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You Want Me To Do What?
Matthew 5:38-48

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

39 But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;

40 and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well;

41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

43 Jesus said, you have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What do these words ***really mean?***

Turn the other cheek, offer your cloak, go another mile,
Love your enemies?

Jesus said these were ***not requirements*** of the law that they knew.

This was ***new***—it was almost ***upside down!***

And isn't that what Jesus does best?

He's the one who says...the last shall be first, and the first last....

You have heard it said...but I SAY to you.....

If someone hits you on the right cheek, ***turn the other one*** also.

You may have heard the cultural context of these* examples...

but if not here's some interesting information....

In ancient near eastern culture,

The ***left hand*** was used only for unclean things.

Wasn't even used to gesture in public.

The ***right hand*** would hit someone on the ***left*** cheek.....

so if someone 'hit' you on the right cheek,

it was probably a backhanded slap with the right hand, not a blow,

and if you turn your head it's hard to backhand you
again with your right hand.
If you turn, it stops the abuser in his tracks.
It's a **surprise**, something unexpected, different,
it stops the cycle of violence.
It's a **totally different** kind of response than an eye for an eye.

Our gut **instinct** is to strike back,
but Jesus says do something different,
and **stop the cycle** of violence.
Use **non-violence**.
Use it creatively.

Jesus says '**do not resist evil**'.
Some people read that to mean 'be a doormat'.
Or let evil win.
I DON'T believe that is what it says, NOT at all!
and that would certainly not fit with Jesus' life and ministry!
Jesus did not advocate abuse!

What if **do not retaliate** means to simply do something **different**.
Don't return evil for evil.
Don't become the very thing that you dislike.
Go in a different direction.
Turn the other cheek.

Same with giving up your **cloak** as well.
Why would someone ask for your **coat** back then?
When people got a **loan** they would put up collateral,
much like we do today.
But the poorest would only be able to offer their coat as collateral.

Now Jesus says if a man takes your coat,
give him your **cloak as** well..... surprise!
This is strange to us, but **coat** was the word for the robe worn next to your skin—it was
your **clothes**, and your **cloak** was like a **jacket** outside that,
so.... so if you've given up your coat and your cloak...
you might be, a bit underdressed for any occasion.
Talk about going in a different direction,
and stopping the cycle.
That would do it!

Same with the going **a second mile**.
Why would someone ask you to go a mile?
Well, **the Roman soldiers** were allowed to grab someone to carry their 60-70lb packs for
one mile. One mile only.

If asked to carry it a mile, Jesus says go a second mile....wow!
 The Roman soldier wanting to inflict a little pain suddenly doesn't know what to do
 because you are graciously carrying a pack a little further,
 and he doesn't have the authority to have you do this!

Surprise.

A totally new direction--that stops the cycle. cultural references to Jesus' examples are from Barbara E. Reid, O.P., "Parables," Christian Reflection, The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2006.

Giving to ***beggars and lending*** to all who ask.
 Can you imagine the surprise, if there were no strings attached?
 People would have no idea what to think about you!

So what's the ***common theme*** so far?

What if it's what Jesus said was the ***Greatest Commandment?***
 Loving God, and loving neighbor as yourself....
 What if this is all about showing ***love?***

Of course, it's not easy, right?

But the truth is, if we take revenge and retaliation out of the equation
 when it comes to our enemies, ...
 well, that leaves us with no other choice than to do something totally different than what
 we naturally want to do.

So, why not show love?

Why not love our enemies, who are also ***children of God***—
 A God who loves the good and the bad,
 Those who are loving, and those who are not.

Jesus says this is what it means to--be ***'teleios' like God...perfect.***
 You know what that Greek word means?
 It doesn't mean without mistake.
 It means ***complete, whole, consistent.***
 It also means ***doing what you're made to do.***

Telos is about hitting the mark, like an arrow hitting the bullseye.
 Pastor David Lose says we could translate this passage as,
"Be the person God created you to be,
just as God is the One God is supposed to be."

Listen to what else he says:
God sees more in you than you do.
God has plans and a purpose for you.
God intends to use you to achieve something spectacular....
to help create a different kind of world.

*Jesus calls this new world the **kingdom of God** – where violence doesn't always breed more violence and hate doesn't always kindle more hate.*

Martin Luther King, Jr. captured the logic of Jesus' kingdom well when he stated, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that.

Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

Can we do this – turn the other cheek, love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us? No, not perfectly. On some days, maybe not at all. But that's not really the point. It's not our job to bring in the kingdom; Jesus does that.

It's our job to...practice living like Jesus' disciples and citizens of this new kingdom in the meantime. . David Lose, "Telos", ...in the Meantime, 2017. www.davidlose.net.

Wow.

Think about that.

We were created to love our enemies.

To live in a new reality—the kingdom of God!

