

Title: No R-E-S-P-E-C-T
Text: Matthew 5.38-42
Theme: Following Christ
Series: Matthew #25
Prop Stmtnt: Turning the other cheek and going the extra mile is impossible without Christ.

Growing up, I was always one of the smallest guys, if not the smallest guy in my class. This meant that I wore a sign that said to all the other guys, "If you want to look tough to all the girls, go ahead and hit me." Because they did. On the playground, on the bus, in the locker room, I was the target. Now, before you feel sorry for me, you ought to know that I had a mouth and while I did not ask for all of it, I certainly asked for some of it. But, some of it, was, as it is called today, "bullying." How is a kid who is supposed to be a Christian, supposed to handle this? My dad, citing this text about turning the other cheek said, "If he hits you once, you can defend yourself, but don't hit back. You have to turn the other cheek. But, if he tries to hit you a second time; if he hits your other cheek then knock his block off!" The problem is, I don't think that what my dad told me was exactly what Jesus had in mind.

Read Text:

How do you respond when you are disrespected? What goes on inside of you when you are treated as if you are slave-labor and you have no other reason for existence and no discernible value than to simply do the bidding of the ungrateful jerk who is barking out commands? If you have ever worked retail, in the fast-food industry, or in the restaurant industry, you know exactly what I am talking about. My daughter worked for several seasons at a clothing store in a local mall. My daughter-in-law worked for a long time at a fast food place. I heard plenty of stories of how people, dripping with condescension would order them like a slave with unreasonable demands. When you are working for a retail company, your response is governed by the rules of your employer. Most of the time, they will tell you "the customer is always right." Even when you are working at a store in the mall and the customer steals a pile of shirts, sets off the alarm and starts heading out of the mall, you are not permitted to confront them or accuse them, but simply say, "*Oh I am so sorry, one of our employees failed to remove the security tag from the clothing. Let me come and take care of that for you.*" Is that even true? No! But, the customer is always right. No, they aren't! This is not a customer; this is a thief. This is not shopping; this is stealing. Why can't you tackle the thief tell them to get their sorry carcass back inside that store before you jack-slap them into the next time zone? Because if you do, you will lose your job and they will sue you and the store and the mall, and your momma, and the city and the state of Michigan and will win. So, what do you do? As the employee you are taught to grin and bear it. Is this what Jesus is talking about here?

I. **What Jesus did NOT mean.**

A. **This is not pretend humility.**

Pretending to be humble is not humility. Pretend humility is actually pride covered by a coat of deceit that is obviously intended to deceive others, but in reality it deceives us into thinking that we are something that we aren't. Christ is not calling us to a life of pretend humility. Christ is calling out those who pretend to be humble and pretend to be spiritual, and pretend to be godly. Christ is exposing the worst form of deception that exists: (and that is) using God as a cover-up for evil.

I personally believe that the only place in hell that is hotter than the place for unrepentant child-molesters, is the place for unrepentant religious leaders who use the name of God and the gospel, or through the title of clergy, or the position of religious leader or by means of a pulpit manipulate people out of their money and prey upon their affections in order to amass power and wealth. I really think that Jesus is saying that in Matthew 23-25. Since Christ spends so much of his public discourses exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who pretend to be religious and pretend to be spiritual and pretend to care about God's Word and pretend to be zealous for the right things, it is obvious that Jesus is not calling his true followers to live a life of grin and bear it. Christ did not call us to live in make-believe relationships with him or anyone else. He refreshingly calls us to live in truth. But, herein lies the problem. How do we do this? How do we live like this?

B. This is not another set of rules.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a listing of new rules to follow. Jesus is not attempting to create an elitist club of extremely devout and disciplined do-gooders who by the strictest form of asceticism and self-control aspire to make it into this exclusive group. That is obvious from the group of men that Jesus called to be his disciples! Some of these guys are almost as embarrassing as us! So no, Jesus is not giving a listing of rules to keep, but he is giving us delights to embrace. Ok, that just sounded really confusing, I know, so let me explain what I mean by it.

