

Love Your Enemies: Matthew 5:1-16, 38 - 48

CVC Sermon 10.26.25

Intro:

G' morning . . . Gayll P-H,

This is a word-finding competition. No phones allowed!

- In one minute, write down as many words/phrases for ANGER as you can.

LOTS of words for anger. Lots of levels of anger, from miffed to outraged.

Anger just is. It's just an emotion, A physiological reaction in the body to a challenge.

A response to:

- Physical pain or loss
- Emotional pain or loss
- Intellectual pain (someone's idea/position is terribly off or untrue),
- Visual or auditory pain (you see or hear something that just grates on your senses)
- Physiological reaction that tells you SOMETHING IS WRONG, something is OFF

Useful, because if we're going to stay alive we have to know where the hazards are, right?

In this sermon series we're asking the question:

- What do we do with this physiological reaction, this very human emotion that we ALL experience and that we can't necessarily control?
- Is it something to be completely avoided? Is anger ever helpful?
- Is it possible to live a life without holding on to anger? If so, how?
- **Today What about "righteous anger" at injustice? Shouldn't we be angry at injustice?**

This morning, let's hear what Jesus has to say specifically about anger/injustice . . .

The Vision: The Beloved Community - Salt & Light, a City on a Hill

Turn to Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus most famous and most radical teaching

- Begins to outline His vision/God's vision for a New Humanity, a new way of being in the world - **He calls it the Kingdom of God**
- Sermon: Jesus saying "*This is what's REALLY true, this is where we are going, guys. This is what the Kingdom (the rule/reign) of God is going to look like.*"
- **Communal vision.** Applies to individuals but it is not individualistic, it's about how we are going to live/work/be together as a family/a closely connected community of God's people.
- So hear it as Jesus speaking to you, yes but even more importantly Jesus speaking to us, to this community.

Matt 5:13-16

"You all are the salt of the earth . . . You all are the Light of the World . . . You all are a City set on a hill . . .

Let your light shine before others SO THAT they may see your good deeds (beautiful actions) and glorify your Father in heaven."

Heard this before,

- SALT = a preservative, absolutely essential in world w/o refrigeration
- LIGHT = in a world without electricity (Dark is dark!) Danger in darkness. Can't see, stumble around, wild animals, thieves come in the dark. We need light!

YOU GUYS (us guys) are ESSENTIAL. You make a difference in the world, you are sent to preserve that which is good, to help people find their way in darkness.

This new Kingdom (God's Rule and Reign) that I've been talking about is going to come THRU YOU – through US (2000 years later)

That's what you/we signing up for when we follow Jesus

We haven't just signed up to get our sins forgiven and somehow slide into the home plate of eternity on our own, just for own benefit

No, If we've signed up to follow Jesus, we're called into this new identity – to be Kingdom bringers:

Visible, out-there, salt and light in such a way that people can easily see the nature of the God we are representing because it's reflected in us

And how we act/what we do reflects on our Father – people see Him, through us.

This is a HUGE. An amazing honor. An enormous undertaking. A really serious assignment. How do we do it?

Well, through the rest of the sermon Jesus unpacks what this looks like.

He gives 6 Case Studies on what this Salt and Light/Kingdom Identity is going to look like.

- *"You have heard that it was said . . ."* quote from scripture that EVERYBODY knew and they knew *where* it came from.
- But then, in each case study Jesus follows up with, *"But I say . . ."*
- Deepening the call beyond outward actions to the heart level
 - *"You heard X, but I say it's X(Y)"*
- With the repetition there's this kind of crescendo effect, the impact, the seriousness of what he's saying is getting stronger and stronger. Super powerful sermon.

Today we're going to look at the last two case studies because they speak to this issue of how we are to handle anger at injustice.

Jesus Style Justice

Starting in v. 38 Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for eye and tooth for tooth.'"

Holy Cow! Who said that??? To us this sounds vicious, right? How can you say such a thing???

But to Jesus' listeners, they are like "Yeah, that's Exodus 21, Deut 19, so we're talking about the Mosaic Law and communal justice – what to do when someone commits a crime. Got it."

(It's like He's referencing their constitution. For them, this connection was lightening fast, for us – takes a little time)

And eye for an eye is about crime and punishment.

