

Sunday Sermon

10/8/23

Series: Raising the Bar

Passage: Matt. 5:38-48

Title: Retribution and Enemies

Good morning, Church! I'm so glad you are here worshipping with us this morning! We believe that God is in the business of renewing people through an encounter with Christ and the power of the gospel. That is our mission. That is our passion. And if you are here this morning and feel like you are looking for something in your life, I am here to tell you that Jesus is the answer you are looking for. We need him for true life, and he wants to encounter you this morning and begin to bring his life and renewal to your life in deep and profound ways.

That said, please turn in your bibles to Matthew 5:38-48. We are now firmly into our series through the sermon on the mount which we have entitled "Raising the Bar." These are truths taught straight from the mouth of Jesus. If you are just joining us, Jesus is speaking to a people who approached God through the mindset of **God will accept me if I am good enough**. Jesus has been exposing through chapter 5 this truth: we could never be good enough. Because our hearts have been tainted by sin, we could never live up to God's standard of holiness. We need an alternative righteousness. We need a Savior.

So this morning we encounter the third and final chunk of Jesus reorienting our view of God's law and then bringing us to a place of understanding of how our hearts align with it. Namely, exposing the vast gap that exists in our living up to it. **So let's read together Matthew 5:38-48.**

Before we jump in this morning, I think it's important to point something out. Often when passages like this one are taught, it's easy to just focus on the application of just doing the right action. Jesus says, "Christians are to live this way." Just do it. Turn the other cheek. Give away your cloak. Go the extra mile. Be a generous person. Love your enemies. That is how Christians should act. Anything else is not perfect.

And you know what? That's true. But it's not helpful and I'll tell you why. Because Jesus' whole point in the sermon of the mount is that we don't and cannot act in a truly Godly way without something in us being changed. There is a difference in the heart that says, "I don't commit murder because I don't want to chance losing something." And the heart that says, "I don't commit murder because I see my brother with the same value that God places on him." There is a difference between the heart that says, "I don't cheat because it wouldn't be worth the cost." And the heart that says, "I don't cheat because my heart's desire is to be faithful as God is faithful."

In both cases the actions are the same. But the hearts are very different. One of them is dead to God or simply doing life in our flesh. One of them is alive to God and is being renewed. You see, Jesus has been exposing the depravity of the human heart and how it falls short of the bar of

holiness, and therefore our need for a new heart which has been made alive to God. And when it comes to our passage this morning the same true.

Because the first question I need to ask upon reading this is “Who would do that? Who would want to do that? What kind of person who have the motivation to live this way?” Because the reality is, this seems like a lot of giving up. A lot of surrendering. A lot of releasing of my personal rights and in that having the willingness to bear a lot of injustice. Without much benefit coming back to me. What moves a person to a place of willingness to do that?

Look with me for a moment at Hebrews chapter 10 starting in verse 32 – because I believe this gives us an answer to that question. ***“But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property...”***

Stop there. What? You don’t need to raise your hands, but I’m just wondering how many of us would JOYFULLY accept the plundering of your property this morning? If you got home from church today and someone had gone into your house and taken a bunch of your stuff. Would that bring joy to anyone here this morning? The answer is no. And that’s not what this is saying. But I ask that question simply to get us to think about what a revolutionary and profound shift of mind and heart these Christians must have had to experience in order to be willing to live in this way.

It says, “They were enlightened.” They discovered something so profound that at the core of their being they moved to a place of willingness to endure hard suffering, public criticism and condemnation, they were willing to care for the detested, and this is what this means, release their possessions while not allowing the act of injustice to steal their joy. This is profound heart change. The question is: What did they discover? Verse 34...***“since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”***

Listen: The life we have in Christ is worth far more than anything that can be taken away. Eph 1:3 says, ***“God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places – look at this – in Christ.”*** Every one of God’s blessings has given to us in Christ.

Paul says in Col. 2:2 I want you to ***“reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ.”***

2 Cor. 4:7 says that ***“We have this treasure in jars of clay, in our mortal bodies, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”*** What is this treasure? It’s God’s Spirit in us (3:3). It is the new covenant of righteousness (3:6). It’s understanding our new identity in him (3:9). It is the freedom from our bondage to sin (3:17). And it is beholding the glory of the Lord and being transformed into his image in the power of his Holy Spirit (3:18).

And we have this treasure in Jesus Christ. That in him I am full – fully loved, fully accepted, fully valued, and fully secure. And that moves me to a place in my heart where out of that I truly start to live as God calls me to live. Where I can give up some things, surrender some rights,

bear some injustice. Love the unlovable. Because in HIM I am full. And in the losing of some earthly things, well perhaps we're not losing anything as valuable as maybe we once thought. Now we can begin to unpack our text. Verse 38, ***"You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'"***

When we think about this OT concept, we generally think of it in terms of justice. You did something to me, therefore it is fair and I am justified in my doing something back to you. We might call this retaliation or payback.

