching? This brings us to our fourth and final but longest point. The correct understanding of Jesus' teaching.

Right? So, if he's correcting what the scribes and Pharisees thought and practiced in the day, certainly he's not supporting the national pacifism cries of our day.

[17:52] What is it that he's teaching in this text? And let me begin by rereading verses 39 through 42. Let's get it fresh back in our minds again. Jesus says in verse 39 and following, 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. So, after Jesus says, Do not resist the one who is evil.

I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. He graciously gives us five examples. He wants us to understand what he means when he says, But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.

And of these five examples, the first three seem pretty straightforward. Fairly basic. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

[19:02] So if someone hits you, don't hit him back. There's the summary of it. And, if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

So if someone sues you to take your jacket, give them your coat also. Grip tightly what is yours, but be willing to give, and to give freely.

And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Roman soldiers in this day could force citizens of Israel, or any other foreigner for that matter, to carry their backpacks.

They could demand that of them, as the conquering nation. But, as the Romans were somewhat fair at times, they could only demand that they would go a mile.

So along the Roman road, they would go from one mile marker to another mile marker, and then that conquered citizen could give the backpack back to the soldier.

[20:03] Jesus here is saying, if you're forced to walk one, volunteer to walk a second mile. So, certainly we have to work on applications of that in our day, and I'm going to leave you to that, mostly, yourself.

How is it that I'm supposed to be gracious in this way? But, when we come to verse 42, this pattern seems to break up a bit, and I think that verse 42 is key in helping us interpret this teaching of Jesus.

Jesus. He gives us the final two examples of what he means by, do not resist the one who is evil. They seem a little out of place.

We've tracked through. If someone hits you, don't hit them back. If someone sues you, give a little extra. That's okay. And if someone makes you serve them, serve them a little more. But then he

says in verse 42, give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Doesn't it seem inconsistent to equate the beggar and the borrower against, right, alongside a slapper, a sewer, and a sluggard?

[21:18] I like to alliterate. Doesn't it seem inconsistent to equate the two together? How is it that the beggar and the borrower are the one who is evil?

Have you ever borrowed money from somebody? I don't think you did so from evil intent. I believe that what Jesus is doing here is speaking to our perspective of ourselves and our perspective of others.

That's how these examples fit together. We are so apt to think that we are always in the right and that others are always in the wrong.

This would have been the great error of the scribes and Pharisees' day. They were so self-righteous. Everything they did was right and good. And therefore, anything anybody else did, anybody who didn't look just like them, demanded or asked something of them, must be evil. Must be in that category. Since they were so righteous, everyone else must be evil. So, how would Jesus have us live in light of this text?

[22:39] What are we meant to do with the text? Number one, we should live in light of this text with a proper view of self.

A proper view of self. We must have the right attitudes toward ourselves. In our sinfulness, we are so quick to jump to our own defense when any wrong is done to us.

I like to classically use traffic as an example because I think we all readily experience this. Have you ever pulled out in front of somebody accidentally? I have. I do it out here on this road all the time.

People come over that hill so fast. And I drive a Prius, which is not a spry vehicle. And I think, Oh, no. That guy clearly was going faster than I can get up to speed.

How often have you shook your fist at somebody when they pull out in front of you? Probably accidentally. Probably didn't recognize how fast you were barreling down the road when they pulled out in front of you.

[23:49] We're so quick to even call things wrong that aren't wrong, but to defend our own rights. We want to be so autonomous, so independent. I deserve.

My, mine. We would be so likely to slap back. Just imagine if somebody, when you headed to the restaurant after you're here and somebody just walked up to you and slapped you.

What is your knee-jerk reaction going to be? Would it be humility? Or would you rear back and let it fly?

We would be so likely to grip tightly our tunic and our cloak. Right? How dare anyone take from me what is mine?

We would be so likely to grumble the whole mile and begrudgingly throw down the backpack at the mile marker.

[24:50] Not a step further. I have rights. We would be so quick to begrudge the person asking for help and think so much of ourselves when someone needs to borrow from us.

Of course, I put myself in the position to be the loner and not the borrower. I am so good with money and clearly you are not.

Beloved, we think far too much of ourselves. Anything that we are, we are by the grace of God.

Don't forget that this teaching comes in succession to the beginning of Jesus' sermon. We started that back in February. His original listeners sit and listen through the whole thing at one time.

Remember, he's declared blessed. Those who are, in verse 3, poor in spirit, recognize their spiritual poverty before God, recognize they have nothing of any value spiritually to offer to God.

[26:03] Verse 4, those who mourn, who are heartbroken over this, right? Humbled, see their great spiritual poverty. Who are meek, although they have the strength to retaliate, the strength to find revenge, rather lay aside their own self-interest for the sake of others.

Verse 6, those are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, right? Recognizing that they have no righteousness of their own longing to do good and to walk uprightly before God. Those in verse 7 who are merciful. Those in verse 9 who are peacemakers. Those in verses 10-12 who are persecuted.