Our nation has a constitution. This is the document that governs how our nation is to function. When a president is sworn into office, he promises to uphold and defend the constitution. (And you know full well, that I am exercising tremendous self-control to simply make that statement and not provide any extraneous commentary to it.) When a person applies for citizenship in this country, they too promise to abide by the terms of the constitution. Our church has a constitution. This is the document that outlines what we believe, based on the Bible, how we will function, based on the Bible, and how we will govern ourselves based on the Bible. When each of us applied to be a member, we agreed that this is what we would follow. The Sermon on the Mount is like the constitution for the Kingdom of Christ. Christ is establishing what it means to live as a member of his Kingdom. This sermon is designed to do three things: 1) It exposes the hypocrisy of what people thought was religion. Jesus is making it very clear that what you believe and practice concerning God is WRONG! Jesus is offensive! Jesus is a threat! This is why he is crucified. He is not simply a nice guy. He is a threat to false believers who refuse to examine their beliefs. I fear that some of you are in that category. 2) It reveals that you cannot measure up to this. This sermon reveals our need. We cannot

achieve this by our own effort. If you are reading this and you are saying, “I cannot do this.” Then you are probably reading this correctly. Jesus demands something from you that you cannot give. Jesus establishes a standard that you cannot attain. Now, right here in Matthew 5, Jesus does not resolve that tension. He does later on. Later on he provides the solution, but for now he lets the weight of this dilemma begin to sink into the very souls of his disciples. When you hear what Jesus said and take it seriously, you begin to realize that this is truly impossible. Who, in their right mind gets whacked across the face and says, “Hey, that’s not fair, you only hit me on one side.” Jesus is making it clear that is impossible to follow Jesus unless we have been changed by Jesus. We do not attempt to live by these rules in order to become a follower of Christ. We hear the words of Christ and we confess that we cannot make it on our own! We cannot do this! This sermon is designed to reveal not only our need, but to point us to Christ. 3) The third thing this sermon is designed to do is it establishes delights for us to embrace. No, we cannot do this on our own. But, when we acknowledge our need of Christ and trust in Him alone as our Savior, he not only forgives us, he changes us. He changes us on the inside. We become a new creation. We become someone that we were not a moment before. And now, because he has given us life from above through the Holy Spirit who lives in us, these words are not duties to do, but delights to embrace.

What goes on inside of you when you hear these words of Christ? If you say, “I could never do that”, with a sense of longing that you wish you could, then you need to embrace Christ as your Savior and run to him to change you. If, however, you say, “this is ridiculous! Anyone who lives like this will be run over in this world and thought of as a fool, and I am no one’s fool.” You are probably not a follower of Christ. But, if you hear these words of Christ, and there is an awakening, an affinity, an agreement of sorts, a calling, a drawing, an enticement, like a magnetic force that beckons you, that resonates with your very soul and in the core of your being you say to God and to yourself, “That’s how I want to live.” Then you understand and experience what Jesus intended for you.

What Jesus was establishing is so counter-intuitive and counter-cultural, because it reflects a way of thinking and living that does not come from us. And yet, it describes life, which his followers long to live. That is why these 11 verses that we are looking at this Sunday and next are generally seen as the most admired as well as the most resented things that Jesus ever said. Adding to the confusion is that many people simply quote these words as absolutisms that they were not designed to be. For example...

C. This is not intended for public governance.

While Christ is describing what life is to look like for his followers, this is not designed to be the law of the land. Imagine that you are a police officer and you are tracking down a murderer. And when you finally apprehend him, he fights back and happens to hit you in the cheek. Do you stop the arrest process and offer the criminal the other side of your face? No. Are you obligated to give money to someone who is abusing prescription drugs and is in desperate pursuit of some Vicodin and he comes to you asking you for some money so he can go and buy some off the street? No. So, let’s look at what Jesus did

mean. Notice the phrase, “*If anyone slaps you on the right cheek.*” Jesus is describing a personal conflict and a private retaliation, not public policy.

