

Sermon Title: An Eye For An Eye

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:38-42 (Sermon on the Mount #17)

Date: 11-15-20

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Come with me back to Matthew Chapter 5, the first of the three chapters which constitute the Sermon on the Mount. And if it's starting to seem to you like we're taking a long time in Chapter 5, I can assure you that in the end, there will be balance; we'll spend about the same amount of time in Chapters 6 and 7 *combined* as we will spend in Chapter 5. That's just how the paragraphs work out, and we want to get all that Jesus has for us here in this inspired record of that great sermon.

Today, before we look at Matthew 5:38 through 42, I want to start by having you listen to the record of something that Jesus did early in His ministry; I believe it was the first of the feasts of Israel that He attended after His public ministry began. It's in John Chapter 2, Verses 13-15—"The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables." (NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Wouldn't it have been interesting to be in the streets around the temple, when all the sheep and oxen came flowing out of the temple, running away from this guy with the scourge?

But now, I want you to listen to the record of something that Jesus did near the *end* of His ministry, about three years later. And no, it's not the *other* time that He cleared out the temple (Matt. 21:12-13). But listen to this, in John 18, Verses 21 through 23. This is during His trial; Jesus says: " 'Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.' When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, 'Is that the way You answer the high priest?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?' "

At just about midpoint between those two events, at the height of His popularity, during His Great Galilean Ministry, Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount; and in that sermon come the words that we have before us today: Matthew 5:38-42. Think about what you just heard as I read it in its entirety. Jesus says: "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 an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

Now, if you wanted to be a skeptic, if you wanted to challenge the Bible, you could put those three things together, and you could say, "Well, what is Jesus doing, rebuking the officer who slapped Him? Shouldn't He have said, 'Ooh, hit Me on the other cheek, too?'" Or, "If you should never 'resist an evil person,' what was Jesus doing when He made that whip and started clearing out the temple, where the evil profiteering was going on at the expense of the Passover travelers?"

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They're not contradictions. The resolution to the *apparent* inconsistency is that the entire difference is motivation. This passage that we study today is one of those that has been very often quoted—very seldom quoted *in context*. It's been misunderstood, misapplied, and abused—arguably, maybe as much as anything Jesus ever said.

It has been twisted to say that Christians should be sweet, pious, adorable little doormats. And many have extrapolated from this text—completely ignoring the context—to say that Jesus taught military pacifism, or to justify conscientious objection to military service. It has been used to advocate lawlessness and anarchy. It is my understanding that it was a twisted application of this passage that provided the thesis for Leo Tolstoy's "War and Peace." But the suggestion is—and does this sound familiar?—if we just eliminated the police and the military and other authorities, we could come up with a utopian society.

Now, that's a *twisting* of this passage. I want you to look at it for what Jesus said. I want you to analyze it in light of the setting in which He said it—in its historical context. And then, we'll make our own personal application. So here's where we're going: "Eye For An Eye"—that *has* to be the sermon title, when you have this passage. We'll see three points. Verse 38: The Letter Of The Law—Jesus quoting from the Old Testament. Then, our second point is not from the text, it's The Background—the Pharisees' Version Of This Subject. And then thirdly, Verses 39-42: Public Justice Versus Personal Revenge.

We start out with The Letter Of The Law. The same formula that Jesus has been using, ever since He made that theme-statement: "Unless your righteousness *surpasses* that of"—the ones *you* think of as the most righteous—"the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). He's been illustrating what He means by "surpassing righteousness"—it's righteousness that deals with your *heart* (Ps. 24:4), that lets God change you from the inside out (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26; Heb. 13:21), because you are utterly incapable of achieving perfect righteousness (Ecc. 7:20), and the kind of holiness that would allow you to fellowship with God (Ps. 5:4).

To be sure we understand the purpose of this verse—where He said: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth' "—I want to take you to the original context from which Jesus quoted "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Exodus Chapter 21, Verses 22 through 25. This is said other places, but here is the origin of it: "If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely..." So the picture is: Guys get into a fight, and somehow a pregnant woman nearby gets kicked or punched or shoved or somehow involved, and it causes her to deliver her child prematurely.

So if "she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide." So, the husband of this woman could take the naughty boys to court, and there would be some sort of a judgment. "But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."

