

Stand up for your rights. Don't let people walk over you.... That sounds like good, empowering advice for living, doesn't it? Add to this, a good dose of self-image, self-worth, self-actualisation, self-determination.... And that's about the best advice the world can give you for living with yourself and living with others, and for keeping your chin up...

But you know what???? As Christians, we've got to forget all that. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have to unlearn **these** attitudes, because Jesus calls us to follow, a very **different** pattern.

This morning, we continue studying Jesus' 'sermon on the mount'. And today, it covers "revenge", it talks about "our rights", "our freedoms", "our possessions",... and basically, we have to give them up. As part of the over-all 'sermon on the mount', Jesus shows us (once again), that Kingdom living – living as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, has very different principles – very different values, to the Kingdom of this world.

The **best** advice that the world can give you, is **not** the Kingdom way. And to be quite frank, the way that Christ calls His disciples to live, makes absolutely no sense, if you're not a Christian. And we Christians should not expect people of the world, to live by these same Kingdom values – because they have no reason to.

As with the rest of the sermon on the mount, there's one

reason for living counter to our culture: – this life (in the world) is short, but in Christ, we enter eternity, and we begin living for eternity today.... And today, Jesus makes some pretty extreme statements, challenging us: Are you living for this life (which is short), or are you living for Christ and His eternity (which is very long)????

OK. Let's make a start. "Give up retaliation or revenge":

<sup>v38</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' That's a quote from a few different places in the Old Testament.

Exodus 21 addresses where injury is caused to an unborn baby. (By the way, anyone who thinks that abortion is OK, needs to read this – eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life – And that's when it's accidental. How much worse would it be for pre-meditated abortion?)

Ex 21:22 "If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. <sup>23</sup> But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, <sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Leviticus 24, talks about accidental injuries <sup>19</sup> If anyone injures his neighbour, whatever he has done must be done to him: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.

Deuteronomy 19 addresses perjury. <sup>16</sup> If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, <sup>17</sup> the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. <sup>18</sup> The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, <sup>19</sup> then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. <sup>20</sup> The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. <sup>21</sup> Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Injuries done to unborn babies, injuries done to one another, injuries intended by giving false evidence – Eye for eye / tooth for tooth / life for life.... You might think that sounds “barbaric” You might feel repulsed even... But you know

what? In its context, God's law is a beautiful thing. It did not **promote revenge** – it put **limits** on vengeance. And it took justice **out** of the hands of the individual, and put it **into** the hands of the community.

*You see, if somebody hit me with a cricket bat and I lost a couple of teeth, I wouldn't then automatically have the right to pick up a rock and smash in his face – that was for the courts to decide. And most people today who claim “eye for eye, tooth for tooth”, are trying to justify their own, self-imposed, immediate revenge.... But that was **never** the Old Testament way. It was for the court to determine, and for the court to oversee justice....*

And it put limits on revenge. You know the problem with payback and revenge? Inflation.. It just gets bigger and bigger and worse and worse, and more terrible. You've seen it with your kids – you've done it yourself.

- *Little Johnny calls little Bobby a name.*
- *Bobby pays back by calling Johnny a worse name.*
- *Johnny pays back by pushing.*
- *Bobby pays back by punching.*
- *Johnny pays back with a stick.*
- *Bobby finds himself a bigger stick.....*

And payback – revenge escalates and escalates.... What is needed, is somebody to step in, and bring justice. And that's what this law did.

It took judgment out of the hands of the individual, and put it into the hands of the community. And so vengeance was controlled, and it was equal – it could not escalate. And the **community** would make the decision that the wronged party – the injured party, for the sake of justice in their community, was to pay back to a **set** limit... That's how it worked. As God intended it, and in its unperverted state, it was a **great** law for a community to have...

So, that was the law – that was their rights... But for His disciples, Jesus set a **new** principle – don't only limit revenge – take **no** revenge. **Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also..**

I don't know if you've considered this, but, most people being right hander's, if you've been hit on the right cheek, you've actually copped a back-hander. And in Jewish culture, to be slapped with the back of the hand, was a huge insult – more than injury, it was insult. So Jesus isn't only talking about if you've been literally hit – it's that and more... He's talking about if you've been insulted, taken advantage of, maltreated in some way... And what He's saying is, “Don't stand up for your rights”.... “Don't look for payback”.

**v40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic,**

**let him have your cloak as well.**

By Old Testament law, you couldn't actually take someone's cloak. A tunic was like the lighter clothes that you wore all the time, and most people would have more than one tunic. But most people only had one cloak. And the cloak was what stopped you from freezing to death. At night, you'd cover yourself with it, and use it as a blanket... And the law said, you could not take someone's cloak – that was just mean and would leave them destitute and vulnerable....

But once again, Jesus was saying, "Don't stand up for your legal rights".

**v41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.**

Israel, was an occupied territory. The Romans had won the war, and now Israel was occupied by Rome. So, Roman soldiers were the enemy, and the citizens of occupied Israel, had to be subservient to them. At any time, a Roman soldier who was passing by, could lay the flat of his spear or his sword on your shoulder, and compel you to carry his baggage for up to 1000 paces (1.5km). After the 1000 paces, you were free, and he could compel somebody else to carry it for the next 1000.

