

**Matthew in Biblical Perspective:
A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King –
The Fourth Commandment: Overcoming Evil With Good**

Matthew 5:38-42

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August 1, 2010 – Morning Sermon

We are on the fourth commandment Jesus gives from the Sermon on the Mount. Let's look at our text for this study. Hear the Word of our Savior in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:38-42 says

38 "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 the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

The grass withers and the flower fades. God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached to you.

I have been gone on a study sabbatical and have been looking over this text in anticipation of this moment. I can't wait to preach this text and here's why. I have been under such conviction that I want to get it off me and on you. This text has so challenged me to make renovations, not so I can be saved because I'm saved in Jesus, but so I can more clearly show my Savior.

This is an interesting text. These few verses have penetrated our whole society. Think of all the phrases just in those five verses. 'Turn the other cheek.' 'Eye for an eye.' 'Tooth for a tooth.' 'You have to go the second mile.' It's amazing to see all those phrases in just a few verses. I'm not sure there is another text that in just a short number of verses that is so used in our language but so misused in our Christian life or not used in our Christian life. I have listened to many commentators and preachers in preparation for this study and this is the same text they will use to say this means pacifism, no place for an army, nation, turn the other cheek. There is no place for policeman just turn the other cheek. There is no place for self defense, just turn the other cheek. Isn't that what the passage tells you? If someone comes up to you begging you have to give it to them and

since you have to give to people who are in need and lend to people who want to borrow, how can a Christian be a policeman or a soldier or a banker? Turning the other cheek would get rid of a lot of lawyers. Sorry I couldn't miss that one.

With this text I want to explain not a way what it is saying but I want to challenge you to what it is actually saying, not it's misuse but it's proper use because it's actually more challenging than those who have misused it today. I know I am time challenged in my sermons and I'm fully aware of that. One of the reasons for that is this text. One of my professors told me, "Harry when you are preaching expositionally which you are committed to doing, if you don't put the text into context it can easily become a pretext. It can easily become a lie." Scripture has to be put in its context.

I love what Sinclair Ferguson said one time when talking about a Bible translation. They were translating the English Bible into Russian so to help them out they got a hold of some software programming where all you have to do is plug in the phrase or the words in English and it just comes right out in Russian. This software really had not been set up contextually for Bible translation so they put in the phrase "the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." The computer software turned out the phrase "Whiskey is strong than meat." Stop and think about that. "The Spirit" translated as 'spirits' (whiskey) is stronger than 'flesh' translated 'meat.' So clearly things have to be in context or we don't properly understand it.

So what is Jesus actually telling us in this text? Remember this is the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has gone up on the mountain, the same mountain where Moses received the Law and now Jesus comes up on this mountain to give us the Gospel use of the Law. First He told us what the character is of those who are in His Kingdom. It's interesting to note that Jesus doesn't start by telling us how to get in the Kingdom but He starts telling those in the Kingdom how they live. So what about getting into the Kingdom? We will get to that and talk about the two gates, the two trees, two roads and two destinations at the end but at the beginning Jesus says, "Those of you who know the King as your Savior, here's your life which are the beatitudes. Your ministry is to be salt and light and here is the way you make use of the Law with the Gospel. Now that you have received My righteousness here is the way your righteousness exceeds the Pharisees. Here is the way you live out of love to Me and the proper use of My Law." Then He gives five commandments and we're on the fourth one in this study. By the way, He'll also give five commandments on how to practice that righteousness in a way that draws people to Christ instead of turning them away from Christ. So we will end up with ten commandments from the Sermon on the Mount Gospel Law which is the Law of liberty and what it sets us free to do.

To recap, the first commandment was the sanctity of life and what it means to murder and what it means to pursue life. The second commandment was on the sanctity of marriage and sexuality within marriage. The third one was on truth

that oaths and vows are necessary in a broken world but Christians live in such a way as if they are not necessary because our 'yes' is 'yes' and our 'no' is 'no'. Now we are at the fourth one and this is where Jesus is teaching us how those who are saved by grace use grace to overcome sin. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound (Romans 5:20). He is going to teach us that those who by God's goodness have been made right with Him overcome evil with goodness and don't let evil overcome them when it comes into their life. He will be very specific about this.