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So, here's the picture: "There is no injury" refers to physical harm to the baby or to the woman *other than* that baby getting a birthday a few days earlier than he or she might have. If both of them survive, it's still not a *good thing* that they harmed this woman, but there would be a fine. If there is "further injury" to the woman or the child, then a more severe *but appropriate* penalty was to be paid.

Now, here's the crucial point: This is in the context of *law for the civil courts of Israel*. God's majestic Law—the Mosaic Law—includes a lot of things that we call "civil law"; it also includes "sacrificial law"; it also includes "ceremonial law." But Israel was a "theocracy"—it was all blended together; they did not have the different aspects of government that we have in New Testament times. The purpose of this, and similar civil laws, is to bring about justice in the public square: penalties suited to the crime. This was to *discourage individuals* becoming vigilantes and taking their own revenge.

When we say, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth," the principle is that punishment should fit the crime, and the harm done by the crime; *appropriate* damages should be paid to the one suffering.

Now, there are a couple of reasons for laws like that. One reason is to deter further crime. We see that elaborated in Deuteronomy 19:20-21. It's in a similar context. It says: "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." So one reason is: If you know there are bad consequences, maybe you'll think twice about the bad act (Ecc. 8:11)—so, it deters crime.

The second reason for this kind of law was to prevent *excessive* punishment based on personal vengeance and retaliation. If a hand is injured, the punishment should not be the death penalty! Importantly, the decision of the punishment was to be made by the "judges"—the ones who were objective in the matter; it was *not* to be made by the offended party.

Now, I should also say: when it says, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot," I don't know of circumstances in which they said, "Well, your faulty handling of that sickle during the harvest cut off your next-door neighbor's left hand, so we're going to chop off your hand!" I'm not sure that is *literally* the case, but it is damages *commensurate* with the crime. And that's why there are even formulas in *our* legal system for, "How much is this crime?" or, "this malfeasance," or, "this negligence"—"How much is that worth, monetarily?" But our point is: it has to be proportionally accurate.

So, do you see that this is simultaneously a *just* law—because it provides justice; it does the righteous thing—and it's also a *merciful* law—it prevented *extreme* punishment motivated by personal revenge (cf. Gen. 4:23; 34:2, 25-29; 49:5-7). This was "civil law."

Now, if you want to talk about "personal law"—or, "interpersonal law"—you probably need to read the next few verses in the Sermon on the Mount, about "love your enemies" and "pray for those who persecute you." It's no accident that Jesus mentioned both of them.

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He distinguished the one from the other, and He mentioned them side-by-side. I've told you many times that I don't think what we have in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 is every single word of Jesus's sermon that day; this is Matthew's inspired record of it for us. In Luke's version of this (6:20-49), in the same teaching on the same day, the "love your enemies" part *precedes* the section about "eye for eye and a tooth for tooth"; the point is: They really are connected, but it's clear that they are two distinct things.

Now, the problem. As with the previous passages that we have seen about anger, about lust, about divorce, about honest speech—letting your "Yes" be "Yes" and your "No" be "No"—the problem with this was *not* with the Old Testament passages (see 2 Tim. 3:16; cf. Matt. 5:17-19), and it wasn't with what Jesus had been teaching (Matt. 24:35). The problem was the way in which the Pharisees—the leaders of the Jews, the teachers of the Jews, the ones who trained the rabbis, the ones who controlled what was taught in all of the synagogues throughout the land—it was how they *twisted* God's Word. We want to talk about that for a moment.

The Letter Of The Law—very clear: The punishment should fit the crime; the penalty should fit the damage done. That's The Letter Of The Law. Now, what was The Pharisees' Version Of This? This is not in the text in front of you; we have to do our homework to find out the background of it. Remember: All of Scripture is always stated *in a specific historical context, in a cultural context, in a linguistic context*. What was going on that made Jesus choose this example?

Well, in this case, the Pharisees very readily quoted the part about "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," etc., but they did it in order to *defeat* the purpose for which it was originally written! They used it to *justify* personal retribution and personal revenge. Their attitude was: "You hurt me; so now, I am entitled to hurt you in return!" And they might even say, "I am *duty-bound* to inflict pain on you in return!" Your motive should *not* be personal retaliation against evil. Jesus is condemning the spirit of revenge: that thing that comes from—here it is again—from *the heart* that says: "I need to hurt you!"