Someone once said, **"Revenge is a dish best served cold."** We have a tendency to hold this since of justice in our spirits.

This week I came across this story by a woman named Kayleigh which I think illustrates this mindset. She shares, "A few years ago, I was grocery shopping and needed coconut milk. When I got there, a young couple was standing in front of the area, arguing about whether their recipe needed coconut milk or cream. After waiting for a minute for them to resolve the issue, I realized I would be waiting for a long time, so I politely asked if I could just squeeze past. The woman turned around and told me to, 'Just bleeping wait.' Thankfully, her boyfriend had some manners and stepped back from the shelves and moved his girlfriend with him, who continued to loudly complain that the world didn't revolve around her. Well, I don't like being sworn at by strangers, so I decided to buy the entire store's worth of coconut milk and cream — about \$45 worth of pure pettiness. I have no regrets."

Revenge! Eye for an eye baby! Problem is that it's not. The human tendency is not to pay back only that which was given, but then to one up. To take a little bit more. Because that's true justice in our minds. I payback the wrong but I also put on top of that the cost of the pain and suffering. The tax for what you took from me.

We've all walked into the room of a screaming child, "Billy punched me!" "Billy, why did you punch your sister?" "Because she pushed me!" "Why did you push?" "Because he stole my crayon!" "Why did you steal her crayon?" "Because she wouldn't share!" Retaliation escalates.

The heart of the "eye for an eye" law was not given to justify revenge, but to limit retaliation. If someone takes an eye, you only get to take an eye back. You don't get to take more. You steal an apple from my cart, I'm not justified in burning down your house. Equal retaliation. It was the restriction of unlimited revenge.

Further it was never intended as an excuse for individual retaliation or what we might consider vigilante justice. It belonged to a court of law, and it's being carried out was to be in the hands of a just judge. Eye for an eye was all about making sure that no one took advantage of you, and that you got only what you deserved from others.

Jesus says, "I agree with that. I have not come to abolish the law." But Jesus is about to reveal that **God's heart is that his people live with an entirely different heart.** One that releases retribution, selfishness, and pride, and instead extends generosity, humility, and love.

Verse 39, ***“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.”***
– Matt. 5:39-42

This whole thing is about a laying down of self.

“Don’t resist (setting yourself up against) ***an evil person.***” The one who brings annoyance or hardship. Don’t draw a dividing line between you and them. Jesus is saying that broken people in a sinful world will wrong you. God’s heart is that you would be willing to endure it.

“if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Without getting into all the nuances of this, people would do this in Jesus’ day as a way of insulting a person. It was more than a physical attack; it was an attack on a person’s character. Anyone here know what it’s like to be insulted, or have your character attacked? God’s heart is that we would be willing to release that without retaliation.

“if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”

This is a rights issue. The law forbade anyone from taking your cloak, but Jesus is saying that godly action is to be willing in our heart to lay down our rights for the sake of another – to respond in humility and kindness instead of retaliation. If you want something, have it. My identity is not in this. This is not what I consider valuable. You are what I consider valuable.

Jesus continues: ***“if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”***

A Roman soldier could legally command a citizen to carry his pack for up to a mile, and there was nothing the citizen could do about it. Jesus is saying that Godly action is when we carry within us a servant’s heart. You need help. I’ll help you. Even if it is an inconvenience to me. I’ll do my obligation, but then I’ll also do it because I choose to love and honor you.

Next is the example of the generous heart. ***“Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”***

Instead of hoarding what we have, what we feel we’ve earned, our default position should be to say yes to a person in need and be generous with what we have.

But here’s the question I’d like us to ponder this morning: Why do we hold on? Whether it’s to money, or offense, or possessions – Why do we feel a sense of injustice when we are called to part with them? Because we feel as if we are being robbed of something. It’s in those things that we’ve placed our treasure. The greatest commandment says, Love God, Love Others. But Jesus says, ***“Where your treasure is there your heart will be also.”*** – ***Matt. 6:21.*** If we are too caught up loving our stuff and loving ourselves, we are falling short in the loving God and loving others. But we’ll get to that in a few weeks.

This is the heart that honors the Lord. But in our passage this morning Jesus has one more example for us. Verse 43:

“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 the sun rise on the evil and 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? And then, listen to verse 48, here is the true standard “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.”

The law actually never says, “Love your neighbor, hate your enemy.” That was just a common practice of the day. Much like it is today. That heart too exposes the gap between us and God. Scripture says, that in sin we are enemies of God. We are not his enemy, but he is ours. But even as enemies, what we see in the Father is a heart that still loved us enough to come after us and extend his salvation and grace to us through Jesus Christ his son.