There has been wrong delivered to these people and they're persecuted for righteousness' sake. And Jesus here is turning, as you've heard me say, an upside down world right side up. And He's saying, these are the blessed of the world. And why? Because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. They'll rejoice with me forevermore because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

[27:17] Beloved, we ought not defend ourselves. We ought to join with Paul in thinking ourselves the worst of sinners. We ought to think less about our rights and more about the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ.

We ought to think more about having received that which we do not deserve and less about what we think we deserve. So we're to live in light of this text with a proper view of ourselves.

We're also to live in light of this text with a proper view of others. We found ourselves in need and God graciously met that need.

He now intends to use us to meet the great need of others. We encounter people every day who act wretchedly, but should we expect anything else?

Beloved, we need to view people with the eyes of Jesus who wept over unrepentant Jerusalem. We need to see all people as eternal and consider their eternity.

[28:38] Where will this person go? Are they a citizen of the kingdom of heaven as I am? Are they a citizen of the kingdom of darkness? And how might I be about the work of rescuing them from that darkness by the grace of God?

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 14 and following, For the love of Christ controls us because we have concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died.

And he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.

You see that? The love of Christ controls us. The one who died on our behalf that we might live in him. And now, living in him, we live in such a way to bring others to the life.

that is found in Christ. We regard no one according to the flesh. I want to read to you two examples. This is from a commentary by Martin Lloyd-Jones.

[30:01] And he writes, Let me give you two illustrations of men who, we must all agree, put this teaching into practice. The first is about the famous Cornish evangelist, Billy Bray, who before his conversion was a pugilist.

Anybody know what a pugilist is? A professional boxer. A much cooler name. Boxer. Before his conversion, he was a pugilist and a very good one.

Billy Bray was converted but one day down in the mines before he became an evangelist. Another man who used to live in mortal dread and terror of Billy Bray before Bray's conversion, knowing he was converted, thought he had at last found his opportunity.

Without any provocation at all, he struck Billy Bray who could very easily have revenged himself upon him and laid him down unconscious on the ground. But instead of doing that, Billy Bray looked at him and said, May God forgive you even as I forgive you and no more.

The result was that the man endured for several days an agony of mind and spirit which led directly to his conversion. He knew what Billy Bray could do and he knew that the natural man in Billy Bray wanted to do it but Billy Bray did not do it and that is how God used him.

[31:32] The other is a story of a very different man, Hudson Taylor, standing on a river bank in China one evening, hailed a boat to take him across a river. Just as the boat was drawing near, a wealthy Chinese came along who did not recognize Hudson Taylor as a foreigner because he had affected native dress.

Hudson Taylor wore the clothes of China to relate to the Chinese more closely. So this Chinese man did not recognize him as a foreigner which would have been a thing of honor.

So when the boat came, he struck and thrust Hudson Taylor aside with such force that the latter fell into the mud. Hudson Taylor, however, said nothing but the boatman refused to take his fellow

countrymen saying, no, that foreigner called me and the boat is his and he must go first. The Chinese traveler was amazed and astounded when he realized he had blundered. Hudson Taylor did not complain but invited the man into the boat with him and began to tell him what it was in him that made him behave in such a manner.

As a foreigner, he could have resented such treatment but he did not do so because of the grace of God in him. A conversation followed which Hudson Taylor had every reason to believe made a deep impression upon that man and upon his soul.

[32:56] So how would we respond, right, if we have a proper view of others to these types of offenses, would you respond in the same way that Billy Bray and Hudson Taylor responded in these cases?

So we must live in light of this text with the proper view of ourselves, with the proper view of others, and finally, and in closing, with the proper view of God.

Beloved, God is ours and we are God's. What else could a rationally enlightened person possibly want?

Read to you Romans chapter 8 verse 31 and following. After Paul has talked about the trouble of the world, living in the tension of our bodies, the flesh, and our spirit of life.

He says, What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[34:19] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation including offenses against our perceived rights will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Beloved, we have Christ and he is better than anything we could possibly imagine that we deserve. And he is for us and he will finally make all things right.

We have the God of the universe on our side. Why do we think we have to go around stamping our feet and pounding our fists and trying to get what's ours?

[35:56] Paul writes in Romans 12 verse 17 and following 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. You see Paul picking up the teaching here.

How is it that we are in fact to resist the evil one with good? We're to turn the other cheek and give also the cloak and walk the extra mile and lend and give generously that people would come to saving faith in Christ.

[37:17] Beloved, may we be a people with a proper perspective of ourselves others and God. May we be individuals that do not seek our own self-interest but look to the interests of others.

May we be citizens of the kingdom of heaven who are not retaliators but trust in the mighty hand of our sovereign and gracious God. May we be a church that glorifies God by experiencing proclaiming and displaying the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

Let's pray together.