

Going the Extra Mile

Today we are studying Matthew 5:38-48. The passage is the third part of a three-part unit within the Sermon on the Mount on Surpassing Righteousness. Two weeks ago Pastor Jay covered the first unit; last week Pastor Rob covered the middle unit; and today we will cover the third unit. Because the three messages cover a single unit of thought, I want to review key points to build a bridge into this week's passage.

1. God always intended the Mosaic law to be followed from the heart.

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart." Deut. 6:5-6

2. God's people need a changed heart to be able to obey from the heart.

"Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments ..." Deut. 5:29

3. The Holy Spirit makes hearts new.

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. ... I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." Ezekiel 36:26-27

4. The way of receiving a new heart is by faith in Jesus.

"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:38-39

5. Hearts led by the Spirit fulfill God's desires.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other ... Galatians 5:16-17

6. Hearts rooted in love reveal surpassing righteousness.

And [Jesus] said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:37-40

The Sermon on the Mount pictures what it looks like for a disciple to operate out of the new heart God has given and to follow the Spirit's leading to love.

I. Hearts led by the Spirit set aside defensiveness.

Jesus addressed the issue personal retaliation in Matthew 5:38-42.

"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."
Matthew 5:38-42

Jesus started with the Old Testament teaching on retaliation.

*"You have heard that it was said, '**An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.**'"*

Verse 38 is a direct and partial quote from Old Testament passages and relates to the "law of retaliation," or *lex talionis*. Leviticus 24:19-20 is one of those passages and it states ...

*"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."*

God intended for the "law of retaliation" to restrain sin.

In the ancient Near East, excessive retaliation often led to the guilty party receiving a grossly unfair punishment. Genesis 4 illustrates this when Lamech states,

"... I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold." Genesis 4:23-24

Lamech illustrates how the hardness of men's hearts led to unjust, excessive retaliation. In the same way that God permitted divorce to address the hardness of man's heart, he also permitted judicial retribution. God gave the *Law of Retaliation* to create a maximum punishment and to ensure that *punishment* by the courts was balanced and fair. That underlying principle, that the ***punishment should fit the crime***, continues as the cornerstone for most legal systems in the world today.

But Israel's teachers twisted the original intent.

What God originally intended to restrain sinful revenge, the Pharisees saw as God's permission for personal self-defense and revenge. An "eye for eye and tooth for tooth" became the required payment for personal disagreements. Ironically, the teachers turned God's maximum restraint to end revenge into their minimum right for revenge.

Jesus got to the heart of the matter with private retaliation.

*"But I say to you, **Do not resist the one who is evil. ...**" Matthew 5:39*

The term "resist" here has the idea of actively opposing, or fighting back against. Jesus effectively said, "Do not set yourself up against the other person. Do not fight back. Trust God

enough to accept the injustice. Put aside your defensiveness when it comes to personal retaliation.”

Jesus used four illustrations to clarify what he meant.

Each of the four illustrations teaches that in *some situations, my choices either extend love or cause another to suffer.* (Wiersbe) Rather than returning evil for evil, Jesus invites his disciples to respond with loving selflessness. If given the choice, out of love we should carry the consequences, rather than cause another to suffer. In each of the four cases, we are not called to accept evil blindly, but to choose intentionally when a response of love is appropriate. Jesus goes on to teach...

Disciples are to elevate love over protecting our reputation.

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

Jesus pictures a personal dispute that leads to a slap on the right cheek. This meant being slapped with the backside of someone’s right hand. In Jewish culture this was an insulting attack on one’s reputation. Again, Jesus is not asking his disciples to remain under physical or emotional abuse. Jesus’ point is that disciples should not *resist* personal insults to their reputation, but leave their reputation in God’s hands.

What does it look like to follow the Spirit’s lead to love? “Turning the other cheek,” means “in the freedom you have in Christ choose to not trade insults with the person smearing your reputation.” Don’t smear their reputation in return. Jesus invites us to trust God actively so that even when our reputation is on the line, we will make the hard choice to love that person.

Disciples are to elevate love over protecting our possessions.

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

Jesus pictured a legal dispute that led to forfeiting a tunic as collateral for the legal judgment. In that culture, when people did not have money or other valuables, they might literally pay with their clothing. The tunic was similar to a shirt, and people often had multiple tunics. But the cloak was like a coat, and people often had only one cloak. It could be used for keeping them warm at night, so the Mosaic law considered it inhumane to keep a person’s cloak.

What does it look like to follow the Spirit’s lead to love? Instead of setting yourself against the other person by filing a countersuit, disciples are to go beyond what is required. Responding with grace to the one dragging you into court is an act of “radical love.” Jesus invites us to trust God enough with our possessions, that we can freely use them to extend grace to that person. Loving someone well when they are seeking to harm us is hard.

Disciples are to elevate love over protecting our freedom.

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

Jesus pictured a well-known situation in his time. People in Roman occupied territories could be legally compelled by a Roman soldier to carry his equipment for one Roman mile, or a

thousand paces. The Jews found this practice especially and publicly humiliating. The idea of being willing to “go the extra mile” continues to be a concept we use today.

What does it look like to follow the Spirit’s leading to love? Life is full of difficult demands that are placed upon us. Obligation requires us to go the first mile. But love and compassion call us to go well beyond what is asked. When we are required by law, by our employer, or by others to meet a demand, we have a choice to lift the Gospel in front of others by being generous and compassionate.