Now, there is no passage of the Word of God that *ever* opposes prosecuting those who are guilty of criminal activity. If somebody robs you, if someone commits an act of violence, that person *should be punished* by way of a court of law (see Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:4). It is *not* morally right, though, for *individuals* to name themselves judge and jury, and take "vengeance" (Deut. 32:25; cf. Ps. 75:2).

The rule set up here is for how you and I should deal with our *hearts* when it comes to having been harmed. But the Pharisees were using these words—with total disregard for their original context—as justification to *assert* personal rights. By virtue of the rabbis' teachings, they justified the practice of making yourself judge and jury. God's Law was turned into an excuse for doing your own civil justice by way of personal revenge. Instead of seeing "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" as a *limit* on punishment, they used it as a *mandate* for revenge. Incredibly, they quoted God's Word to justify doing *exactly the opposite* of what His Word commanded them to do!

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I had an illustration of this one time—long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away; as a matter of fact, it was in the People's Republic of California, in a different millennium. I worked through a situation in which a certain woman had been stirring up *all kinds* of trouble in the church, and it actually went beyond there. She gossiped. She undermined and attacked the leadership in *every way* that she could. She was vicious. She was disruptive. She was divisive. And she was *merciless* about it. Now, this wasn't any woman who has since been elected to congress, but—it could have worked!

Well, she was confronted about it. *A lot* of people were hurt by what she had done. Eventually, it rose to the elders of the church, and they confronted her. It came to the point at which that sad day was looming when it was going to be a public church discipline issue (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20). The elders were relieved—they were *very* pleased—when she called and asked to meet with the board. She said, "I need to apologize." It seemed that she had finally understood her sin, that she had indeed come to the point of repentance.

She sat down with us. She used the words of the Bible. She said that she was sorry for the offense. We began to discuss it a little bit, and she went on to explain that she was *not* sorry for *anything* that she had said or *anything* that she had done, but she was *very* sorry that the board *took offense* at what she had done. It wasn't, "I'm sorry for what I did, and that it hurt the Body of Christ"—it was, "I'm sorry *you* took offense!" Have you ever been apologized to like that? You know, apologize with one hand and slap you with the other. That's kind of what it's done.

Jesus was confronting that kind of an attitude of using Scripture in a twisted way to "get even" on your own, or to do your own thing. Jesus was condemning the loveless and vengeful motives that the Pharisees rationalized by twisting the Scripture. They weren't about to deal, for example, with the lust in their own hearts, but they would drag that woman who was caught in adultery into a public setting (Jn. 8:1-11). That was the point.

So, The Letter Of The Law—"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'." The Pharisees' Version—they turned that around into, "You must take your own personal revenge." And that brings us to Verses 39 through 42, and the subject of Public Justice Versus Personal Revenge.

Now, friends, understand: The Bible *forbids* personal revenge. It provides for the punishment of evildoers, but don't take your own vengeance. There has never been any doubt about that, starting in Leviticus 19, Verses 17 through 18—"You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart..." The Law *always* dealt with the heart (e.g., Ex. 20:6; Deut. 10:12)—they just covered it up. "You may surely reprove your neighbor"—in other words: if somebody does something wrong, you can point out the wrong; that's an accurate use of Scripture—"but shall not incur sin because of him." What does it mean by that? "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord." And when you're reading through Leviticus and you see "I am the Lord," that means: "Get out your highlighter—I *meant that!*"

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Or, Proverbs Chapter 20, Verse 22—"Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the Lord, and He will save you." Or, Proverbs 24:29—"Do not say, 'Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work'." "I *will* get even! That's my duty." But He said, "Don't say that!"

When you understand this, and you see that Jesus puts this instruction right next to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44), you see again: He's talking about *attitude*. Again, the issue is *the heart*.

Look at some of the other things that Scripture says about this: Romans Chapter 12, Verses 19 through 21—"Never take your own revenge, beloved"—so, how often are you justified in taking your own revenge? Well, approximately: *never*—"but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Evil is going to happen. Evil will happen with *you* in the crosshairs! So, what do you do? Well, you *don't* "take your own revenge." Don't let evil "overcome" you *by turning you evil*—by having *you* do something evil *in return* (Rom. 12:17) How do grudges get started? How do family arguments get going in the first place? Somebody does something and it's not very nice, it's not very cool; and other people respond, and so they justify their response: "Well, look what she did! Look what she said!" "Oh, yeah? Well, then, I can throw a plate at you!" "Okay—well, then, I can hit you with the frying pan!" And you just escalate, instead of saying, "I'm not going to be overcome by evil."