How does He start? He starts by giving a quote from the Law just like He has with the other three. He gives the quote from the Law from Exodus 21. Exodus 21 follows Exodus 20 and isn't that brilliant that I was able to show that to you. The Law of God (Ten Commandments) is found in Exodus 20. The ordinances as to how the judges were to apply the Law in the judicial system of Israel are found in Exodus 21 through 23. He gave the Law to tell us we need a Savior to tell us that we're sinners, how to love Him and to drive us to Christ and then He gives to His people how that Law is to be used in equity appropriately in the judicial system.

One of the things that He teaches is an 'eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' which is called the Law of Retaliation. He is telling the judges in Exodus 21 to 23 that when an evil doer comes before them and they are guilty here is what you do – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He is not giving them a method of justice but He is giving the equity of justice. He is saying three things with that statement. First He is saying justice is given by My judges in the judicial systems not by the individual. He is outlawing personal revenge. He is outlawing vigilante justice. He is saying that justice is found in the court system. Is there an evil doer? If so they come before the court. Are they guilty?

The second statement He is making is make the punishment fit the crime – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If someone breaks someone else's arm you don't give them capital punishment. The punishment is to fit the crime.

The third statement He is making is I am now dealing with evil doers in the court with proportionate sure justice to restrain evil and reward righteousness so that you individually, not only do you not set up your own court, but are free to pursue the evil doers with love. That now frees you to pursue them with love – eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It is prescriptive where the punishment fits the crime. It is restrictive where only the judicial system is to do this not you. Now that frees you up to pursue in love the evil doer.

That's why Jesus says, "That's what you have heard which was the Law but now I say here's what this Law now frees you to do. Do not resist the one who is evil." So He expands the Law with its use of restriction – court systems, proportionate judgment that is meted out to the guilty, and freeing us from pursuing our own court systems and this now allows you not to resist the evil one. Let's stop and

go back to proportionate crimes. Here is an example of this. One night when I was a little boy we had sat down to eat at the dinner table. I was the only boy. I was the oldest and I have three sisters. One of my sisters spilt the ice tea twice which caused my father and mother on the second occasion to discipline her. Another thing that happened that night was I was demon possessed that night. I really think I was. My dad sat at the head of the table and my mother sat across the table from me and then my three sisters sat at the other end of the table. Normally I would sit at the other end but that night I was sitting in an unusual spot for me across from my mother. My mother had finished serving the table and she came to sit down. As I saw her starting to sit down I was demon possessed. My foot went under the table and pushed the chair so that the chair moved and my mother hit the floor. I remember watching her going down and thinking to myself "Why did you just do this?" To this day I believe I was demon possessed right then. So did my sister get disciplined for spilling the tea the second time? Yes. Do you think I was disciplined? I am not able to describe to you what happened to me after that. Just let me assure you that the punishment fit the crime that day. I got a lot more than my sister got that day.

So the Lord is showing us the Law of Retaliation where justice is in my court system. It is to be proportionate justice and sure justice which will free you not to do personal vigilante justice. What does that free me up to do then? It will free you up to go after the evil doer. Don't resist them. Please bear with me. The word 'resist' in the Greek is *anthistemi* which is where we get the word *antihistamine* from. It's actually a legal word. It means to take to court. He is saying when an evil doer does evil don't set up your own court system with your own personal vigilante justice for revenge. You don't hold them accountable to you, your honor and your sense of justice. They may have to answer to a court which is a different story but they don't answer to you. Jesus will embellish this more when we get to Matthew 7 and He talks about not judging. It is a very technical term that He is talking about. Doesn't Jesus tell us through the writers of the New Testament to resist the evil one? Are we to resist Satan? Are we to resist sin? Yes. What is He saying here? Here you have met a sinner. They have done something evil. There is a court system I have put in place to handle them for the good of society but I have put you there not to set up your own court system, but to go after them with the love of your King. That's what I have put you there for.

