

**2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters**  
**Sermon Series - Focus on Your Witness**  
**Sermon Title - From Revenge to Love!**  
**Sermon Text - Matthew 5:38-48**  
**Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry**

Listen to those lyrics...“Oh heart, why are you afraid? Don't you know that the Lord can save! He's already made a way, so hold fast and keep the faith”

Aren't you glad we don't have to wait for heaven to experience the presence, the protection, the power and the peace of God? We can, on this earth, taste the sweetness of God even though this earth is sometimes filled with a lot of bitter things. Today, as we once again look at a portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, let's pray and ask God to show us how to take some of the most difficult things in life and let Him make good come out of them!! Let's pray!

"Sweet Jesus, You taught Your disciples so many amazing concepts and principles. You helped bring clarity to the laws, instructions and concepts of The Old Testament. I pray with all my heart, soul and mind this morning that You will speak powerfully through Your precious Holy Spirit and Your divinely inspired Word. There are so many different needs in this one room this morning and only You have the ability to take one sermon, and speak to each need! I simply yield myself to You and ask You to work through me as Your vessel, Your mouthpiece! I trust You completely to answer this prayer for I pray it in the name Jesus and with His attitude that Your will be done! Amen!"

As we continue our series on The Lord's Sermon on the Mount, we are focusing on another portion of the sermon that greatly impacts our witness! This morning's message is about the gaping chasm between the ways of Jesus and the ways of the world which are especially obvious when it comes to how we handle things when we've been wronged and what to do with our enemies! Jesus is going to point out the way things had been done, were being done, and the way things should be done. He was trying to get people to move from a mindset and culture of revenge to a mindset and culture of love. Not an easy thing back then or today! In fact, I'm not a gambling man, but I bet some of you just thought to yourself, "I think I want to leave now, this guys gonna try to get me to wimp out and be all forgiving and 'lovey dubby' with people that don't deserve anything from me!" You might be surprised, but I agree with you on one thing, sometimes people don't deserve anything from you, but I hope to show you that how we treat others shouldn't be dependent on what they deserve! I'll explain, but first let's check out what Jesus had to say about this topic in Matthew 5:38-42. As I said, Jesus wanted His hearers to move from revenge to love. So let's begin with moving...

### **From Revenge**

Jesus says...

Matthew 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

Matthew 5:39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Matthew 5:40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

Matthew 5:41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Matthew 5:42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Wow!! Now that's some hard medicine to swallow right there, but it's the cure for so much that is wrong in our world. From broken nations, broken communities, broken politics, broken churches, to broken families. Let's look at...

### **The Context**

As we examine these first few verses in this part of Jesus' sermon He is actually quoting a portion of the Levitical Law...

Matthew 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

When people today go back and read the "eye for and eye," and "tooth for a tooth" part of the Old Testament they don't take the time to understand the context and situation in which those laws were given. And the same thing was true with the people of Jesus' day! They had either forgotten, ignored or never understood the fact that "eye for an eye" and "tooth for a tooth" was actually a law given by God to prevent abuse and injustice in the early years of human existence. I know you're thinking, "Really? Come on, Preacher! Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth, is pretty harsh!" True, but you need to understand what was taking place when the Old Testament Law was given. There was unrestrained retaliation when something happened. If someone lost an eye in a fight, the person would go for revenge and take the other person's life! Maybe that's where the concept of "overkill" developed! God was saying, "No! You don't kill someone for that! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." He was trying to establish parameters for fairness and justice because people's hearts were hard and could be very cruel! That's why God gave them rules. And as we've studied over the last few weeks, people, being people, would try to get around the rules, and still do what they wanted. The sad thing is that many times it's not justice that people want, but revenge. The law was given to control the wickedness of humankind, not some arbitrary rule given by God to make life hard on us! You might remember that the religious leaders had been told by Jesus that some of Moses' extra rules had been given because of their hardness of heart! So Jesus goes on to tell them something that I think points to...

### **The Intent of the Law**

Jesus said...

Matthew 5:39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

When Jesus says "don't resist an evil person" He's not saying to go along with evil people and their wicked schemes or actions. He's saying don't resist evil with evil. In other words, if they want to solve the problem by fighting it out, and seeing who is the most powerful physically, or who has the most connections to people in power to win, or who has the most money to win the legal battles, don't play that game. Turning the other cheek is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of wisdom. The intent of the law was peace and well being for both sides! How many lives in history could have been saved if someone had turned the other cheek instead of just jumping into a heated battle? Now I understand that there are times when you turn the other cheek and you seek to reason things out with someone, but they refuse to talk. If they attack you to harm you or your family, you may have to defend yourself and those God has put under your protection. I get that, but that should absolutely be the last resort! Sometimes people claim self defense when they are really going on the offense and taking matters into their own hands and way too many times that turns out tragically on both sides! It recently happened in Florida where a lady had an altercation with another lady's children, and when the mother of the four children went and knocked on the door, the other lady shot through the door and killed her. I'm sure there's a lot more to the story, but you get my point. So heartbreaking.