In his incredible mercy he continues to show and extend love to those who don’t love him back. He chooses to continually extend love to those who continually choose against him. That is the true heart of God. That in the recognition of this love we might be compelled to return to him. Jesus says, “It’s easy to love those who love you. It’s God-like to love those who don’t. And to pray for their blessing and well-being.” **Perfection is attained when we demonstrate in our lives those characteristics that reflect the heart and nature of God.**

When it comes to the issues of sacrifice, laying down image, laying down rights, being generous, releasing wrongdoing, and loving those who don’t love us in return – are we measuring up? Are we perfect? No. There’s a gap. Jesus didn’t come to change your actions he came to change you and me. That is the mark of salvation - it is our sanctification. Are we being transformed into his image?

Romans 12:2 – ***“Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”***

What is Jesus renewing our mind about? That our worth and value don’t come from the things of this world, but from the identity placed on us in Christ. In him we have everything, he is our sufficiency in this life and in the life to come. Our true treasure is not in the things of this world, but in him. Our identity is not in how we are treated or in what others think about us, it’s in him. He is our life and our salvation. He is our source and our sufficiency. And in him we are secure, no one can take us out of his hand. Therefore, what can the world take from us that we do not gain back in spades in him?

“No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” – 1 Cor. 2:9

Would you enter into a love relationship with the Lord Jesus this morning? He died to take your sin, to cover the gap, to give you a new heart and an alternative righteousness, his righteousness, not based on your hard work, but on his finished work. Would you commit your heart to following him and allow him to begin to bring his transformation to you?



RAISING

THE BAR

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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- Heb. 10:32-34a

“since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”

- Heb 10:34b

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- 2 Cor. 4:7

- God's Spirit in us (3:3)
- The new covenant of righteousness (3:6)
- Our new identity in him (3:9)
- Freedom from bondage to sin (3:17)
- Beholding the glory of the Lord (3:18)



