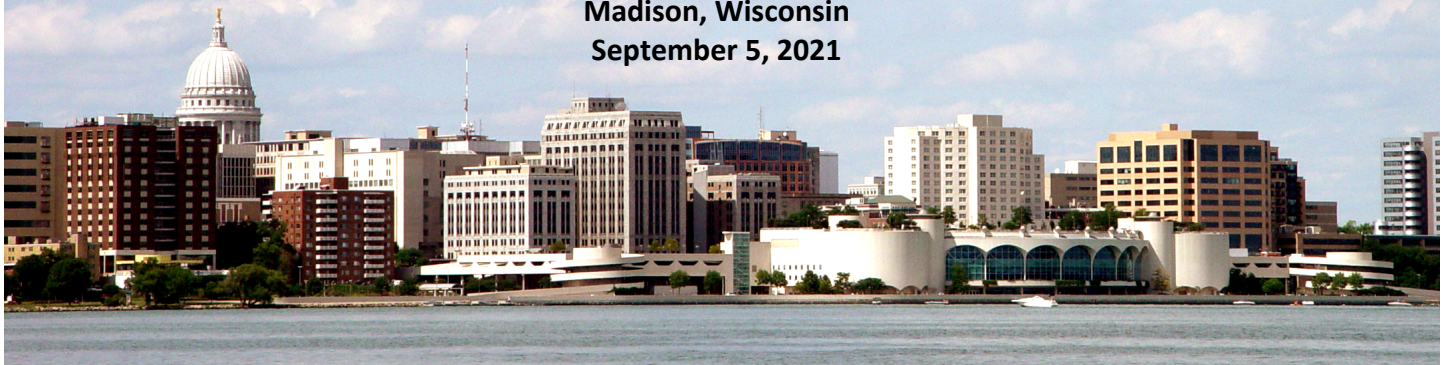


# Jesus on the Law

## PART 7: AN EYE FOR AN EYE • MATTHEW 5:38-42

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Four Lakes Church of Christ  
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It is good to be together this morning! I hope all of us have the elements for the Lord's Supper, either from home or from the table in the entryway, as John/I will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after our study this morning, and then Michael/John will be leading us in our songs before we dismiss [for class].

Just a quick note: Right after I printed the bulletin yesterday afternoon, we got a notice from the South Beloit congregation that they are cancelling this Saturday's ladies' day. Also, Jerry Turley called this morning, letting us know that Karen is not feeling well today. And then, Ruth Hann's son, Ricky, has had a run-in with a forklift this week – forklift vs. ankle, and the ankle did not do well with that.

As we begin today, we are very briefly summarizing God's plan of salvation on the wall up here. Since the pandemic began, we have moved the "invitation" to the beginning of the sermon, instead of at the end. But the summary is: In response to the good news of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, we obey that good news by turning away from sin, confessing Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be briefly buried with the Lord in baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

And, as usual, we do have some good news this morning! The first one comes to us from the Lord's church in Winslow, Arizona. They posted online a few days ago and said, "Praise God, Mariah was Baptized into the Lord at the Winslow Az church of Christ. Please pray for her new life." I love the bearded baptizer and the tattooed baptizee, "Standing on the corner in Winslow, Arizona," I suppose. We are thrilled with Mariah's decision, and we are certainly looking forward to meeting her someday.

And then we also have some good news from the Northwest congregation in Fort Worth, Texas. They say that, "Irene was invited by her neighbor to our VBS a few months ago. Her family came nearly every night to hear about 'The Greatest Story on Earth.' Irene has continued to attend services and the past few weeks has sat down with us to study the Scriptures even more." We are certainly thankful for the ongoing potential with Vacation Bible Schools! Some of you know that my wife and her family first learned about the Lord's church when they were invited to a VBS (when she was 8 years old) down in La Junta, Colorado. As I remember hearing it, my father-in-law was stationed at a remote radar base, and a coworker said, "Hey, you have kids, why don't you come to our VBS," and they did. We visited that congregation maybe ten years ago, and there were some there who still remember my wife and her family. I loved worshiping in Colorado and seeing all of the cowboy hats

lined up on the coat rack in the entryway. But, we certainly rejoice with Irene, and we share this by way of encouragement. If you would like to study together, if you think that you might be ready to obey the gospel yourself, please get in touch.