In the ancient world, and throughout a LOT of the world today when a crime was committed it's not resolved in a court but resolved through tribal vengeance,

So:

- You poked my brother's eye out? I chop off your head.
- You did what???! You chopped off my cousin's head?
- My family burns down your family's house and barns . . . Oh yeah????
- ESCALATING, never ending feud

So, an "eye for an eye" is actually putting a LIMIT on punishment. "If someone knocks your tooth out, you ONLY get his/her tooth back"

Basic principle, the penalty should fit/match the crime, so we don't get into escalating feuds

Fair enough. You hurt me, I should get fairly compensated for that hurt.

Even outside the judicial system isn't it tempting to return fire for fire?

- Have you ever had someone accidentally hit or hurt you and you reflexively lashed out at them?
- You gossip about me — oooo, I wanna gossip about you
- Your husband says something snarky at breakfast, you snark on back

But just limiting retribution isn't good enough for Jesus, He says,

"But I say to you, do not resist an evil person."

- *If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.*
- *If someone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.*
- *If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.*

- *Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

This is Jesus-Style Justice

Even if you're familiar with this passage, I hope you're still shocked, because He is not exaggerating just to make a point. He is dead serious.

This is straight-up coaching about what it practically looks like to be SALT and LIGHT in the world, even in the face of INJUSTICE

Jesus says: "Don't just limit retribution. No, change the dynamic altogether."

Do not resist an evil person.

What can He possibly mean?

In the Greek word for "resist" is "*anti-histemi*", a compound word that can mean to stand against, something or someone, but can also mean "to stand opposite", like the crime matching or opposing the punishment, (demonstrate with hands) so as you listen to what He's saying in context it's a kind of play on words, riffing with the idea of eye opposing eye, tooth opposing tooth

And so, the meaning is really something more like: "*Do not **resist (stand against or oppose)** an evil person in the same manner that they are messing with you. Your resistance, your response to evil, oppression or basic wrong-doing has to look different. It's gonna be far more profound than just matching the punishment to the crime.*"

We know this from the context (More on this, check out the Bible Project podcast on the SoM)

Look at the three of the examples Jesus gives . . . being struck, being sued, being coerced . . .

Being Struck:

In the ancient Middle East, being slapped was not considered a crime (like punching someone out), though it was offensive.

But, it's an honor/shame culture so maintaining one's honor/avoiding shame is a matter of the utmost importance. To be publicly shamed is the absolute worst thing you can do to someone. Really. That's how feuds got started and were kept going over generations. Part of what keeps the whole Israel/Gaza thing going even today.

So now, put your hand on your right cheek. Now, in order for me to slap you on the right cheek (assuming I'm righthand dominant), how do I hit you? (I have to back-hand you).

In this culture, to backhand slap someone was to utterly degrade them and their standing in society, it's not just the violence, it's an act of shaming dominance. It's a way of saying, "You're worthless."

The obvious response to an affront like this is either full-on nuclear war or the victim cringing away in shame.

Notice: Jesus doesn't say, "Just take the abuse and smile" as if you're taking a job as a human speed-bump

No, Jesus says, "*Offer your left cheek. Stand your ground. Stand in your God-given worth and say – by offering your left cheek – hit me again, but this time with your open palm*", which (in their culture) connotes that we are of equal status.

(Though why people be hitting each other, I don't know. 😞)

This is not "just taking it". It's like a close up conflict in a movie – where the hero doesn't flinch and doesn't back down. Even without words it says, "*You cannot degrade me. You cannot shame me. I belong to God.*"

And, it forces the perpetrator to think about what they are doing. Are you going to try to demean and shame someone who knows their own worth? Think again . . .

Being Sued

Same thing with the shirt/coat example. You have to think like a communal person. There is almost no privacy. It's as bad as Cambria, everyone sees everything, and the gossip chain is swift.

Most people only had 1 shirt/coat. So, if I try to take advantage of you by demanding your shirt (as security for a loan) and then you give me your coat as well, what happens?

You are standing there, naked, in front of everybody. This is so unbelievably disgraceful that now *I as the perpetrator* am shamed because I'm shown to be a ruthless, greedy jerk in front of the whole community. Everybody can see that you're standing there naked and I've got both your shirt and coat.

I tried to walk all over you, but by not opposing me, you allow me to bring shame on myself.

Being Coerced

And of course, the example of going the extra miles is a reference to Roman occupation/oppression where Roman soldiers could order any Jewish person to carry the soldier's (heavy) gear for a mile, and so, through intimidation/coercion degrade the Jewish person to the level of a donkey.

