

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

Sunday, August 5th, 2018

Sermon Series: “Staying Cool in a Hot Summer”

Sermon #6 - **The Peaceable Kingdom** – Matthew 5:38-42

Matthew 5:38-42 38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ [a] 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Opening

1. We are nearing the end of a hot summer (we hope), and so we are coming to the conclusion of this sermon series: Staying Cool in a Hot Summer;
2. Last week, we talked about being spiritually formed. Each believer has an “inner being,” as Paul calls it, which is created when we ask Christ to live in our hearts. Staying cool in a hot summer requires the inner part of our spiritual lives to be formed – so that we aren’t tempted as much, and we find the strength we need.
3. Have you seen videos you can watch online about “Epic Fails.” These are videos of people attempting something and failing at it, and they are generally pretty cute, because we know that could have been us in the video. Well, this week, I attempted to apply the message from last week and failed. I led the morning devotion on Friday at the mission. I didn’t have much time to prepare, so I decided to summarize briefly the message from last week on “peace in the storm.” In the middle of my 10 minute time, an infant girl began to scream. The lungs on that young lady were amazing, and it must have been at some kind of pitch that struck a nerve in me, because I couldn’t stay focused on the lesson I was teaching about peace in difficult circumstances. I started to feel frustration rise, and then anger. Why wasn’t the mom removing her. Dee Jay, one of our last remaining summer missionaries got on her knees, and calmed the child, so that I could continue. It was funny to me that I lost my peace in the middle of my lesson on staying calm in the storms.
4. So this sermon series is for all of us, I guess. 😊

Introduction

Some years ago a man named Lucien had served in the military “*beyond the call of duty*” as a native son of Kentucky. One day he discovered that an old boyhood friend named Sam was serving time in the State penitentiary and had 8 more years to serve. Lucien went to the warden and asked if he could visit Sam, to which the warden agreed. Lucien and Sam talked for two hours with their time ending with much laughing over some of the things that had happened in their youth.

A month later Lucien visited the Governor and said: “*I haven’t been able to sleep. Sam, my boyhood buddy, is in prison. He was a good boy, Governor, and since you told me that if there was anything Kentucky could do for me to name it, I came here to ask if a pardon might be granted. I’ll take him into my business and into my home, for he has no family, and I have a big house.*”

A week later the Governor sent for Lucien and said: “*Here’s the pardon, but it’s yours under one condition; that is, that you sit down in the warden’s office and talk with Sam for two more hours. Then if you think you should give him the pardon, take Sam home. I will parole him to you.*”

Lucien hurried over to the penitentiary and again they sat down in the warden's office. Lucien said, *"Sam, when you get out of here, will you go into business with me? I might even get you out of here sooner than you expect."* Sam got up and walked around awhile, looked out of the window, then said, *"I don't believe I could accept that invitation, for I've got something to do when I get out of here, something very important. I'm going to do it just as soon as I get out of here."*

"What is it, Sam?" Lucien asked. Sam turned around, the fire glinted from his eyes, hatred filled his whole face as he said, *"I am going to get two men together – the judge who sent me up here and the witness – and I'm going to kill them both with my bare hands."* Lucien left and tore up that pardon.

Such is the desire for revenge in man. Sam lost the opportunity for a pardon because his heart was full of hatred desiring only revenge. But revenge comes in less graphic forms as well, such as in the story of the old pious, but somewhat cranky old lady that had been inadvertently forgotten to be invited by her neighbors for a picnic. On the morning of the event they suddenly realized they had forgotten her and sent a little boy to ask her to come. "It's too late now," she snapped, "I've already prayed for rain"¹.

Human Nature

1. It's only Fair - We understand human nature, because we've all lived it. You hurt me, so in return, I will hurt you.
2. Easy to Escalate - Man's basic sinful nature is seen in his desire to revenge. If he receives an ounce of injury he wants to get a pound of revenge. You see this even in little kids. One child bumps into another one and the second one strikes the first one and from there it escalates. Nations do the same. One nation is offended and the other retaliates with greater offense until often it can become outright war.
3. Our World's Way – But it is not the way of Jesus. The angels announced at Jesus' birth that this baby would bring glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will to men. Colossians 3:15 tells us to "Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, since as members of one body we were called to peace." The question becomes, "Which way will be choose? Power or Peace?"