What if all **Christians** could love our enemies!

What if we could just love those

we don't get along with right in our own churches---

just imagine how that would change the world!

Because, our **enemies are also children of God,**

People just like us.

Sometimes they are people who are hurting, or insecure,
and that's why they lash out.

What if we don't need to **demonize** anyone else?

What if we can disagree, be different, **all through love?**

And what if our enemies actually make us stronger?

More able to understand the human family?

If we're honest, we know that **forgiveness and grace is very, very difficult.**

Don't you find yourself in situations where you do NOT want to forgive?

We all do!

That amazing **grace** we've received from God—

Sometimes it's the **hardest thing to give** to others!

Truth is, we are all human, and **we all have enemies.**

We have people we don't like,

People that we judge harshly,

People that we cannot stand to be around...

And sometimes we even have all of that around our holiday table, right?

Jesus knew this was true,

And still he told us **to love and pray for** our enemies!

This week I was reading about a young woman who called her Dad and said that she was supposed to read this passage in church as a liturgist.

She left a message on his phone:

“Dad, this is what I’m supposed to read, but does it say this in other places in the Bible? Is there maybe a different translation?”

Because I think Jesus is wrong!”

That’s how I feel sometimes.

Surely you’re kidding Jesus—right?

We can’t possible love our enemies!

But Jesus actually said—

love your enemies, and **pray** for those who hurt you, **He really did ask us to forgive**, and love.

And I don’t know about you,

but I don’t think we can do this on our own power, do you?

I mean, we all have our own dark sides, don’t we?

Even **Mother Teresa**—

if there was ever a person you could say would not have a dark side, it would be her, right?

But when asked why she did ministry,

she said that it was because she knew herself,

and she knew that a **little Hitler lived inside of her**.

Mother Teresa said that! About herself!

Can you believe that?

But you know, when you read stories of the **saints** over the centuries, this is a common theme—

they can **see the sin** in their own lives.

They understand that it is there **but for the grace** of God go I.

They know that it is **only by God’s grace** that we can do any good at all.

The saints also know that what **we hate most** in someone else,

Are some of the very things inside of us!

Ever noticed that?

Sometimes what drives us the most crazy,

is precisely what we do to other people!

Strange how God **humbles** us, isn’t it?

A man in conversation with Pastor John Wesley once made the comment, “I never forgive.”

Wesley wisely replied, "Then, sir, I hope that you never sin."

So, what do you think?

Is it impossible to love your enemies?

What if it's impossible to do *on our own....*

But entirely possible *with God's help!*

What if this is where we really need *the Holy Spirit* that Jesus promised?

A power that is ready and waiting—whenever we ask for help!

I think one of the *most powerful stories of loving an enemy* is found in a book called *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom.

After World War II was over, in 1947, Corrie ten Boom traveled across Germany with the message that God forgives.

"When we confess our sins," she said,

"God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever."

She and her sister Betsie had been arrested in Holland for concealing Jews from the Nazis.

Listen to what *happened to her* after she spoke at a church in Munich:

...that's when I saw him, ...One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones.

It all came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath her parchment skin. This man had been a guard at the *Ravensbrück concentration camp* where we were sent.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "*A fine message, fräulein!* How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand.

He would not remember me, of course...

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt.

It was the first time since my release that I had been *face to face* with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbrück," he said. "I was a guard there."

"But since that time," he went on, "*I have become a Christian.*"

I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. *Fräulein*—again the hand came out—"*will you forgive me?*"

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and **could not**. Betsie had died in that place—how could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

... the seconds seemed like hours as I wrestled with the **most difficult thing**

I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. “If you do not forgive men their trespasses,” Jesus says, “neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

I knew the **power of forgiveness** in the lives of victims of Nazi brutality.

Those who were **able to forgive**,

were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives,

no matter what the physical scars.

Those who **nursed their bitterness** remained invalids.

It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart.

But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too.

Forgiveness is an act of the will...

“Jesus, help me!” I prayed silently.

“I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, **an incredible thing** took place.

The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm,

sprang into our joined hands.

And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being,

bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”

For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands,

the former guard and the former prisoner.

I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.

[now] I wish I could say that merciful and charitable thoughts just naturally flowed from me from then on. But they didn’t.....I can’t store up good feelings and behavior—but only

draw them fresh from God each day. Guideposts Classics: Corrie ten Boom on Forgiveness,

November 1972, <https://www.guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/guideposts-classics-corrie-ten-boom-on-forgiveness>

It **IS possible** to stop a cycle of hate.

It IS possible to love our enemies, and pray for those who hurt us,

It IS possible to strive for teleios, for perfection,

And **be the people God made us to be.**

And we do it with that same prayer as Corrie, **Jesus help me,**

And we **draw upon that same Holy Spirit power,** fresh from God each day.

Amen.