Gross. This was the kind of humiliating oppression that made the Jewish Zealots go nuts – repeated violence uprisings cuz y’know nobody likes to be treated that way.

But Jesus says to these folks who are being ground under the thumb of the Roman occupiers, *“Don’t react. Don’t get violent. You go one mile because you have to. You have no choice under this unjust system. But when you come to the end of the mile go the second mile, willingly, kindly, generously —as a friend and equal might. Show that you are salt and light by demonstrating that you cannot be humiliated, you can not be degraded.”*

This is like the martial art of Aikido where, instead of resisting your opponent you take their negative, offensive energy, GO WITH IT in such a way that their aggression is neutralized.

Each of these are examples of creative, non-violent resistance. They stop the cycle of offense and injustice by introducing an entirely new dynamic:

- I will not react. I will not escalate. I will not take the bait.
- I will treat you better than you are treating me, no matter what you do
- I will do this without anger
- I will do it out of love and sense of my God-given identity as a Kingdom-bringer

Me: quick temper examples . . . I have a really quick and overwhelming cortisol response. It’s not pretty.

So, now we’re back to anger, right? To that churning feeling inside, that physiological Fight or Flight response that hijacks your whole being

It might help you with a tiger, but it’s not going to help you live like Jesus.

But, how, in the face of provocation do we find the self-control, patience, absolute trust in God to be able to respond with creative non-violence?

Well, first, yah gotta want it. I mean, like, REALLY want it.

Dallas Willard says that transformation only happens when we have V.I.M. (SLIDE 6)

- A VISION of who we could be, who we are called to be (SALT, LIGHT, CITY on a HILL)
- INTENTION: I actually WANT to grow, I WANT to be transformed . . .
I WANT to be the kind of person who can take the higher road and stay on it, no matter what
- MEANS: Concrete steps that will get us there, that will reshape our reflexive behavior/attitudes

When I look at how Jesus lived his life, stood up and spoke truth in the face of so much opposition, so much violence, so much evil, even to the point of torture and death *without retaliating*, I am stunned and deeply sobered.

When I hear about Christians living under persecution in China, North Korea, Iran, Eritrea continuing to talk about Jesus in prison, expressing love even to guards who sadistically torture them, I'm blown away

I *deeply* admire them – but I feel scared. I mostly hope I won't have to follow their example.

There's a good portion of me that doesn't WANT to be the kind of person who can turn the other cheek. That's a problem.

Maybe if we knew how much this matters, if we knew what depends on our non-reactivity, we would want it more.

Did you know that during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, those who were marching, participating in sit-ins and boycotts TRAINED to be able to do that without reacting?

They were in a very serious situation of continuing oppression and it needed to stop.

The goal was to **win over hearts and reveal injustice**, not to humiliate opponents,

So no one was allowed to participate who had not gone through intensive training where they learned the principles of creative non-violence and *practiced* non-reactivity.

- **Role-playing exercises:** Where they were yelled at, spat on, hit — practiced **remaining calm**, protecting themselves without striking back, and staying calm under extreme stress.
- **Training in body language:**
- They were taught to sit upright, speak respectfully, and avoid angry gestures. These were some of the commitments they made.
 - Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
 - Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.
 - Pray daily to be used by God in order that all people might be free
 - Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
 - Refrain from violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
- Everyone was expected to memorize these. Every volunteer had to agree to them before participating in direct action. The goal was to ensure *discipline, unity, and moral clarity* even under attack.

Why? Because they KNEW how important their behavior was.

They knew they were going up against centuries of entrenched dehumanizing racism and systems of injustice that wanted to rile them up, wanted to start a fight. They knew this was a dark, fruitless path that would only make things worse.

Do we know how important our behavior is? Are we remembering our call? Our identity?

You can not do something under pressure that you do not practice on a daily basis. It has to become second-nature, reflexive.

So maybe the small irritants, the everyday offenses that we wish would go away are opportunities for us to practice turning the other cheek, going the extra mile

But, then Jesus doesn't just leave it at "Don't resist evil with evil"

Active Love

In the final case study he goes on: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. The first part of this, Leviticus 19:18, straight out of scripture.

