

“Do Not Resist the One Who Is Evil”

Matthew 5:38-48

For the fourth week in a row, our Gospel reading has been a portion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount from Matthew’s Gospel. Splitting it up like this is probably not the best way to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word of the Lord. You need to read all of this together from blessing to promise – with all the Law of God mixed in. We don’t want to ever read Jesus’ words as a bunch of “do this, obey” statements, and if you do them enough, then you will be justified, because, as we saw last week, that is not what Jesus is saying.

But rather, this is what justified people do because it is good for your neighbor. Being faithful to your spouse before and after you are married, not being angry with your friends and family, not stealing, not telling lies or gossiping; these are the earthly blessings that God wants for you and your neighbor. The heavenly blessings have been taken care of by Christ.

Because you are the salt and light of the world, because of who Jesus is and what He has already done (what He has completed; “It is finished” hear Him cry), because you have been blessed and given the Kingdom of God, you can see with eyes of faith that this Law (God’s will for your life), this was the way creation was made to exist. Sin is what has stolen away the good. Satan wants you to believe the lie that sin is the good part of life. God’s desire for you is where you find the good. The summary of God’s

Law is love. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Love you neighbor as yourself.

So what do we do with this last part of God's perfect Law which only can be fulfilled in Christ? We must take it in all seriousness that it is instruction for us, but we must recognize, like the rest of the Law, it is **only** fulfilled in Christ.

Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'" This is justice in our world. If someone harms you, you inflict equal harm, but do not escalate the harm. One eye for one eye; one tooth for one tooth. Our world sees this as just and right.

Jesus says, "Do not resist the one who is evil." Literally, the Greek says, "Do not stand against evil." Do not fight back against anyone. If someone strikes you on the right side of your face, turn to him the left side also. Do not stand against evil.

If someone takes you to court for your tunic, give him your coat and your tunic. If a Roman soldier exercises his right to have you carry his stuff for one mile, go the extra mile. Give to the one who asks from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

But, Lord, how can we live like this? We began our look at the Sermon on the Mount four weeks ago with our focus on Paul's words from 1 Cor. 1, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are."

This is the foolishness of the cross found in God's Law to recognize that justice does not bring about true righteousness, but rather, mercy does.

It is the complete opposite of common sense, and it goes against what we are naturally inclined to do. We see “wrong” and we see our job is to fix it. Common sense tells us that we must fight against evil if we want justice to be done. However, wielding the sword of justice cannot bring about the justice that God’s Law demands is right. Rather, justice is accomplished by the taking in of evil into ourselves and letting it die there.

Now, ultimately, this is not about you and me, but is about the one Man who truly does turn the other cheek when He is struck in the face as He stands trial before the Sanhedrin; who does let them take both His cloak and His tunic as the soldiers divided his clothes among them; who does carry His cross more than a mile to the place called Calvary, but the real burden was the weight of the sin of the world which we placed upon Him.

However, just because Jesus has carried this burden and fulfilled God’s Law in such a perfect way, this does not mean that these words don’t apply to us anymore. Quite the opposite. He has demonstrated the utter and total fullness of what it means to love. And it means that you stand against evil, not by taking a stand against evil, but by submitting to the one who is evil by acting in mercy, truth, and love.

I know what you are thinking. And I don’t want to do it either. But this is what the Word of God says. This is why trying to feel justified and righteous through what you do leads to despair.

But don’t hear me wrong. This does not mean that Jesus is teaching tolerance in the classic or modern view of the word. He is not. He is not saying, “Turn the other cheek and do not speak the truth.” In fact, this entire teaching has nothing to do with what you say or preach. Jesus is talking about how you respond to violence and hatred against you. The Christian

way, the way of Christ is that you take it into yourself never to let it out again.

Think of it this way – someone does something to you. You have a really bad day. You go home, and what do you do? You are likely to take it out on your family and “pay the evil forward.” Don’t pay it forward. Let the evil die within you. That is love. That is the sum of God’s Law. That is what Christ has done for all of your sin.

If you want to be a “better Christian” and learn the “new obedience,” be prepared to suffer. And when you suffer, don’t pay the evil forward. Like I said last week, being a Christian makes your life more difficult here on earth. It does. Accept that truth.

So love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. And Jesus’ teaching all gets summed up in an unfortunate translation, “You therefore must be ‘perfect,’ as your heavenly Father is ‘perfect.’” This is from the Greek word “telos” which means “whole, total, complete.” This is the same word Jesus speaks from the cross when He says, “It is finished.”

The reality is that if you are the salt of the earth; if you are the light of the world; if you are the child of your Father in heaven; then you must be whole, complete, not lacking anything, because your Father in heaven is whole, complete, not lacking anything. You are complete because your Father does not have children who are less than complete. You are not “damaged goods” or disqualified from grace because of your sin. You are complete in Christ.

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not be in want of anything. Ye though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil . . . And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.