A Pressure Cooker

1. Jesus starts "You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth" (v. 38).
2. The statute, known to history as the Lex Talionis, is the oldest law in the world. It first appeared in the Code of Hammurabi, the man who ruled Babylon (ancient Iraq) from 2285 to 2242 B.C.
3. Exodus 21:24-25 states it clearly: ". . . eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."
4. The biblical version of the Law wasn't designed to justify conflict, but to limit it. Without it, if you scraped my car, I could wreck yours, or if you killed my son, in return, I could kill all of your children. This was a law limiting revenge.
5. It took vengeance out of individual hands and put it into the courts. The judge could then determine what proper restitution for injury. They developed elaborate ways to insure the rights of all citizens.
6. I don't think I've ever used a pressure cooker, but I have seen them in operation. Pressure cooking is the "process of cooking food, using water or other cooking liquid, in a sealed vessel. It works by trapping the steam produced from the boiling liquid. So, the heat is contained, the product inside turns out to be delicious as a result, and then at the end, the steam can be safely released without harming anyone. The

¹ Scott L. Harris. From Sermon Series "Sermon on the Mount." Grace Bible Church, Wappinger Falls, New York. "Resisting Revenge." November 8th, 1998.

biblical version of the Lex Talionis is, in fact, a kind of pressure cooker – keeping the steam inside, purifying the product, and releasing the steam appropriately.

The Big Picture

1. Yet, Jesus gives us a bigger picture. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is taking the Old Testament laws and infusing them with the Spirit of Grace. Where the Pharisees had applied the laws legalistically and to their own advantage, Jesus pushed the law towards their intended purpose – the Spirit, instead of the letter of the Law. That is what he is doing here in these verses too.
2. Verse 39, Jesus tells us not to resist an evil person, even when it is your right to do so.
3. 1 Cor 13:5b says that “Love does not insist on its own way.” Insist here means a continuous strong desire that demands its own way. Conversely, this means being inconsiderate of the good or happiness of others.
4. Jesus isn’t asking us to “give up our rights,” or to be door mats, and he isn’t talking about self-defense. As Christians, we are to stand up and in for anyone who is being abused. There is a difference between Justice and Revenge. Here, Jesus is teaching us instead to remember how blessed we are as His children, and then to respond accordingly. We can and should stand against oppression anywhere, but we must resist revenge.
5. Perhaps you have been following a despicable story as I have about Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. Since June 20th, we have been horrified by the revelations of the Cardinal’s preying sexually on young men, including at least one minor. In the Catholic church, a cardinal is one who nominates someone to be Pope, and is one who could have been the Pope himself. If these allegations are true, then Cardinal McCarrick is an example of someone whose self-centered nature caused him to confuse need & wants with rights, so that he could violate the rights of someone else.²
6. By Contrast, On July 2nd, the Diocese of Rome requested testimony that might advance the cause for canonization of Chiara Corbella Petrillo, who at age 28 died, like St. Gianna Molla, after postponing cancer treatment during pregnancy. Chiara met her husband Enrico in 2002, and they married six years later, having cultivated a special devotion to St. Francis. The couple experienced several traumatic pregnancies. Their first child was diagnosed in utero with anencephaly, a severe defect of the neural tube, and their second child likewise developed life-threatening abnormalities. Chiara carried both babies to term, and both died less than an hour after birth³
7. Shortly after Chiara became pregnant a third time, she developed a cancerous lesion on her tongue. She lost the ability to speak and swallow, but she refused any treatment that might compromise the health of her child, including an early induction. In May of 2011, Chiara gave birth to a healthy baby boy and began cancer treatment, but by the spring of 2012, the cancer had metastasized. She died that June, wearing her wedding dress. In a letter to her son, she wrote, “Whatever you do, it will only be meaningful if you think about eternal life. If you truly love, you will realize that nothing belongs to you, because everything is a gift.”