Vengeance, and the bitterness that drives it, is like *spiritual acid* that will corrode your heart. Deal with the heart. Deal with *your* responsibility to the Lord. You will answer to the Lord for everything you *do*; you will answer to the Lord for everything you *say*; you will answer to the Lord for everything you *thought*—and *nothing* that anybody else does (Rom. 14:12). Deal with *your heart* before your Lord.

Now, that passage in Romans 12 is like a little commentary on the rest of our passage for today. Look at Verses 39 to 42. Jesus says: "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

He says, "I say to you, do not resist an evil person." What does that mean? It rebuts the Pharisees' misinterpretation; it forbids personal retaliation. Now, don't just stand there and *beg for more* bad stuff to happen to you! But it's not yours to "get even." "Turn the other cheek"—that means, show by your attitude, show by your words, show by your deeds, that you're not filled with the motivation of retaliation; your desire is to spread God's love (Phil. 2:15).

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Remember at the end of the Beatitudes? When they persecute you, let them "see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Jesus does *not teach*—and some people twist this passage to say that He does, but He doesn't—that we should take no stand against evil, that we should just passively let it run its course in the world. That's why I read to you what Jesus did when He cleared out the temple. What was He doing? He was *resisting evil*. There was *public evil* going on, sanctioned by the pompous religious leaders of the day! Jesus made a whip and He went in there, and no one resisted *Him*—that's how powerful He was. He was resisting evil when He cleared that temple.

He told us: "Resist the devil" (Jas. 4:7; cf. 1 Pet. 5:9). Or, Romans Chapter 12, Verse 9—"Abhor what is evil." (cf. Ps. 97:10; Ezek. 9:4). You shouldn't *like it* when evil happens; you call it what it is (see Eph. 5:11). We speak "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). First Thessalonians 5:22—"Abstain from every form of evil."

So we "resist" evil, we "hate" evil, we turn from evil, we refuse to let evil make *us* evil—but that's not the end of it! As a matter of fact, another example: What did Paul do when Peter was guilty of bringing into the church an evil attitude of superiority? God had used Peter to reach Gentiles (Acts 10:1 – 11:18); and then, some Pharisees who were the Judaizers—the ones who professed Christ (Acts 15:1, 5)—came, and they were spreading their stuff, and Peter quit hanging out with the Gentiles and started hanging out only with the Jews; and in Galatians 2:11, what does Paul say? "When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned." He knew better.

Paul told the Corinthians to take a strong stand; in First Corinthians Chapter 5, Verse 13, he said: "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." (cf. 2 Thess. 3:14; Titus 3:10) In Second Thessalonians Chapter 3, Verse 10, he says: "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either."

We speak "truth in love." We "admonish one another" (Rom. 15:14; cf. Col. 3:16; Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). We resolve conflicts. That's what we're like. But what you have to understand is that those references all have to do with *public* application of justice and righteousness. They *do not* advocate *personally getting even* for what is done to you. It has to do with justice in civil matters, and holiness within the church.

But Jesus is saying here: "If anyone wants to sue you"—that has to do with your attitude toward someone who wants to deprive you of your stuff. Rather than resentfully contesting the claim, submit yourself to the court. That's the point: Let justice be done, but don't be *fighting* for your personal rights—let God take care of that; He *is* your Defender (Ps. 9:4; Prov. 29:26). "Leave room for the wrath of God." You know that evil person who harms you, who takes your stuff, who damages your stuff, who harms your reputation—God sees that, and that person will answer to Him (Matt. 25:40, 45). And trust me: *nothing* you could do by way of personal revenge would be as significant—or as righteous—as what God would do for *eternity* for that person (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). We have no right to hate the person who deprives us. Like I said: Let God be your defender (see Ps. 17:1-15; 35:19).

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The "shirt" that He refers to here was the tunic that was worn next to the body, which someone could demand as a pledge for payment for a debt. That robe was considered so indispensable that, when it *was* even given as a pledge for a debt, the Law required that it be returned before sunset (Ex. 22:26)—it was *that* important, because it would be used as a cover; and for a poor person, that might be the only cover they had at night. So He's saying: Don't be *fighting* for your stuff, even if it's something that's pretty important to you (cf. Lk. 6:30).