But, this second part about "hate your enemies" is actually NOT commanded in scripture, *"Sure, yah gotta love your neighbor, but it's hey, it's OK to hate your enemy."*

Jesus says, "NOPE"

But I tell you . . . love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous . . .

Be perfect (whole/complete), therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect (whole/complete)
Matthew 5:44 - 49

In Luke 6, even more amplified "do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you"

OK, so non-violent resistance is not enough – that can still be done out of pride or self-righteous anger — it has to be done out of LOVE that seeks the good of the other

Why? Because this demonstrates the character of our Father. So, we're back to Salt and Light, we're back to reflecting the family likeness of a benevolent, generous, forgiving God who not only puts up with us, but pursues us . . .

A God who is perfect (sense of wholeness, completeness) [There's the Vision again]

The mark of a Christian is the capacity to act in love toward one's enemies, because this is how God has loved us – we, who were His enemies.

So, according to Jesus we do not need anger to respond to injustice.

Anger is a normal human emotion and it can be a wake-up call to a need for change, but it is a toxic fuel to run on. It does not enhance good judgement or lead toward constructive action.

Love is the fuel for action that defeats injustice. Love for the victim and love for even the victimizer. Supernatural love.

Listen to what Martin Luther King had to say about this:

“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that. . . .

Love has within it a redemptive power. There is a power there that eventually transforms individuals . . . if you love your enemies, you will discover that at the very root of love is the power of redemption . . .

That’s what we’re called to participate in.

Application: Means

So, how are we going to live this out? It’s SO challenging!

- 1) Admit that you can’t do it on your own
- 2) Ask for help. “God, please help me. Your word is clear, but I’ll never be able to respond like this, without You. I am so easily offended, so quickly reactive. Please help me grow in this area.”
- 3) Then you . . . PRACTICE

We don’t just magically become non-reactive, if we’re not cultivating a life of non-reactivity.

We practice:

- Self-calming and self-control
- Patience
- Trusting God in the small things
- Letting Go and Letting God

In the past few years, Mark and I have been learning a lot about the mind-body-soul connection and what practices/disciplines foster resilience and courageous, non-reactive action

One of the biggest insights is that every day we are all cultivating a kind of hormonal soup, full of cortisol, insulin, adrenalin, oxytocin, dopamine – all kinds of chemicals that drive our behavior and our mood.

And our ability to respond well under pressure is going to come from all the things we've put in that soup during the day or even in the days before. It's basically junk in/junk out

Put in: Caffeine, alcohol, short sleep, TV news, doom-scrolling or envy-scrolling, violent movies or gaming, porn, junk food, no exercise, worry, complaining, rumination, social isolation . . .

You are going to get: Reactivity, outbursts of anger, anxiety, impatience, depression and inability to focus, to work or to form and stay in positive relationships

You put in: Prayer (alone or with friends), deep breathing, gratitude, long walks in nature, acts of service, good sleep, healthy food, daily, vigorous exercise, soaking in Scripture, reading books that are encouraging, time with children or animals

And you are going to get: Centeredness, calm, joy, perspective, greater self-control, greater patience and generosity of spirit and an enhanced ability to cope creatively.

This is not rocket science. It's just the Law of the Farm. You reap what you sow.

So, what's in your hormonal soup? Are you unconsciously jacking yourself up with poor habits? Or are you consciously calming yourself down so that you CAN be Salt and Light in the world?

Jordan Peterson has a great little question with reference to this kind of thing:

"What is the one thing that you could do, that you would do, that would make your life better (less reactive, more self-controlled, more loving)— go and do it."

So, what is it? What ONE THING could you do this week that would make you less reactive, more able to respond with love to those who bother or oppose you?

Take a few minutes to write that down . . .one thing to stop, one thing to start

Most of us don't have the kind of enemies Jesus or Dr. King had. But we have family members, we have neighbors, former friends, co-workers, classmates that we do not like or that don't like us:

- Jesus has told us to pray for, bless, do good to THOSE people – those difficult, reprehensible, frustrating people. Write the name or initial of the person who comes to mind.
 - When, during your day, will you pray for this person? Write it down. Do it daily.
 - What concrete action(s) can you take this week to do good to this person?
 - What are some ideas?
 - Write it down. Write down when you will do it.

Guys:

We are the Salt of the Earth. We are the Light of the World. We are a City Set on a Hill. We are the Children of a Loving Father.

Let's live it out.