Jesus wants us to understand this so He gives us five life takeaways but He just doesn't call them life takeaways. So here are the five examples Jesus gives to illustrate this to us. The first one is if the evil doer comes to you and slaps you on the right cheek then you turn the other also. What is He saying here? It's important to understand the right cheek. What kind of world do we live in? We live in a right handed world. When I played baseball I hit left handed and I had planned to play golf left handed but my daddy said, "No, you're going to play golf right handed" and I said, "Why?" He said, "One, you are going to play with my clubs and I'm right handed and I'm not buying you any clubs so you'll learn to play right handed. Two, the world turns to the right." I said, "Really?" He said,

“Yes.” I want you to know in Hezekiah 3:6 it says the world turns to the right and that’s what my daddy said so it must be true. The third thing my daddy said is “Golf courses are set up for right handers so learn to play right handed.” So I learned to play right handed. In fact, it wasn’t too long ago that left handed people were looked at suspiciously. Don’t get oppressed if you’re left handed. It’s okay, we love you and we’ll work with you but it’s a right handed world.

When we do a hand shake it’s supposed to be done with your right hand which shows you don’t have your sword in your hand. So it’s a right handed hand shake. So if somebody slaps you on the right cheek what kind of slap did that have to be? It had to be done with the back of the hand. It’s a back hand slap to the face. What was the purpose in the Ancient Near East for this? We need to get the context here. If someone came up and back handed you to the right cheek, what did that mean? It was an insult. So what do you do when someone insults you? You turn the other cheek. The right cheek could be used to insult and the left cheek was used for affection thus one would press their cheek to another in affection. So when someone comes up and slaps you with an insult is the basis for your relationship going to be reclaiming your dignity or loving that evil doer? That’s the question. Some would say here there is no place for self defense. This is not someone striking you in an assault. It is not the slap of an assault. He is talking about the slap of an insult. When someone gives you an insult slap you go after them with a cheek of love. This is not dealing with the issue of self defense. It’s dealing with the issue of someone trying to humiliate you and you humble yourself to love them. You pursue them. That’s what He calls you to do.

Jesus gives a second example. Someone comes and sues you to get your tunic, your shirt, and the court systems will handle that appropriately but what do *you* do when it happens to you? You should be ready to give your coat also. The coat is a big deal for an Israelite. According to Exodus 24 with a coat you could make a deal or a pledge. When someone said, “Here’s my coat” then they could make a pledge. The coat was what covered you during the day. Jesus isn’t teaching that His people are to go around without clothes on. He is saying that the coat is valuable. You can make a pledge with it, it covers you in the day time, it provides warmth and it’s your bed and bed clothes at night. The coat is a big deal for the Israelite. Do you remember when Ruth approached Boaz at night? What was he covered in when she pulled the folds back? It was his cloak which is their bed clothes. It was their bed clothes by night and their cover by day. Jesus says, “That which is sacred to you and significant in your life, like your coat, be willing to give it up to the other person.”

The third illustration Jesus uses is if someone comes to you and demands you go a mile with them go a second mile. It’s important that I put this in context here. Here Israel is under occupation by whom? They are under the Roman Empire. They had a standing law without any court, process or ordinance that any Roman official, soldier or officer could impress you to serve them for 1,000 stadia or 1

mile. Do you remember Simon of Cyrene? A soldier impressed on him to carry the cross of Jesus. That was a humiliation to an Israelite. We the children of Abraham are under the boot of the oppressor. They can even make us against our will carry a burden and walk a mile with a soldier. Jesus says "I know their kingdom and emperor says that but you have a King and a Kingdom and your King says to go ahead and go the second mile with them." That's what your King says.