Disciples are to elevate love over protecting our property.

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

Jesus pictures a disciple coming across someone begging. Jews of that time would have been humiliated to beg, so this likely pictures someone in desperate need. They are hurting and in legitimate need of help, and the disciple appears to have the means to help them.

What does it look like to follow the Spirit’s lead to love? God brings various types of people across our path. He gives us choices in how we will respond to the story of that person’s life. Jesus is picturing the choice of either trying to protect to our own future—our money, property, and time—or setting aside our defensiveness so God can use those possessions to help another person’s future. Giving away our property when lead by the Spirit can turn our “nice-and-neat” plans into messy plans. Will we set ourselves up against the welfare of that other person, or will we choose to love them?

Transition: But Jesus invites us to elevate love even higher...

II. Hearts led by the Spirit will love an enemy.

Jesus addressed the issue of love and hatred in Matthew 5:43-48.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” Matthew 5:43-47

Jesus started with a common understanding about loving other people.

*“You have heard that it was said, **‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’**”*
Matthew 5:43

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” is from the Mosaic law. Most of us are very familiar with that commandment from Leviticus 19:18. In fact, later in the book of Matthew, Jesus called this the second greatest commandment, as well as the fulfillment of the Law.

But the phrase “hate your enemy” is not from the Mosaic law. In fact, it can’t be found anywhere in the Old Testament. The Pharisees had reached a faulty conclusion. That conclusion was that loving your neighbor ought to cause an equal and opposite reaction... that of hating your enemy. The religious leaders focused on distinguishing neighbor from enemy. While this may seem to make it easier to obey the commandment, it means missing the real point.

Jesus got to the heart of the matter about loving other people.

*“BUT I say to you, **love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ...**” (Matt 5:44)*

Jesus commanded his disciples to “love their enemies and pray for them.” *Agape*, the word used here for love, is the choice to act in the best long-term interest of the other person. The primary issue when loving other people is not about answering the question “Which person qualifies as my neighbor?” Nor is the primary issue about answering the question “Which persons qualify as my enemies?” The heart of the matter is **intentionally choosing to be the neighbor**. That means acting in the best long-term interest of that person, regardless of whether I struggle to love them or whether they have actually wronged me in some way.

Jesus commanded his disciples to pray for those who persecute them. Praying for the person I struggle to love or who wants to harm me literally puts that person in front of the throne of God. If I am harassed by someone, I am to pray for their best. If I am frightened by someone, I am to pray for their welfare. If I am bullied by someone, I am to pray for their good. Prayer commits their long-term best into God’s hands.

Transition: Why does Jesus call us to extend ourselves in this way? Because...

All-inclusive love distinguishes us as family.

“... so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matt 5:45

“So that” means that Jesus has a *reason or purpose* for why we should love and do good to our neighbor-enemies. Jesus did not say that the reason to “love your enemies” is in order to **become** a child of God. He said that the reason to “love your enemies” is in order to demonstrate that **you already are** a child of God. It is a distinguishing characteristic of our heavenly Father. Loving intentionally and membership in God’s family go together (Carson).

Jesus gave a two examples of how God loves all-inclusively: the sun rising and the rain falling. God provides his common grace for everyone who is part of the human race, and does not limit common grace only to good or just people. The point is, if God inclusively loves people, even those who oppose him, then his children should follow his example.

Transition: Jesus gives another reason to extend radical love. Because ...

Ordinary love does not distinguish us from the world.

"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" Matthew 5:46-47

Jesus said that there is nothing distinguishing when you return love for love. Jesus said tax collectors and pagans do exactly the same thing. By using tax collectors and pagan Gentiles, Jesus is describing the most reviled people in his culture. The tax collectors were traitors who lined their own pockets while they collaborated with an occupying enemy. The pagan Gentiles were seen as being people outside of God's mercy and grace. They did not believe in God, and so the Jews might not even greet a Gentile on the street.

Jesus is saying that disciples should not see acts of ordinary decency as something that God will reward. That is basically the way that the entire world works, and so it doesn't earn us any kind of reward. In other words, why would God reward you, when the person returning your love has already rewarded you?

Transition: Jesus gives a final reason to extend radical love. Because ...

All-inclusive love distinguishes us as godly.

"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matt 5:48

Verse 48 summarizes and concludes Jesus' teaching up to this point. The Greek word for "perfect" is *teleios*, a word which carries meanings like "perfect, full, mature, and complete." Jesus is saying that we need to aspire to be like our Father. Disciples are to have a mature and complete character, like God's character. But Jesus call to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect comes in the context of an all-inclusive love. Jesus has been teaching that the Father's perfect love is without discrimination. The Father loves all people.

But let's be clear about something, loving people with an all-inclusive love is messy.

Loving those that consider themselves your enemy is messy. Loving those who want to hurt you is messy. Loving those set on damaging your reputation is messy. Loving those who just want to take things from you is messy. But here's the thing.

God intentionally moved toward the messiness of loving others well. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created this universe, knowing full well that Creation would lead to the Fall ... MESSY, and that the Fall would lead to a need for a Redeemer ... MESSY. And the Redeemer would one day need to judge to world ... MESSY. Redeeming people who are enemies, who damage your reputation and who simply want something from you, well ... that's messy.

But the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit intentionally and by design moved toward the messiness of loving others; they moved toward us. So, let's intentionally move toward the messiness of loving others well.

Let's pray together.