As most of you know, we are in a series of lessons where we are looking at what Jesus has to say about the Law of Moses in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. He did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it, and he gives the warning that to enter the kingdom of heaven, our righteousness needs to exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. With this in mind, we've been working our way through a series of examples, where Jesus takes what the people had heard about the Law, and he clarifies and corrects a number of misunderstandings. He's dealt with murder, adultery, divorce, and the making of vows. And in each of these areas, Jesus raises the bar, as he explains the kind of righteousness that's needed to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Last week, we started looking at the next example (in Matthew 5:38-42), where Jesus addresses a misunderstanding concerning what the Law of Moses teaches about REVENGE, as summarized by the phrase, ***"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."*** We live in a culture, where we glorify taking revenge, and they did as well. In fact, over time, they had misapplied the ***"eye for an eye"*** concept, and they had twisted it. Instead of limiting revenge (as it was originally intended), they took it as a challenge. Instead of letting the courts handle it, they took it as a goal of some kind: If my neighbor insults me in some way, I honor God by insulting him right back!

And that's the first example we looked at last week, ***"whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."*** We learned that this is not a self-defense scenario, our neighbor is not attacking us with a knife or threatening our family with a sword, but this is almost certainly a backhanded slap in the face, an insult. And when we are insulted, we as God's people have a high tolerance for putting up with stuff. We don't retaliate, but (like the Lord) we keep our power under control. We do not lash out in revenge. We do not trade insult for insult.

This morning, then, I'd like for us to go back to this passage as we take a look at the next three examples. And to put it in context, let's look together again at all five verses – Matthew 5:38-42; the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:38-42,

***<sup>38</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' <sup>39</sup> But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. <sup>40</sup> If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. <sup>41</sup> Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. <sup>42</sup> Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.***

So again, we have what these people had heard. In a way, it's what the Law actually said (***"an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"***), but they had taken it as an endorsement of revenge, which it is not. Last week, we had the example of an insult (getting slapped on the cheek), and today we continue with the next three examples...

#### **B. ...starting with the Lord's reference to GETTING SUED.**

***"If someone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also."*** There's quite a bit going on here, but I would just start with the reminder that we are not talking about getting robbed. So, like last week,

this is not a self-defense situation; instead, this is a matter of being taken to court over something. But if we look at this verse very carefully, we aren't even at the point of a lawsuit, are we? The reference is, ***"If someone WANTS to sue you."*** In other words, we aren't quite in court yet, but it's getting close. Somebody ***"wants to sue you."*** So again, this is not a random act of violence, but there is a process to it. There's some kind of financial dispute that's clearly making progress to ending up before a judge.

And in the face of that threat of an impending lawsuit, Jesus makes some rather unusual comments about a ***"shirt"*** and a ***"coat."*** To us, this doesn't really make sense, does it? When's the last time you heard of somebody suing somebody for their shirt? It's hard for us to imagine hiring a lawyer or going to small claims court to sue somebody for the shirt off their back. Most of my shirts were \$2.99 from Goodwill. This shirt, for example, I actually stripped off a mannequin at the Goodwill over here at East Towne. It looked like a great shirt, I checked the size, and it was LT, so I took it off the mannequin right there. To us, shirts are no big deal; certainly nothing to sue over. So, this might be a case of Jesus exaggerating to make a point, but there's also the possibility that in ancient times, clothing was more valuable than it is today. 2,000 years ago, a shirt was pretty expensive. And in ancient lawsuits, people could be sued for the clothing they were wearing, if they had nothing else of value. That's hard for us to imagine.