Let me just say this, if a person comes after me to do me harm, I will do whatever I can to avoid hurting that person, even if it puts me at some risk, but if you forcibly come in my house to do harm to my family, you will have a tiger by the tail, and tigers don't like that! I've often told people that I would do what I had to do to protect those God has put under my care, but as soon as the threat was over, I would be rendering medical aid so I could share Jesus with that person so they could be saved! Again, if you can turn the other cheek without risking your family's well-being, then that would be the Jesus thing to do! By the way, turning the other cheek in today's world is not just about a physical altercation or fighting, but also with how you deal with insults, attacks on your integrity, and thoughtless and mean spirited words posted on social media. How you deal with that is critical when it comes to your witness! I'm not trying to add another rule to the rule book, but maybe you should make it a rule of thumb to spend some time in prayer before you hit the send button! And what about things said to you face to face by a fellow student, co-worker, neighbor or family member. If you choose not to turn the other cheek and you retaliate in kind, you damage your witness and may close the door permanently as far as your ability to ever share Christ with that person. You might be tempted to say, "But they're my enemy, so I don't care!" We'll see what Jesus had to say about that in a minute, but if you decide to focus on your witness by turning the other cheek you may open the door for a witness to that person down the road. In fact, Jesus talks about how far we should be willing to go in our attempt to keep the door open for an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with someone. Listen again to the words of Christ as He gives us...

### **The Practical Application**

Matthew 5:40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

Matthew 5:41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Matthew 5:42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

I can hear someone saying, "Ok, that's it, that's crazy, I'm out of here!" By the way, this would be an awkward time to get up and go to the restroom! Let me explain what Jesus was saying here. It's amazing what you can discover when you study and do a little digging on the background and cultural context of the Scriptures.

In Jewish law, you could sue someone for their tunic, which was a piece of clothing with sleeves, but you couldn't sue a person for their cloak, because it was the outer garment that was used by poor people as a blanket at night. So, again, the intent of the law was always about fairness and justice. So just what is Jesus saying when He says to His followers to offer their cloak? He was saying that our commitment to share the Love of Jesus with others should motivate us to go beyond what the law requires and be willing to give up personal rights if it could lead someone to find the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ! And then Jesus tells His followers to even be kind to the pagan, occupiers of their nation, the Romans. How so?

The soldiers were permitted to force non-Roman citizens to carry their baggage for a mile. Jesus tells them if they are asked to carry their stuff for a mile, offer to carry it two miles! Talk about a witness. The Roman soldiers would probably say to that person, "So you must be one of those "Christians" which meant "little Christ." To which they might reply... "Well, yes, in fact I am, mind if I tell you about Him while we walk?" I can hear the soldier say, "If you're willing to carry my duffle bag another mile, I'm all ears!" Now someone might bring up the fact that those pagan occupiers did not deserve help, or to be told about Jesus! All I can say to that is this: Do you believe you deserved Jesus when He offered to forgive you of all of your sin and saved you? Again, I must quote from one of my favorite commentators on this passage, Dr. Frank Stagg...

"The Christian's question is never, 'Does the other deserve my help?' but 'How can I help?'"

But how do we help someone like that? Sometimes the answer is simple. As we've already read, Jesus said...

Matthew 5:42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

If someone truly needs our help and asks for our help then we need to ask ourselves the question, "How can I help this person?" A good thing to do at this point would be to pray and ask God for wisdom to know the right thing to do. That God wants us to help the person and serve the person is a given. But what is the best way to help them? Sometimes a person has just had a series of unfortunate bad circumstances and helping them would be a hand up more than a

hand out! If we have it within our means to help, then what a blessing to do so! We're going to talk more about this next week, so I won't spend too much time here, but our witness to others does come into play! And as we'll see next week, our priorities, and many other aspects of our lives, are highlighted in our response to those in need. But here's something we need to consider: We don't want to be guilty of enabling continued poor choices. Sometimes a person needs help learning how to better manage resources and to be a good steward. And certainly, if you know someone is abusing your generosity for destructive purposes, like an addiction or as an excuse to not live responsibly within their means, then the answer to the question, "How can I help?" may be that you lovingly tell them what they asked for is not what they need! They won't like it, but sometimes the only way for someone to move up is when they hit bottom. I've lost sleep more than once trying to figure out how to truly help someone in need. Their need may be genuine, like someone needing a hotel room for the night, but if it's a pattern, if you don't help them get out of that pattern, then the need will continue to arise night after night and week after week.