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- Matt. 5:38

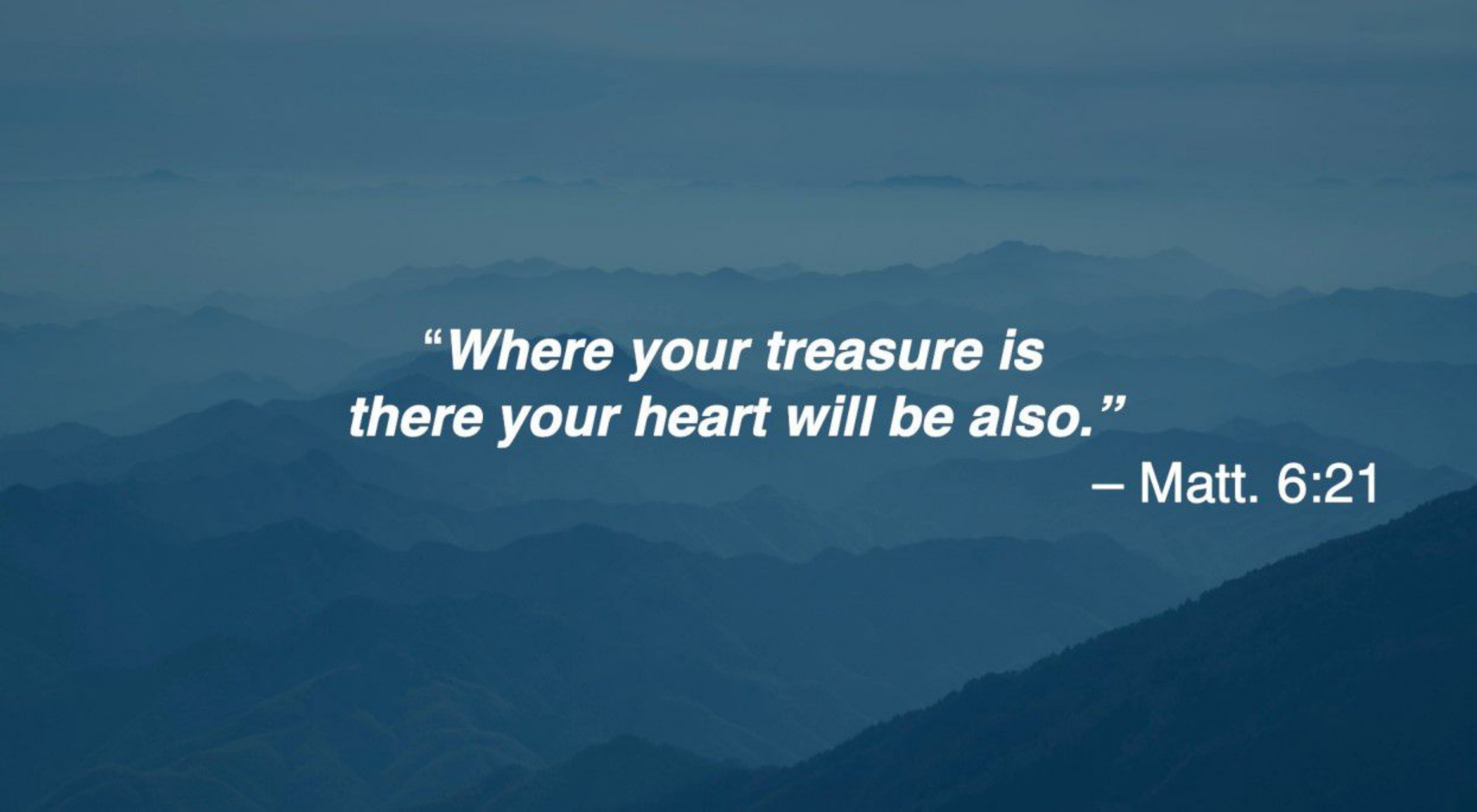
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**God’s heart is that his people
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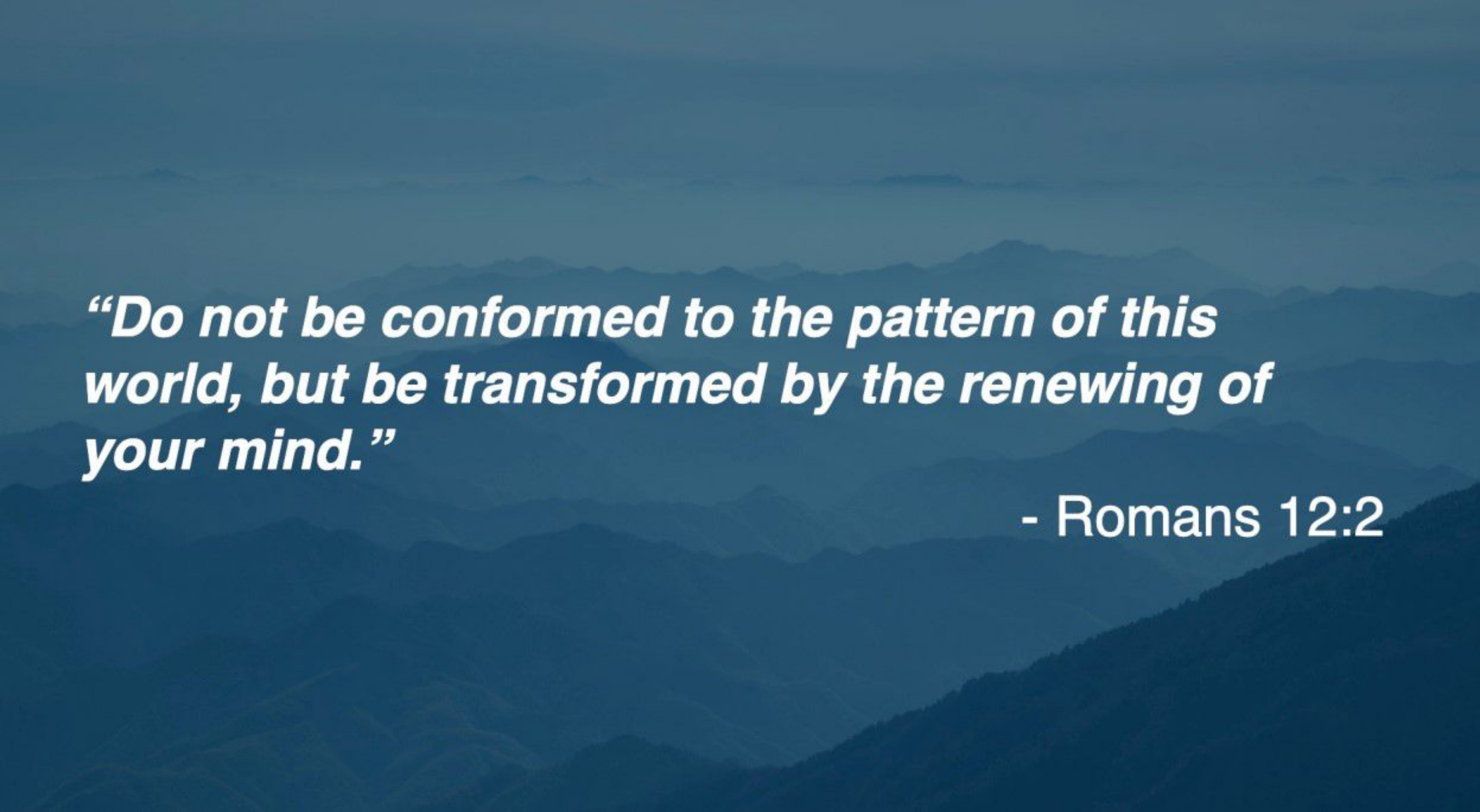
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- Matt. 5:43-48



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