So, into this culture, God made an interesting law in Exodus 22:26-27, ***"If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious."*** This seems to give us some insight as to what Jesus is talking about in this passage. The ***"shirt,"*** the ***"inner garment"*** was something of a luxury, but the ***"coat"*** was a necessity; it almost doubled as a tent, it was a shelter. And if I were poor, I could use my coat as a deposit for something, but the lender couldn't keep it overnight; and the reason is: I need my coat to sleep! TO keep my coat is inhumane. My coat is my shelter at night. And when I toss and turn in the cold, God sees that, and he will hold the taker of the coat accountable.

Well, with this in mind, from the other side of things, if somebody is getting ready to take me to court to sue me for my shirt, my inner garment, if he is that desperate, then Jesus says that I should go ahead and make the decision to give him my coat as well. In other words, I have the ability to willingly give up my coat. The shirt might not be my choice if it gets to a lawsuit, but the coat is my choice, and the point is: I don't always have to insist on my rights. This is an act of love, above and beyond the bare minimum. *The Message* has an interesting paraphrase of this verse, ***"If someone sues for the shirt off your back, gift-wrap your best coat and make a present of it."*** So, it's the idea of going above and beyond the bare minimum. It's an illustration of what Jesus meant when he said that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees. We don't just do the minimum, but we look for ways to do more.

Besides, think of the alternative: Somebody is thinking about suing me for my shirt, we argue about it, he sues, we go to court, we argue some more, others get involved, and in the end, we have completely destroyed any chance of a relationship. And aren't relationships more important than shirts? Aren't people more important than things? As God's people, to the best of our ability, we go above and beyond in making things right. Sometimes it's better to take a loss than to insist on winning at any cost. I think of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7, concerning Christians taking each other to court. He said that by the time it gets to a lawsuit, ***"Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?"*** And that is a great question! There are times when we might need to ask ourselves, ***"Why not rather be defrauded?"*** Sometimes it's better to give up our rights than to win. Sometimes winning

isn't worth it. So, this is the second example in this passage: If somebody wants to sue us for our shirt, we are to go ahead and give them our coat as well.

**C. The third example Jesus give in this passage is tied to how we react to an OPPRESSIVE GOVERNMENT.**

In verse 41, the Lord says, ***“Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.”*** He does use the word ***“whoever,”*** but Jesus seems to be referring to Roman law, allowing a soldier to force a civilian to carry his gear for a mile, a thousand paces. The Roman army obviously didn't have trucks or Hum-vees, and like soldiers today, their gear was heavy. So, Roman soldiers had the ability to say, “Hey, you, carry my stuff for a mile,” and they had a legal right to do that. We think of the soldiers who grabbed Simon of Cyrene and forced him to carry Jesus' cross for a while. It was humiliating. It was a reminder that Rome was an occupying force. It was inconvenient. Several days ago, I went to Google Maps and plugged in a location exactly one mile from our house down on the southwest side of Madison. They estimate that walk to take exactly 20 minutes. With a heavy pack, maybe we can imagine half an hour. The hassle, though, is that I would need to drop whatever I was carrying at the time. I'd need to leave my groceries behind, or whatever. And then, once I've carried the soldier's gear for half an hour, then what? Then I need to hike back to where I was when I got interrupted! So, we are talking a very inconvenient delay of at least an hour. I'm trying to imagine a modern equivalent, with our cars, and I'm imagining coming out of Woodman's with my groceries, when a soldier says, “Hey, you, I need you to drive me to Johnson Creek real quick.” I don't have time for that! Not only is it half an hour there, but then I'm there and have to drive back. And to fit his gear in the car, I have to leave my groceries right there in the Woodman's parking lot. This would have been a huge hassle. In fact, we fought a war over this kind of thing, didn't we? I'm thinking of the practice of “quartering” back in the mid-1700's, where the American colonists were required to provide food and housing for British soldiers. This is one of a number of things that led up to the Revolutionary War. We didn't take too well to being forced to do whatever a foreign army told us to do.