And you know I said that sometimes we have to let people hit rock bottom. For some folks, rock bottom is really, really, deep and dark. At that point, you may be limited to praying, and loving, but no longer enabling them. A few years ago, I was on my way home, and had my windows down. As I was in the turn lane to get on the interstate, one of the homeless ladies our church had helped said, "Hey preacher, give me some money!" I didn't have any cash on me, and I rarely give cash anyway! I usually offer to buy them a meal. Since I was already in the turn lane with people behind me, I said I don't give cash, but I'll catch you tomorrow and get you some food. She yelled at me to get a life! I said, "See ya later," and she repeated for me to get a life. I wasn't mad at her, I just felt so sorry for her and said a prayer for her as I got on the interstate.

Now, as we think back to the historical context of our passage, it's hard to imagine finding the wherewithal in our hearts to offer help to people who were foreign occupiers. But Jesus wanted His followers to know that He loved those people and wanted to have a personal relationship with them! He wanted to save them as He had saved those who had put their faith in Him and become His followers. His followers had the opportunity to be a witness to their enemies by moving away from attitudes and actions of revenge and forming attitudes of and actions that would move them...

## **To Love**

Jesus said...

Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

Matthew 5:44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Matthew 5:45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good,

Matthew 5:45 and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Matthew 5:46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

Matthew 5:47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### **The Context**

The Old Testament commands for the Hebrew people to be a separate and “holy people” had been interpreted to mean that they were to hate people who were not Hebrew. The command to love thy neighbor was actually interpreted by some Pharisees to mean only other Pharisees. So they didn’t even have to love their fellow Hebrew family and neighbors. And, as we’ve seen, they had the Old Covenant principle of the eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. There was heavy judgment enacted even on the sins of the Hebrew people and certainly on their enemies the pagan nations. There are some today who would like to take us back to that! They desire to destroy their enemies, and some in our world today have even suggested the killing of people who are living in sin. Of course, the ones making that suggestion aren’t suggesting that for their particular sins, just those bad people over there with that sin! However, we are under a new covenant. And Jesus let’s that be plainly known in our text for today. The people of Jesus’ day conveniently thought “since I’m commanded to love God and my neighbor, then I can hate my enemy.” Jesus had come to this earth to set the record straight. Jesus points to the...

### **Intent of the Law**

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

Matthew 5:44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Ok, here's the deal, if we claim Christianity betters humanity then we've got to adhere to a higher standard, a higher calling, a higher purpose, and a higher practice! This does not make us better than others for in our fundamental state of being we are all created beings of a magnificent God who made us from dust and then breathed into us the spirit of life! As you've heard me say many times, as followers of Jesus, we are not better than anyone else, but we are better off because of what we have allowed God to do in our hearts and lives by His mercy and grace! People who have not allowed God to work this miracle of grace and love in their lives are still bound by their fallen nature and that nature will naturally love those who love them and do good to them, but will not usually go beyond that, especially to enemies. There are non-religious people who will be somewhat benevolent, but I believe if you look closely, you’ll see that it’s typically going to be with those who are of the same opinion and mindset as they are and will rarely if ever include kindness to enemies. It’s just not the way of the world.

However, Jesus makes it clear that those who are recipients of a great and undeserved grace and love of God must in turn be willing to give the same grace and love of God to those who have yet to become our brothers and sisters in the spiritual recreation we call salvation, but who are our brothers and sisters in creation! Every human being on earth has God for their creator, even our enemies! But Pastor Larry, how can I love my enemy? They are, after all, against me, they despise me, and say and do hurtful things to me! How am I supposed to love them? Start

by remembering how it felt when you lived in a world without forgiveness, mercy, peace, hope, and love. Remember what it was like to live in a world filled with anger, hate, and despair. A world where revenge was the goal. You know, getting back, and paying back, revenge, an eye for an eye! A world where you went to bed thinking about negative things and got up thinking about negative things, like how can I get even? When I remember back to my days before Jesus, it does several things. It makes me so grateful for the change from the old life, the gift of a new life, and the promise of eternal life! It makes me sad that there are still people living in that world and causes me to want them to find what I found! Having been a fireman and now as Fire Chaplain, and as a pastor, I've dealt with a lot of tragic things. There have been times when I've been on a scene where a tragedy has occurred because of poor life choices and I'm reminded of how that could have been my story if not for the amazing grace of God!