Love—even love toward scoundrels—*that's* what should motivate our hearts; that should show up in the way we act; it should show that we want God's will for someone. That's what it means to love someone (Rom. 10:1). So act as Jesus would act. Let them "see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

"Forces you to go one mile" (vs. 41)—that's a reference to the idea of conscription. The word was actually invented by the Persians. Conscription is where a government courier or a government authority can demand that you serve immediately, or that your animal be used. This was the word that was used to describe Simon of Cyrene being compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. The soldiers said, "You! Carry that cross for Him!" (see Matt. 27:32). Jesus is saying that, rather than respond with bitterness or annoyance toward being pressed into service, do it with a smile; give more than is asked.

And my friends, I want you to know: Acting like that—*that's not natural!* That's not what comes normal to us! That's *supernatural!* That requires a kind of righteousness *you're incapable of!* It requires that you understand how much you have been forgiven, and therefore how forgiving you can be (Eph. 4:32; cf. Matt. 18:23-35).

When He says, "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you," (vs. 42)—another application, same principle: There doesn't have to be anything in it for you! Serve other people *as if* you're serving God! Wow—what a concept! Let them "see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

If you are harmed, it is perfectly acceptable to pursue, *legally*, whatever remedies are available to you—but *not* taking your own revenge, not exacting *your own* "pound of flesh." Trust God! Is He going to take care of you? Yeah—probably better than *you* would! And He "knows what you need, even before you ask Him" (Matt. 6:8). This is God! He *will* take vengeance (see Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; Rev. 3:9).

Civil government is "a minister of God to you for good" (Rom. 13:4). They are to implement civil law. Personal relationships—that's not exactly the same. In that same verse, the Apostle Paul goes on to say: "But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." That's exactly the same as what Peter says in First Peter Chapter Two, Verses 13 and 14—"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right."



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For the sake of God's righteousness, as well as for the sake of human justice, believers are obligated to uphold the law, and to be on the side of seeing that others do so as well (Prov. 28:4; Is. 1:17).

One of the reasons that we've commented on the civil justice movement is because it is not really seeking God's justice; it's saying, "We've decided that wrongs have been done, and we are going to mandate a punishment for that!" That is *being God*! If you obey God, *every* evildoer needs to be punished! It doesn't matter what their skin color is. It doesn't matter what their motivation was. The evil act needs to be punished. That's justice! When you start putting adjectives in front of "justice," you're just saying: "I get to determine what that justice is!"—and that's a denial of what God says.

There *are* people who have been wronged. That does not excuse rioting—"I'm going to show you how mad I am!" That's not justice. To excuse or to hide wrongdoing—that's not loving, that's wickedness; because that undermines God's order on Earth (Prov. 29:4; Ecc. 5:8).

I think the best way to wrap this up would be to call our attention to a sampling of some Biblical illustrations of the spirit that Jesus is calling us to, the spirit that shows the surpassing righteousness that only Christ can give.

Consider Abraham: Abraham was called by God. God nudged his nephew Lot along with him (Gen. 12:4)—who was a *total pain* to Abraham. And what did Abraham do? He kept rescuing Lot (Gen. 14:16), despite Lot's propensity for *repeatedly* causing trouble! And we're never told that Lot was a righteous man until the book of *Second Peter*! Boy, what patience Abraham showed!

Consider Joseph: He is probably the Old Testament superstar of this. Joseph's brothers decided to kill him. Well, one of them thought that was a little rash (Gen. 37:21-22). "Let's sell him instead!" (vs. 27) He winds up being sold into slavery. His dad is lied to; his dad thinks his son has died. And then God allowed the situation to develop in which Joseph was in the position—Number Two in all of Egypt—to bring his brothers to their knees. And what did he do? He forgave them.

About 20 years after they sold him into slavery and lied about his death, Joseph said these famous words in Genesis 50:19-20: "Do not be afraid..." Why were they afraid? Because they knew their hearts, and they knew what *they* would have done if *they* were in Joseph's shoes! They would have exacted their "pound of flesh"! Joseph says: "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?" What's he saying? "Leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

Joseph continues: "As for you, you meant evil against me"—he doesn't soft-pedal evil; he calls it what it is—"but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." God is in control, so why would *I* want to mess with *you*? That's my paraphrase of what Joseph said.