Jesus, though, is suggesting a different kind of revolution. Instead of rebelling, instead of just grinding through that one mile with resentment, Jesus gives a new command, ***“Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.”*** This is not what the people were expecting. They wanted a Messiah who would come in and liberate them from Roman oppression. As disciples of Christ, though, we are to go the second mile.

Can we imagine what this would have looked like? We get to the end of that first mile, by law the soldier gets ready to take his own pack, but we say, “No, I'd be glad to keep going for another mile.” That guy would obviously want to know, “Why?” And that right there would open up all kinds of doors, wouldn't it? As Americans, we hate being told what to do, but Jesus tells us to go above and beyond.

By the way, I should point out that going the second mile obviously requires going the first mile as well, doesn't it? And I mention this, because when we talk about going above and beyond for the Lord, we obviously have to start by actually doing the minimum. And sometimes, it seems pretty difficult to actually do the minimum! I'm imagining somebody asking a supervisor, “What extra things can I do to get a raise?” when that person can't even show up on time. It seems to me that probably need to start by showing up on time, and then we go above and beyond from there. We cannot go the second mile if we've never done the first. So, we might dream of doing great things for the Lord, but let us not forget the most basic things.

In Jesus' command, though, let's also notice that there is some moderation. I hope this is okay to notice here: The Lord does not tell us to “go however many miles he tells you to go.” So, we are to have an attitude of going above and beyond, doing more than the minimum, but on the other hand, we are not absolute slaves, either. It

seems to me, then, that we have the Lord's permission to set some boundaries here. Go above and beyond, but there is a limit.

**D. As we come to the end of this passage, we come to a fourth example, as the Lord addresses what I would describe as BENEVOLENCE.**

This is the idea of doing good toward someone in need. Jesus wants us to use our resources to do good, ***“Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”*** We don't hold on to our stuff for dear life, but we share, and we share freely. And yet, based on other passages, I would also suggest that we share wisely. Notice: We don't necessarily need to give exactly anything and everything a person might ask for, but we do need to give. We need to help. I think of lame man asking Peter and John for alms at the temple gate in Acts 3. Peter said to the man, ***“Look at us!”*** The man began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them, but Peter said, ***“I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk!”*** There's an example of somebody asking for one thing, but getting another. Obviously, we aren't able to heal people miraculously, but the principle seems to be: Let's do the best we can to meet the real need. I remember meeting a homeless man in Janesville whose feet were covered in sores. His socks were fused to his feet. He needed a pair of fresh socks, and we were able to give him a pack of fresh socks. He peeled the old crusty socks off, put the new ones on, and he was good to go. That is what that man needed.

Sometimes, of course, giving cash is not helpful at all, even harmful, especially if someone is struggling with addiction. They might ask for it, but the last thing they need is \$20 in cash. As many of you know, our custom here is not to give cash, but to help with food if all possible. We will go to Aldi, we will get them what our family would normally eat for a week, and then we drop it off. We've done that dozens of times. Maybe twenty years ago, I remember the church deciding to help some people financially (they were desperate), and a day or two after we gave them a check, I happened to run into this couple on the way out of Wal-mart. I couldn't help but notice that their cart was full of Pepsi and Ruffles potato chips. I feel terrible for noticing, but that was at a time when we really couldn't afford actual Pepsi in our family. We were paying off some hospital bills after having Kid #2, and my wife had it down to \$25 a week at Aldi for a year or so there. But it helped to open my eyes that cash might not always be the way to go to help those who claim to be in desperate need.