The fourth illustration Jesus uses is if there's a beggar that there, what should be your impulse? My impulse would be 'no sir'. Does that mean you have to give to everybody? Absolutely not. Jesus will make that clear in this sermon. In Matthew 6 He will tell us not to give our pearls to swine so there is some limitation on giving. The Apostle Paul in the ministry of mercy says that when you have someone in the church that doesn't work then you are not to let him eat. He doesn't say they can't work for that's mercy and you're to minister to them but if they won't work then don't give them food. So this illustration isn't without thought but He says, "When My people meet someone in need your impulse is to give and your commitment is to give, rightfully, thoughtfully and wisely and not foolishly or to reinforce sin. Your impulse is to give."

The fifth illustration Jesus uses is when you meet somebody who is in need of capital, a borrower, then be ready to give to the one who is need of the capital. It doesn't mean your obligated to support someone's wild scheme in business but my impulse as I want to invest in you at that point of need is to give when you come to me as a borrower.

So what does that mean to us? Here is the takeaway. Christianity knows we are in a broken world. Jesus knows we're in a broken world. So Christianity has provided the government and the government has a court system and the court system is supposed to affirm what is righteous and punish evil doers appropriately even to the point of death because it bears the sword. While Christianity calls for the State to "resist evil" with justice and the sword, the individual Christian is called to "overcome evil" with good, by not returning evil for evil, but by returning a blessing instead. I the Christian in my individual life, in my society, my calling is not to be the judge or set up my own court system even when the sin has been against me. My calling is to overcome evil with good. My calling is not to claim my privileges, my dignity, and my honor. My calling is to claim the evil doer. I am supposed to return a blessing instead. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound. I am to do for them what He the King did for me. That's what I'm called to do and that's what He tells us to do.

Now, for clarification what is He not saying? This isn't some well meaning but misconstrued statement saying pacifism is the rule of the day. I want to show you this in a text of Scripture. We could multiply this in many different texts. Earlier in the worship service we did a confession of truth from Matthew 12. In Romans 12 Paul brings to us with expansion its implication what Jesus is teaching us in this

text of study of how we are to live in the face of evil doers. Romans 12:14, 17-21 says

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (Don't avenge yourself. You leave it to the wrath of God. God's wrath and justice will be poured out in the last day and God's wrath and justice is shown through the government system of proper courts. God will bring His justice in that way. You don't set up your own personal court system.) 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil (not simply by refusing to return evil which is step one) with good.

When sinned against it's not simply I'm going to sin back against you. I'm not going to get you back but more than that bring the blessing. Bring good and overcome evil with good. Where sin abounds bring grace.

Now what is this not saying? It's not saying there's not a place for self-defense. Jesus is standing before the courts and He is silent until they put Him under oath and the court was in session. What did He do? He defended Himself. Paul, Agrippa, Festus and Felix before Rome Paul made a defense. There is a place where self defense is appropriate. The Scriptures teach us this. This is not telling us that Christians give foolishly when people come and ask us for something. On the contrary we think it through. Is it somebody who won't work or can't work? That's not what He is saying but He is saying the basis of your relationship with other people is not reclaiming your dignity but reaching that sinner. When someone wants you to go a mile with them and they have no right to do it you're to say "a mile that's nothing, I'll go a second mile with you. I'll walk with you." I'll weep with those who weep and I'll rejoice with those who rejoice. I'll get into the mess of the messiness of your life with you.

Being a Christian doesn't mean you abandon those things that God has set up appropriately. We're there any soldiers saved in the New Testament? Yes. We're they told they had to resign from the army? No, of course not. We're they told you can't be a judge because your judge not? There is a place for judges. There is a place and system. There is a place for the policeman, the sword, the banker, the lender operating with Christian principles in a Christian situation but in my individual life as I come into the encounter of people in this life, the one who needs, the one who is a beggar, the one who has insulted me, the one who has asked me to go that mile with them, that one who is unreasonable or sinful or evil that is being brought to me, I'm not to protect myself but die to myself, reach that person and go the second mile. Here my life isn't with cloaks, tunics and coats so

have my coat. We need to be able at that moment in time to reach that evil doer. That's what it is saying.