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Consider David: He was "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), and it shows up when he twice spared the life of King Saul who was pursuing him. Humanly speaking, David could have scored instant victory; he could have had his revenge; but he refused to take his own vengeance because God had promised to do it in His time.

In First Samuel 24, David had Saul helpless in a dark cave, and he let him go. David's conscience was even pricked over the incident of cutting off the corner of Saul's robe, and in Chapter 26 of First Samuel, he tiptoed right up to the sleeping Saul—but he refused to harm him! That would have been personal revenge. And we would probably have liked the movie, if that's how it was done; but that's not how it played out, because David was a righteous man.

Consider the prophet Elisha: He provided bread and water to the invading Syrians ("Aram," NASB) (2 Kings 6:22). "If your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink" (Rom. 12:20).

Consider Stephen: Do you remember his last words? Stephen was arrested for preaching the Gospel. Do you remember when the stones began to rain down on him in that horrible miscarriage of justice? In Acts Chapter 7, Verse 60, it says: "Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep."

Now, if you want to be snarky, you could say, "Well, Stephen, who do you *want* Him to hold this sin against, if not them?" That's not what he means! They're *responsible*, but what he means is: "God, *save these people!*" (1 Jn. 3:5) "They need a Savior, and they're pelting me because they don't like the message!"

Consider Paul: He himself was a former murderer. He wrote Romans 12:19-21 that we read. He wrote First Corinthians 13, the so-called "Love Chapter." And he wrote First Corinthians Chapter 4, Verse 12. Talk about somebody who had *many* opportunities to be motivated by personal revenge! He says: "When we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure." (cf. Rom. 12:14) That means he keeps on doing what he was doing: preaching Christ.

And ultimately, you have the example of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:23). He went to the Cross. While He was there on the Cross, He "bore our sins" (1 Pet. 2:24; cf. Is. 53:5-6)—He "who knew no sin" became "sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). But before He even got to that moment of the sin-bearing when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46), as He felt the weight of the wrath of God against all of our sins, what did He say as that Cross was being lifted and dropped into its place after the nails had been driven through His hands and His feet? Luke 23:34—"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Stephen was only echoing what Jesus had said. Now, they *knew* what they were doing—they were executing a man! And they were really skilled at it. They knew *exactly* what they were doing, but they had no concept of the significance of *who* was on that Cross, and what He was going to be doing in those next hours.

Sermon Title: An Eye For An Eye

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:38-42 (Sermon on the Mount #17)

Date: 11-15-20

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What's the point of this paragraph in the Sermon on the Mount? It's the same as the paragraph before it, and the paragraph before that, and the paragraph before that—which is: You *can't be* righteous enough! (1 Kings 8:46; Jer. 13:23; Rom. 3:23) You need a righteousness that surpasses what the most so-called "righteous" people in the world can achieve! (Phil. 3:4-9) You need something *you can't do!* And by the way, this chapter is building to that very crescendo. You need the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

My friend, if you have somehow slipped by—however many sermons, however many times you've read your Bible—and you think, "You know, my good stuff outweighs my bad stuff," you're using the wrong scale, because the scale is: If you ever did *one bad thing*, you are guilty enough for *eternal Hell!* (Jas. 2:10) "Well, that's not fair!" I know—and that's why I'm glad *you* are not the Judge! Because God did something that wasn't *fair*—He sent the Innocent to die, to pay the penalty for the guilty (1 Pet. 2:22, 24; 3:18). *That's the message of Christ!*

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...But I say to you, let's get to the issue of your heart." Don't let spiritual acid eat at your heart. It will hurt. It will burn. And you'll miss out on all the joy that you could have.

Let's pray:

*Our Father, how we thank You again for the simplicity, the power, the life-changing effect of Your Word. And we humble ourselves before You today, and ask You to have Your way with each of us—to teach us, to mold us, to shape us. May it be that the people around us can see our good works—even in the context when they are persecuting us—that they can see our good works, wrought by Your Spirit, and glorify You by turning to You. Please don't let a soul leave this place apart from having cried out to You for the salvation that only You can give. And then, use us for Your glory, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*