Imagine how degrading that would feel... It didn't matter who you were. It didn't matter how important your current task was, to you or anybody else... The enemy could just

compel you, at any time, to drop what you're doing, and become his human pack-horse...

And Jesus is saying, "Don't begrudge being the slave... Don't begrudge being compelled to do the menial..." "Be a servant." "Be helpful to people (even people you don't like), and do it joyfully."

And then He goes on, to talk about generosity.

**42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.**

All of these things, we want to try and set limits to. But Jesus sets no limits.

- He sets no limits in giving: Give to the beggar, and don't refuse to loan stuff.
- He sets no limits in giving up our rights
- He sets no limits in giving up our freedoms
- He sets no limits in giving of ourselves in service
- He sets no limits in suffering injustice

I always put a fair bit of preparation into these messages you get on a Sunday morning. It takes about 2 full days, of reading, prayer, studying the Scriptures, and writing... And as I prepared the message for today, some of the stuff I read, was aimed at setting limits. But I'm not going to preach on that, because Jesus set no limits. You only need to set limits if you're preaching law. And the sermon on the mount is not a

lesson on 'law' – it's a lesson on the attitudes of the heart – it's a lesson on the Kingdom of Heaven, and Kingdom principles. It's a gauge as to whether my heart is tuned to the Kingdom of this world, or if it's tuned to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus leads His disciples to a radical shift in perspective. There is nothing more radical, than to shift one's perspective from the worldly to the heavenly. And Jesus modelled it for us.

Jesus never stood up for His rights.... He stood up for what **was** right, and He stood up for **others**, but when it came to Himself, He gave up His rights. He bore grief and shame; He put up with insults and pain; He was beaten and flogged; He was spat upon and cursed; He was lied about; He was set up, with false testimony; He was humiliated – stripped naked and nailed to a cross for the whole world to mock Him and point and jeer at His demise....

Did Jesus do that because He was weak? No. He could go through it, because He was strong. Did He suffer because His **faith** was weak? No. He endured suffering, because His faith was strong. Did He suffer because He didn't love Himself? No. He suffered because His **love**, was greater, than all the hatred the world could muster and throw at Him.

Jesus modelled (and taught) the way of the servant. In Mark



9, Jesus said **"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."** Even though Jesus knew that He was the King of Heaven, He became (and made Himself) the most lowly. One day, He took off His clothes, put a towel around His waist, and He washed filthy feet. Our master, didn't stand up for His rights – He became the servant....

"Turn the other cheek" is not law.

"Going the extra mile, for your enemy", is not law.

"Giving to the needy" and "loaning to those who ask", are not laws.

These things are examples of Kingdom living at their best. Jesus did these things out of love, strength, and confidence. Jesus loved people, and so He acted out of love. Jesus was strong – with Him was the power of God, and so He could choose to do these things – He wasn't forced... And Jesus had confidence – He knew He was the Son of God – He knew that His Kingdom was coming. He knew, that He would be vindicated by His Heavenly Father. He knew, that one day, every knee would bow, and every tongue confess, that He was Lord.

What's your motivation for Kingdom living?

Do you turn the other cheek because you have to? Do you suffer insults without retaliating because you have no choice? Do you give up your rights (legal and social) because you're

weak, or are caught in a situation you just can't get out of? Do you give to the needy out of a sense of obligation, and begrudge going the extra mile because you have to????

That's not what Jesus has in mind. We turn the other cheek, out of **love**. Out of love we don't retaliate. Out of love we give to those who are needy and we become servants... out of love.

We turn the other cheek out of **strength**. From a position of strength, we have the power to deny ourselves. Out of strength, we can offer forgiveness. Out of strength, we can just step away when we've been hurt, or wronged, or insulted.. and not retaliate...

And we turn the other cheek out of **confidence**. As a Christian, your face should be set toward eternity. And we have every confidence that Jesus Christ is returning... Kingdom living, makes no sense, unless you're living with an eternal perspective.

The sermon on the mount is **not** laws to live by – it's a gauge. It's a gauge for you to measure your perspective. It's a gauge for you to measure your love; your strength; your confidence in Christ (your faith).

And we **need** that gauge. For most of us, most of what we've done in life, prepares us for **worldly** living. Your education;

your politics; philosophy; knowledge. Even the principles our parents taught us – most of these, prepare us, for worldly living.... Sadly, much of what you learn in church, prepares you for worldly living.

The Holy Spirit prepares your heart for Kingdom living. The Holy Spirit, increasing you love, strength, and confidence in Christ – He's the one who **can** change your perspective – from the worldly, to the Spiritual.

And that's a battle I have to do every day. Even this very week, somebody did something to me, and I thought "That's not right". And the flesh jumped straight into action "It's the principle of the matter". "I can't let them get away with it". "I'll show 'em"....

But you know what? I didn't have to stand up for my rights, and I didn't. In the scheme of things, my rights aren't important. Jesus Christ is important.

Questions????