Or maybe we are approached in a parking lot, by someone asking for money. Instead of handing over money, it's often better to dig a little deeper. What's going on? What do you really need right now? And that might be a tank of gas, it might be a meal. I very thankful that Kwik Trip has “fuel only” gift cards. It's a card that has a picture of a Kwik Trip fuel truck on it, and unlike their other gift cards, these will only work for gas, and will not work for tobacco, or alcohol, or whatever. I hope you can see the wisdom in that. A year or two ago, I remember being approached by a woman on a powered wheelchair in the Home Depot parking lot in the dark one night. She wanted cash. I told her that I don't give cash, but I asked her, “What do you really need tonight?” She said that she hadn't eaten for a while. So, we went together to the Subway out in the Home Depot parking lot on the west side. I learned her name, texted my wife that I was taking this woman out to dinner, and then I let her order dinner. To me, it just seemed to be the human and loving thing to do. Cash would have been impersonal, and it might have been misused. Plus, it gave a bit of extra time to talk about the Lord that night, and we did; standing in line at Subway, I got to tell her about all of you! I'm not saying it's necessarily a sin to give cash; not at all, but we do need to be wise.

Just a few days ago, somebody called the church line looking for money. I could tell he was intentionally telling the story in a way that I could not verify the details. But as he continued, he said he took Amtrak to Port Angeles, Washington. What a weird coincidence! I didn't tell him my sister lives there, and I didn't tell him that I would be driving there in two weeks. But I know that Amtrak doesn't go to Port Angeles, Washington. You can take a bus from Amtrak in Seattle, but that's not what the guy said. So I verified, "You're telling me you took an actual train to Port Angeles, Washington, and actually got off a physical train in Port Angeles?" The man said, "Yes." And I said, "Stop lying to me." Some people are out to deceive. We are to be generous, but we are to be wise as well.

We also have an interesting warning in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13, where Paul says,

***<sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. <sup>13</sup> But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.***

It seems, based on this passage, that there are scenarios where it might actually be a sin to just give somebody whatever they are asking for; namely, if someone is ***"not willing to work,"*** we are not to encourage or enable that behavior. We could spend all day on this, but the emphasis in Matthew 5:42 is that when somebody comes to us for help, we do the best we can to help in a way that is truly helpful. We use our resources to help others, knowing that our stuff is not really our own in the first place. We think of 1 John 3:17-18, where John says, ***"But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."***

#### **Conclusion:**

As we come to the end of this passage, let's remember: Jesus is speaking these words in response to what these people had heard, ***"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."*** They thought God wanted them to take revenge, to snap back over every little thing. They thought life was all about getting even, settling the score. The Lord, though, raises the bar. When we are insulted, we turn the other cheek. If someone sues us for our shirt, we let them have our coat as well. If we are forced to go one mile, we double it. And when someone asks us for something, we find a way to help.

As we think about these four examples, I hope we realize that Jesus came to this earth to show us how this is done. When slapped in the face, he did not retaliate, even though he could have called twelve legions of angels. As he was forced to walk to his own execution, he went willingly, and allowed himself to be nailed to the cross, even saying (over and over again), ***"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*** Then, as he hung there on the cross, as the soldiers literally gambled for his clothing, Jesus not only allowed it, but he died on the cross for their sins. And in dying there, he gave all of us not what we deserve, but he gave us exactly what we needed, an opportunity to come back to God. In the cross, Jesus shows us how to live.

We will leave it here for this morning, and conclude with the last passage in this series next week, if the Lord wills.

With this, before we partake of the Lord's Supper together, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

God of justice, God of love, you are the ultimate example of what it means to be patient in the face of abuse and injustice. We praise you this morning for sending your Son to this earth to suffer, not for his own sins, but for ours. We pray that as we interact with our families this weekend, as we head back to school and work this week, as we live our lives, that we would love others, that we would not retaliate. We pray that we would be generous with our resources, always remembering that we have nothing of our own; everything is truly yours. As we serve in ways that might be uncomfortable for us, we pray that we would always go the second mile. We pray that we would always be looking for ways to help and to serve.

This morning, we pray for the students and staff at Kennedy Elementary. We hope that what we have been able to provide with your help will truly be a blessing. We pray for a safe and productive year.

We are thankful for those who are visiting with us this morning. We pray for safe travels.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. In Jesus we pray. Amen.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)