It is saying that our relationship with sinners in this world is not based upon our honor, our rights and our dignity but upon our desire to win them for Christ with the love of Christ. That's the foundation of our relationship with them. We are talking about humility and self denial. If we think our right thinking and right living is what is getting us to heaven we'll have no patient with evil doers but if we know we have been saved by grace then when evil comes to us then God has planted within our heart a desire to respond, not with evil against evil and not just to not do that which is evil but to do that which is good to bless them, to watch those burning coals bring conviction that would bring them to Christ. That's what God has placed upon our heart and that's what He is challenging us to know and to do. What's the limit? The only limit to our humility is the death of our love for sinners.

So what do we say? I live in a broken world. I have the same struggles you do. I am preaching a sermon right now to a congregation that is many and maybe even most of what Jesus is teaching concerning our response to sinners where they are far beyond the preacher who is preaching this to them. I recognize that. This thing has put me under such conviction that it overwhelms me but I know it's what my Savior has called me to be and do. I live in a culture that has invented a right where you have a right to live life and no one ever offends you or insults you. We think in a sinful world we as Christians among anybody ought to know that offense is a part of this world. In fact, our very Gospel is an offense. Our very existence is an offense to the world and we have now lost the opportunity to win the lost person if all of our relationships are built upon reclaiming our honor in front of them instead of claiming them for Christ. One might think, "Pastor, are you telling us we're doormats?" No, I'm not telling you we're doormats but I am saying that God's people are anvils of grace that eventually break the hammers of evil that is falling upon them. God's people are shields of goodness that shatters the spear of sinfulness. When sin abounds grace much more is to abound.

Why do I do this? It's very simple. Be committed in this world to take the position of a servant and be prepared to pay the price. We claim servant-hood but we get upset when people treat us like one. If you're in the Kingdom and you know the King Jesus is calling you to take the position of a servant and be prepared to pay the price. What's the price? The price is humiliation and self-denial. There is a place where court systems deal with those issues and other issues but in our relationships we want to be servants and prepared to pay the price. Why? It is because your King did. When your King was smote upon the cheek He turned the other until they plucked out by the roots His beard. When they brought the lashes to your King He bore His back. When your King was threatened He did not utter threats back. Your King from heaven took off the cloak of regal majesty and laid it aside for you to humble Himself and pick up our coat of sin to pay for

our judgment. Your Savior is the One who has humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. Why do we do this in the Kingdom? Our King did it for us and by His wounds we have been redeemed. Through our self-denial the Lord might bring others to Himself in glorious ways that we haven't even seen.

So we are ready to take off the cloak and turn the cheek. We who were beggars are ready to give. We who were the needy are ready to lend. We who were headed to hell and Jesus came and walked into hell for us tore down the gates. No power of hell can hold me. He humbled Himself. He walked through the gates of hell. The keys to hell, death and sin were on the other side and He took them, unlocked them and He laid Himself down to set me free because I am free, now I have been invited to die with Him and for Him. That's what I have been invited to do. Do you want to live? Then die to yourself because your life is not about exalting yourself but it's humbling yourself and when you reach people who are evil doers because you love them then you are doing what I, Jesus, did. Jesus walked into hell for you now you walk with Me. I walk with you everyday. I'll walk not the second mile with you but I'll walk the last mile with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you because I love you. Now, there are people that need to see Me in you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege to have the Word and search the Word. Now, Father have it search us. Some of you reading this today don't know the Savior. There's a Savior who laid aside everything for you and there is no other way to Him but through Him so come to Him today. Say, "Jesus I come." Father, speak to our hearts. I confess again these people here I'm preaching to are so far beyond me in this impulse to give, to be humbled, humiliated for others to see Christ in us. Father, do a work in us that in a broken, evil world even when its done against us, we will not return evil for evil but to the contrary giving thought, we will overcome evil with good and when sin abounds even against us may grace much more abound from us because of Him who has freely and graciously saved us. Thank You Jesus, I pray in Your Name, Amen.

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