

Turning the Cheek – Turning the World

Thomas Robinson, *Jesus' Call to the Way 1*, August 13, 2017

Matthew 5:38-42

³⁸ You've heard it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." [Ex 21:24]

³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.

But **whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to them the other also.**

⁴⁰ And to one who wants to go to law and take your **shirt**, let them take your **coat** too.

⁴¹ And whoever **forces you** to carry a burden one mile, go with them two.

⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from one who wants borrow from you.

⁴³ You've heard it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and you shall hate your enemy." [Lv 19:18]

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute (oppress) you,

⁴⁵ so that **you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.** For he makes his sun rise on evil people and good, and sends rain on just people and unjust.

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what pay do you get for that? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing that's "more"? Don't even the Gentiles do the same?

⁴⁸ **You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

Matthew 4:17-22

¹⁷ Jesus began to preach, "Change your way of thinking, for the kingdom that belongs to God's realm is right here."* ¹⁸ Walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ He said to them, "Come after me, and I'll make you fish for people." ²⁰ Immediately leaving their nets, they followed him.

²¹ And he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John, in their boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them. ²² Immediately leaving the boat and their father, they followed him. [*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."]

Matthew 16:24-25

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone wants to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." ²⁵ For any who want to save their life (*psyché*) will lose it, but any who lose their life (*psyché*) for my sake will find it.

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ "Come to me, all who labor hard and are burdened, and I will give you rest." ²⁹ Take on yourselves my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your lives (*psyché*). ³⁰ For my yoke is good, and my burden is light."

John 14:5-9a

⁵ Thomas says to him, "Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?"

⁶ Jesus says to him, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you have known me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

Matthew 7:13-14

¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴ For narrow is the gate and constricted the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Ephesians 4:1-3

¹ I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk a path worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The Call and The Way

We begin a series looking toward our congregational retreat: "Called to the Way – Living the Wisdom of Jesus." Jesus was not an expected wisdom teacher giving proverbial advice with a bit different twist. He called followers to learn to see a new reality and to walk that path. For every one of his early disciples it was a radical challenge to begin a journey of challenges over years. Jesus leading to events beyond imagining.

Peter, Andrew, James, John, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Matthew, Simon– Jesus is profoundly personal. God is personal, creating diverse, specific people, loving all. Jesus calls to "follow behind me," warns/promises transformation. They leave everything and follow. They leave behind an old self, to find their own lives/souls.

Why Does Jesus Say Something so Obviously Wrong?

In grasping Jesus' Wisdom, it's important to allow ourselves to feel how unexpected and disconcerting it is. Not wisdom that fits our normal ways of thinking in any way. We want to make it practical, utilitarian, a new law. But it powerfully resists all attempts.

Everyone with any normal moral sense knows that when Jesus says, "*Do not resist the one who is evil,*" it's just wrong. It can't be right. And the Cheek, Coat, Borrowing! Loving neighbor and hating enemy is surely our normal mode (except for some neighbors). What kind of wisdom is loving your enemy when they're still an enemy?

Jesus doesn't say this is easy. You leave everything, even self, behind if you follow him.

He knows the power of evil to control us, define us, even by resisting it. Pharisees, Zealots, so many were defined by the evil they fought. Jesus' way to disempower evil is not to play its game of making me violent, possessive, exclusive, greedy by reaction.

Managing our Evil or Living a New Identity

Normal wisdom and law and most good advice are ways of managing our evil and the evil of society. It's necessary for what it does in society at large. But Jesus says that it never brings you to your real self, given by God; to God's life, to eternal life. It blocks you from being real children of the God of such great generosity and love.

Jesus call us to learn a new hard/easy, disconcerting/delightful reality, that he would ultimately bring to full view in his death-resurrection: You united with God's own life.