² Elisabetta Povoledo and Sharon Otterman, NY Times. “Cardinal Theodore McCarrick Resigns Amid Sexual Abuse Scandal. July 28th, 2018. Accessed online August 5th, 2018 at the following link:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/world/europe/cardinal-theodore-mccarrick-resigns.html>.

³ Jane Sloan Peters. First Things. “The Hidden Splendor of the Church, Published July 27th, 2018. Accessed August 4th, 2018 at the following link: <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/07/the-hidden-splendor-of-the-church>.

8. It isn't that we don't have rights, but that we ultimately belong to Christ, and we call Him Lord, which means that we submit our rights in order to fulfill the purposes of the Prince of Peace and his peaceable Kingdom.
9. What does that look like?

On Our Honor

1. Verse 39b – If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;
2. “Strikes” in the original means “to slap.” This wasn’t a violent assault, but an insult to character and reputation. It was a sign of great contempt and abuse, so that fines from the church for this behavior were twice those of other physical injuries;
3. Jesus is saying that though you would be within your rights to strike back, don’t do it. Turn the other cheek instead.
4. The world’s way is to strike back, and to inflict greater harm to show who has power. God’s way is to return blessing for insult, so that people can see the Heavenly Father in us, so that they can find the prince of peace.
5. Which response takes more strength?
6. I am reminded of our Lord on the cross who asked the Father to forgive those who had beat him, spit on him, insulted him. Not only did he not get revenge, he forgave them.

What Possesses Us?

1. In verse 40, Jesus speaks to us about our possessions. “If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.
2. The tunic was the inner garment, an undershirt with sleeves. It could be taken in a lawsuit, but the “cloak” could not – it was the outer garment, which protected a poor person from the elements and served as his bed at night. Exodus 22:26 forbids keeping the cloak.
3. But Jesus says “Let him have your cloak as well.” Even though it is your right to keep it, and he has no right to take it. Do not insist on your rights.
4. Jesus is addressing the material possessiveness that dwells so deeply in our hearts.
5. In Victor Hugo’s 1862 Novel, *Les Miserable*, set in the French Revolution was more a story about the revolution that can happen in the human heart. Jean Valjean, the protagonist of the novel, spent 19 years in prison for the crime of stealing a loaf of bread to save his sister’s son from starvation. By the time he was released, all he knew was prison life. Desperate, alone, and with no place to go, Jean (formerly prisoner number 24601) knocked on Bishop Bienvenue’s door. The convict spends the night at the Bishop’s house, and steals some silver place settings when he leaves. Apprehended by the police, Jean Valjean was returned to the Bishop’s house to answer for his new crime.

However, the Bishop sensed that this crime was paltry next to the real crime – the 19 years stolen from Jean’s life, and a few silver settings did not come close by comparison. So the Bishop tells the police that the gift was freely given, and throws in two silver candlesticks that the Bishop claimed Jean had left behind in error. This kindness set in motion Jean Valjean’s transformation into a man of heroic virtue who in turn would transform others.⁴

Free Indeed?

1. Verse 41 – If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles;”

⁴ A good summary of the story can be found at this link: <http://thesestonewalls.com/gordon-macrae/les-miserables-the-bishop-and-the-redemption-of-jean-valjean/>

2. Here Jesus refers to a custom known and despised by every person who heard his Sermon. A Roman soldier could require any Jew to carry his military pack for the distance of one mile. No matter where you were going or what you were doing, the soldier could “force” you to do this.
3. They did this to Simon of Cyrene, forcing him to carry the cross of Jesus. They didn’t have to ask, and you had no choice but to obey.
4. We are so possessive of our personal freedom as Americans that we will fight anyone who attempts to take just a little bit of it. It is one thing to give up your freedom for something good – like what the city and the gas company are doing to my yard – without asking, are coming to tear up the yard to fix a gas line underneath it. Sure tempted to call. Right? But to give up our freedom to an enemy?
5. Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian Christian minister of Jewish descent endured 14 years of Communist imprisonment and torture in his homeland of Romania. He was the cofounder of the Voice of the Martyrs, a ministry which helps us know about the persecution happening to Christians across the world⁵ Listen to this testimony from Rev. Wurmbrand:

“I have seen Christians in communist prisons with 50 pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonful’s of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold, – and praying with fervor for the communists . . . Afterward, the communists come to prison too. Now the tortured and the torturers were in the same cell. And while the non-Christians beat them (the former torturers), Christians took their defense. I have seen Christians giving away their last slice of bread (we had at that time one slice a week) and the medicine which could save their lives to a sick communist torturer who was now a fellow-prisoner”⁶

6. This is both true power and authentic freedom, and pure Peace.

Treasure Heaven

1. Verse 42 says “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.” Give when you are asked to give, and lend when you are asked to lend.
2. Not foolishly. God’s word counsels us to be wise in our use of money (Proverbs 11:15; 17:18; 22:26-27).
3. Be willing to give what God asks of you, even when it is difficult.
4. I remember the story of Rush Creek’s pastor who preached on this passage, and he asked people what they would be willing to give? He went through several options and then told them that there were people in our community who didn’t have shoes. And the pastor took off his shoes and laid them at the altar. Suddenly, people from everywhere were coming down and laid their shoes at the altar. My good friend who went there told me he had just purchased a brand new, \$200 pair of cowboy boots, but he put them at the altar. All of those shoes came to Mission Arlington.
5. Story of my dad, and how he gave up his shoes, so that his son would not be embarrassed when he preached.

⁵ Cited from the Voice of the Martyrs Website, located here: <https://www.persecution.com/founders/>. Accessed Sunday, August 5th, 2018.

⁶ Scott Harris sermon, “Resist Revenge.”

How do you do this?

1. Accept Christ - Only with a blood transfusion – where the blood of Christ. You have to have major surgery.
2. Grow in Christ - Even then, only as we are spiritually formed, so that we are shaped more and more by the heart of the Prince of Peace.
3. Stay close to your spiritual family Then through the church, we must keep reminding ourselves of what is really important, eternal, real:

The best Christians and the most vital are by no means found either inevitably or even generally among the wise and clever, the intelligentsia or the politically minded, or those of social consequence. Their lives are hidden from the eyes of the world – they are the source of all initiative and action, all spadework that is not to be fruitless

4. Trust God – I mentioned Cardinal Theodore McCarrick earlier in the message. After 50 years, he was caught. I can only imagine how those hurt by him felt when it seemed like no one knew or cared. Yet what was done in darkness ultimately came to light. Romans 12 says that we are to trust God to judge, and he will. No one is ever going to get away with anything. Read the end of the book.
5. Let it Go – On July 20th, Joseph Pappas shot and killed prominent surgeon Dr. Mark Hausknecht as both pedaled bikes along a Houston street. 20 years ago, Hausknecht performed an operation on Pappas' mother, and she died on the operating table. Now Pappas is dead, killing himself as police closed in. Revenge doesn't work, and it won't help. We act like it takes such strength not to strike back, but in truth, it is a burden greater than we are designed to carry. Let it go.
6. Start small – Start today. Return love for insults. Have fun with it. People wonder what you are up to when you just keep smiling, right? 1 Peter 3:9 says “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”

Conclusion

1. On July 5, Pope Francis advanced the cause for canonization of Carlo Acutis, a gifted computer programmer and technophile who died at age fifteen. Carlo frequented the sacraments and loved the Eucharist, which he called his “highway to heaven.” At age eleven, he began a website that catalogued the Eucharistic miracles of the world, a project that would occupy him for two and a half years. He died of leukemia in 2006, but not before he had visited many of the miraculous sites with his parents. “To always be close to Jesus, that’s my life plan,” he once said. “I’m happy to die because I’ve lived my life without wasting even a minute of it doing things that wouldn’t have pleased God.”
2. Let’s not waste our life by insisting on our rights. Instead, let’s submit all we have to him, including ourselves, and change the world.

Invitation