II. What Jesus did mean?

Here is what Jesus is saying: Do not settle for justice when you have an opportunity show grace. Don't waste the opportunity that being disrespected gives you to put Christ on display. Let me support that for you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” Christ is quoting from Exodus 21 and Deut. 19. God had established the law of retaliation under the Old Covenant. Known in forensic circles as Lex talionis (the law of retaliation), this law was a merciful gift from God to protect the punishment from exceeding the nature of the crime. We have seen examples of the need for this throughout human history. In fighting between Mafia families is a classic illustration. “If you kill one of mine, I will take out five of yours.” This only ensures that retaliation never ends. This is the natural response of human nature. So, God establishes this law for his people. And it is clear from Exodus 21 that this was given as a sentencing guideline for judges. This helped ensure that the punishment fit the crime. Therefore, this law (“eye for eye”) defined justice and it restrained revenge. What a grace of God to give this!

The problem was, the Pharisees had taken this directive to judges and removed it from the realm of the courts and turned it into a directive for personal relationships. When Jesus says (v.39), “*But I say to you*” he is directing his words as he is throughout this discourse, to his disciples (5.1-2). In other words, he is telling them, here is how I want you to live in this world. When someone hits you on the cheek... (Whoa, stop there for a moment.) Jesus is describing a personal rebuke or insult. Again, this is not designed to be a guideline for the courts and the government. The eye for eye and tooth for tooth was for the courts, but how you are going to live as a person with other people. How are you going to relate to people in your family, or at work, or in life when you are insulted? How are you going to respond when you are disrespected by the very people that you are seeking to serve? How you respond when you are disrespected reveals what you really believe about yourself. And what we believe about ourselves is usually way too high.

So, let's look at the four scenarios that Christ presents through two lenses. How would you respond to this, if you live believing the lie that you deserve respect? Now, I realize that some of you just woke up when I said that, and are wondering if I really said what you think you heard. Yes. I said that if you think that you deserve respect, you believe a lie. I do not deserve respect. Respect is not justice. I deserve hell. I am a sinner who has rebelled against an infinitely holy and absolutely righteous God. I have offended Him and by the true sense of justice, I deserve to be judged for eternity for my sins. But, God has not judged me. Instead, he judged Jesus in my place. My sins were taken by Christ and he died for them on the cross. I am humbled by this. This drives us to be poor in spirit, to mourn, when we consider the seriousness of our sin and the cost of the cross. We are made meek because we have no righteousness to boast about and no ability to save ourselves. All of this and more Jesus establishes at the beginning of this sermon. Now, he

is applying what it means to live in humility. But, that is not what most people think because most people have not yet been captured and arrested and set free by the grace of God in the gospel of Christ. Most people instead take themselves too seriously. Instead of believing that they are sinners who deserve judgment, they believe that they are gods and goddesses who deserve worship and respect. This is a fundamental belief of every human. We are born believing this. So, what happens when we do not get the respect that we think we deserve?

Jesus describes someone hitting you on the cheek. He is talking about a backhanded slap across the face that is designed to humiliate the person who is hit. If I believe that I deserve respect and this is done to me, I am enraged. And if I am in a situation where I cannot do anything about it, I boil with bitterness and make promises for revenge and plans for retaliation as soon as I can.

Next Jesus describes a legal dispute. Again, this is personal. And since the wealthy people usually controlled the legal process it is likely that the disciples understood Jesus to be describing a situation where you are being unfairly charged and penalized by a court that is rigged or a judge who is bribed. What do you do? Why fight for justice when you have an opportunity to amaze them with grace?

Then Jesus describes the situation in his day when a Roman soldier could order any Jew to walk with him for a mile and carry a load. Wow! Talk about a major inconvenience. Again, how would you respond if you believe that you are an important person deserving of respect, only to be ordered by an enemy soldier to carry his stuff for a mile? This is an enemy!

Finally, Jesus describes the bother of people begging from you and trying to borrow things from you. Important people don't have time for needy people. They only get in their way.

But when you love God so much, and you love others so much, that even when they disrespect you, or seek to take advantage of you, then your love for them is so powerful that it overwhelms the desire for revenge.