And, by the way, when I think about people in the world that totally despise the Christian message and because I am a pastor, consider me their enemy, rather than anger, I feel a deep sadness for them and for the angst and lack of peace they have to live with. It's written on their faces, and their actions that they are not happy people.

### **Practical Application**

Jesus said...

Matthew 5:46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

Matthew 5:47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

I don't have to love what others do or love being around them if they are trying to tear me down, but I am commanded as a follower of Christ to love them and to pray for them! Now let me share something very practical with you. Some people today say that to disagree with someone is to hate them and not to love them! That is simply not true. As followers of Christ and people who believe what God's Word teaches cannot agree with everyone! We can love everyone, but we absolutely cannot agree with everyone. But some would say that disagreeing with someone is judging them. It is not! In fact, sometimes, just agreeing with someone and not confronting them in love with the truth of God's Word is not loving them! If you love someone, you want them to know God's truth, because as Jesus told some of His Jewish listeners...

John 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

John 8:34 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

John 8:35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

John 8:36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Truth really does matter and when you love someone you want them to know the truth because the truth of Jesus can set them free! But once again, the way in which you share truth is so important. Okay, I'm going to say something a little political...the far right and the far left think the ends justify the means and that's simply not true! They believe you can lie and be hateful if it accomplishes a goal. That is not the way of Christ! Let me tell you a story that happened to me. Before I met Jesus, when I was in the 7th-8th grade, there was a bully in my class. He was bigger than me and bossed me around especially in P.E. class! We even had a study hall together. He would pick on me relentlessly. I would get so angry and many times I would day dream of ways I could get him when he wasn't looking. It was around my ninth grade year when Jesus radically changed my life. Guess what, I went from day dreaming of revenge to praying for that guy and for starters he stopped bothering me.

Then when I was junior or senior I went to speak at a small church close to Eagle Lake, Mississippi, just north of Vicksburg. The bully's grandmother went to that church and he was there that night. After the service we sat on the front steps of that old church and he apologized for being a bully. I told him I had already forgiven him and that Jesus wanted to be his Savior and best friend and he prayed to receive Christ! Not all of the people I've prayed for have allowed Jesus to change their lives, but I can tell you that every time I pray for my enemies it changes me for the better!! I'm reminded of how all that is good in my life is from God and how I owe everything to Him, so how can I not truly care about others. Let me say this. I've counseled down through the years with some of our service men and women, and also law enforcement. They have a tough job to do. When asked, I tell them that God has ordained human authorities to protect the ideas of law and order. Scripture says...

Romans 13:1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Romans 13:2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

But here's what I also tell them. You have a job to do, but that doesn't mean as a law enforcement officer, you can't pray for the very people you are having to arrest, or if you are serving in our armed forces, that you can't pray for the people you are having to fight against. Our former Mayor, Freddie Drennan, who used to be a police officer, arrested one guy numerous times. He talked with this guy over and over about making better choices in his life and that God had a plan for his life. The guy didn't listen, but he heard! What do I mean by that? Years later that guy ended up in a federal prison, but never forgot the police officer who cared about him. Freddie Drennan had planted a seed, and God put another person in that man's life in federal prison who led him to faith in Christ. That guy has shared his testimony on national television and spoke at the Mayor's prayer breakfast a few years ago and thanked Freddie personally for letting God use him to be such a good witness to him!



And I know for a fact that some of our service men and women, even though they are extremely limited in what they can say when on foreign soil, have had an impact because of the way they live their lives. Not an easy thing to do in some places, but doable because of God's presence in their lives by way of His Holy Spirit! And in case you were wondering about that last verse in our text today where Jesus said...

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Don't be discouraged by this. When God asks us to do something He will always make a way for us to do it! God's desire for us is that we become all that He created us to become, but He is very much aware that we are sinners and sometimes struggle with loving our neighbors, let alone our enemies. So He accepts us on the grounds of His mercy given to us through His Son's perfection. We are perfected not by our own righteousness and goodness, but by the covering of Jesus' goodness and righteousness, and He will give us the power to live a life saved from the evil powers of revenge to live a life of love. As I close, listen to these God inspired words of Paul the Apostle in Romans 12:9-21 which are a blueprint of how to move from revenge to love...

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 12:13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Romans 12:20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Revenge is never sweet, but always bitter and it destroys those who let it rule them. Only God has the ability to take vengeance, because He is the only one who knows all things and understands the heart. So the sweetest revenge is to love your enemy to Jesus and then you'll have a brother or sister in Christ for an eternity! Let's pray!