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February 20, 2011

Love Your Enemies?
Matthew 5:38-48

Some people say it helps to take a walk back in time and step into the shoes of the people of Jesus day....to answer some important questions about these verses.....like what was he talking about? What did they hear? What did it mean back then?

Turn the other cheek, offer your cloak as well, go another mile, give to beggars and lend to all

Jesus said so himself, these were not requirements of the Torah. Jesus was taking everything another step...in ***another direction***.

Jesus was offering a new way of living, Turning life ***upside down!***

It's what he does best, the last shall be first, and the first last, in his sermon on the mount, blessed are the poor in spirit, not the strong and mighty...

You have heard it said...but I SAY to you.....

If someone hits you on the right cheek, turn the other one also. You may have heard this all before---the cultural context of these* examples...but if not....In ancient near eastern culture, The left hand was used only for unclean things. Didn't even use it to gesture in public.

The ***right hand*** would hit someone on the ***left*** cheek.... so if someone 'hit' you on the right cheek, it was probably a backhanded slap with the right hand, not a blow, and if you turn your head it's hard to backhand you again with your right hand.

If you turn, it stops the abuser in his tracks.

It's a ***surprise***, something unexpected, different, it stops a cycle of violence really.

A totally different kind of response than eye for an eye.

Can you imagine if someone did slap you, and you hugged them back?

Can you imagine if someone cut you down with vicious words, in front of your friends, and you tell a joke to lighten the mood?

Our gut instinct is to hit back, instead Jesus says do something surprising, and stop the cycle of violence.
Use **non-violence**. Use it creatively.

Jesus says '**do not resist evil**'.

We sometimes read that to mean be a doormat. Let evil win.
Wrong. This is NOT what it says, NOT at all!
and that would certainly not square with Jesus' life and ministry!
Jesus did not advocate abuse!

No **do not retaliate** is what it really says.
That word resist means standing against with force.
So do not retaliate. Try something different.
Don't return evil for evil. Don't become the very thing that you dislike.
Go in a completely new direction. Turn your cheek.

Same with giving up your **cloak** as well.
Why would someone ask for your coat back then?
When people got a loan they would put up collateral,
much like we do today. But the poorest would only be able to offer
their coat as collateral. Now Jesus says if a man takes your coat, give
him your **cloak as** well..... surprise!

Big surprise because your coat was the word for the robe worn next to
your skin—your clothes basically, and your cloak was outside that, so....
so if you've given up your coat and then your cloak...
you might just be well, a bit underdressed for the occasion, and l
eaving everyone in a uncomfortable situation....with you naked and all.
Talk about going in a different direction, and stopping a cycle of abuse.
That just may well do it.

*Can you imagine a truly angry checkout person demanding to double
price check all the clothes you are trying to buy,
so you cheerfully offer to take over checking out the next person in line
while she leaves to go check those prices? Surprise!*

Same with the going **a second mile**.

Why would someone ask you to go a mile back then?
Well, The Roman soldiers were allowed to grab a local to carry
their 60-70lb packs for one mile. One mile only.
If asked to carry it a mile, Jesus says go a second mile....surprise!

The Roman soldier wanting to inflict a little pain suddenly doesn't know what to do because you are graciously carrying a pack a little further, and he doesn't have the authority to have you do so! Surprise. Go in a new direction. Stop the cycle of pain and abuse.

Can you imagine your boss demanding overtime, and you offer to throw in a few more hours?

Giving to ***beggars and lending*** to all who ask. Surprise! No strings attached, and people have no idea what to think about you!

*Can you imagine making a loan to a friend into a gift?
What about striking up a real conversation and sharing a meal with one of those looking for work sign holders on the side of the road?*

What's the ***common theme*** here in all this surprising activity, In all these suggestions from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount?

It's all about loving those who aren't easy to love, In those difficult situations. It's about ***loving enemies***, and somehow--being ***perfect*** like God.

No small order!

But the truth is, if we take revenge, retaliation, retribution out of the equation when it comes to our enemies, ... well, that leaves us with no other choice than to do something totally surprising and different than what we naturally want to do. Why not act out of love?

Why love our enemies?

Because we are ***children of God***—who loves the good and the bad, Those who are loving and those who are not.

Jesus says be 'teleios' like God...perfect.

You know what that means?

It means complete, whole, consistent.

So we are asked to love our enemies—all the time.

Talk about a real surprise.

Imagine our world if all ***Christians*** could love our enemies,

If we could just love those we don't get along with right in our own churches---just imagine how that would change the world!

Truth is our ***enemies are also children of God***, People just like you and I.

Sometimes they are people who are hurting, or insecure, and that's why they lash out, or wield their power over others. They are to be pitied and loved, not hated.

Truth is those with whom we **disagree** most vehemently Are not our enemies, they are people who might just make us stronger, More able to understand the diversity and complexity of the human family.

We need **not demonize** those of differing opinions and backgrounds, for they are God's children who help us to know our own opinions and backgrounds!

It is one thing to disagree, to **stand firm** in your convictions— this is the right thing to do.

But we can be in disagreement, we can be different, **out of love**. We can love one another, because we are all children of God, and God loves us all.

I'm not saying it's easy. I'm saying it's **possible**.

I had just a glimpse of this at a recent **Ministerial Alliance** meeting here at our church just over a month ago. Almost seven years ago Chris Tiger and I from the Methodist church started the Alliance with 5 churches. Now it's 18. Last month we had a beautiful meeting where we adopted a mission statement about how we love God, and we love the people of Owasso, and commit to reach out to them in prayer, service, assistance and justice. We have churches of all stripes coming together, and each month we go around the table giving announcements of what's happening at our churches and inviting one another.

At that meeting the Holy Spirit was present, and love was in the room and expressed among the participants. And the activity announcements and invitations ranged from *a suicide prevention seminar, to human trafficking summit, to a gay rights march, to a pro-life pregnancy outreach, to weekly prayer for the end times*. We encouraged **every** pastor in their ministry.

The point is not about turning your cheek, or going a second mile, or giving up your jacket... it's just about loving those with whom you disagree, those who make your life difficult.

We are called to love our enemies, because we are loved,
We are beloved children of God, always loved,
So we should always love.

And we're not in this alone—it's not just us doing the loving.
Jesus empowered his people with his message, his life,
his death and resurrection.

Philippians 4:13 is our reminder---we can do all things through Christ
Jesus who strengthens me.

It's not just up to us, it's up to ***God in us***.
But we must be willing, we must surrender,
we must take that step of faith to love when our mind says don't....

May we listen to the Spirit
who will always show us the way of love,
even when we see no way to love, Amen.

cultural references to Jesus examples from Barbara E. Reid, O.P., "Parables,"
Christian Reflection, The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2006.