If I believe the truth about my true need for Christ, then when I am disrespected, the drive for personal revenge is taken away. Slapped on the face? Ridiculed on social media? Why settle for pursuing justice and retaliation when you have an opportunity to show grace? Sure, you can hit back and do the expected. But, Christ enables us to not do the expected. He enables us to do the unexpected.

Involved in a legal dispute? Perhaps a family member is accusing you of being unfair in settling your parent's estate? Why fight? "Do not resist the one who is evil?" Showing mercy is more valuable than fighting for justice. Why settle for pursuing justice when you have an opportunity to show grace? There is a time to fight for justice, but not when you personally have an opportunity to show grace.

Inconvenienced? Made plans for Saturday and your boss made you work overtime and threatened to fire you if you didn't? When you care about your boss seeing and savoring Christ, then you will realize the opportunity that he has just given you to put Christ on display right in front of him. You have the opportunity to not only work, but to "go the extra mile" and look for something above and beyond to help him see Christ. Why do what you have to do, when you can show grace and do what you don't have to do?

As you can tell, Christ is simply taking the heartbeat of following him and applying it to these real-life situations. The first three illustrate how to respond when something is done to you. The last two show how you should respond when you are the one who is in charge. In other words, how does a follower of Christ, who has been overwhelmed with grace not only treat those who disrespect him, but how does he treat people that the world normally disrespects? How generous was God to give us the riches of grace through Christ? So, can we be a people who are prepared to give to those who ask of us? Instead of living with a closed heart, we get to live with an open heart and an open hand to those who are truly in need. (Here are five words that will bless your world – "How-can-I-help-you?") This does not mean that we give blindly to a person who will hurt himself and others with it. But, Jesus is speaking of a desire to be a tangible source of blessing to those who need it.

Mez McConnel grew up in the project housing complexes of Edinburgh, Scotland. These housing projects are called Schemes. He spent more time in prison than he did in school. He was hard, calloused, cold, unloving, and seemingly unreachable. He knew how the world functioned and he knew how to take care of himself.

One day, a group of guys came out to the project (scheme) where Mez was hanging out and attempted to strike up some conversation, and play some soccer. Immediately Mez resented them. He distrusted everyone, and so, he would teach these guys a lesson. You don't just come into the projects and act like you are doing some charity thing. We don't need your charity and we don't want your charity. So, Mez and a couple of buddies busted up their cars. They smashed the windows, kicked in the doors, scratched the paint and showed them that they were not interested in their pity.

The next week, the same guys showed up again and the next week and the next week and the next week. Mez could not run them off. Why would someone turn the other cheek or offer another vehicle to be vandalized? Because 2000 years ago, when the sinless Son of God experienced the ultimate disrespect, he not only offered the other cheek, his head, his face to be spat on, his beard to be pulled out, his back to be beaten, his hands and feet to be nailed. He offered his side to be split because he laid down his entire body. He gave more than a cloak and tunic; he gave his whole being and everything that he owned. He didn't just go a mile or the extra mile. He went all the way from heaven to a stable on earth, to a cross on a hill and in between to a desert and dozens of no-name places to be handled by thousands of needy and dirty people who, for the most part, only wanted to use him in order to get by for another day. He gave to those who begged and to those who borrowed and could not repay. In fact, he gave so much, that there was nothing left for

anyone to pay. He gave because we had nothing to give. He gave because his life for ours was the only way we could be forgiven and declared righteous.

When you trust him, you follow him. You do not follow perfectly, but you follow. This is how we walk. This is how we, by grace, through faith, walk. And a group of guys, by grace, through faith, walked like this into Mez's life and he couldn't get rid of them. Mez couldn't run from love like that because there was no rule that he lived by that could explain it. It was a long time later before Mez was caught by the gospel, but he was caught. I tell you this story because Mez is a friend of mine. He now pastors a church in a scheme in Edinburgh called Niddrie Community Church, where he lives with his wife and daughters. He and some other guys have launched a church-planting movement in order to take the gospel to Scotland's poorest. After all, Jesus came to us.