

**Sermon Series: “Embracing Forgiveness”— Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield—6/17/2007**

**Title: “An Eye-for-an-Eye”**

**Text: Matthew 5: 38-48**

**Introduction:** *Illus.: The high cost*

**Theme:** In our daily lives in which we experience many injustices at the hand of others, Christ compels us to turn our thinking in-side-out by responding from mercy rather than revenge.

**From legalism to love (Print/read vss. 38-39)**

- Avoiding “*proof-text*” Christianity
  1. Jesus reprimands Pharisaical thinking which misapplies of Old Testament teaching
    - a. “*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.*” *Lev.19:18* – Individual not allowed to seek redress of wrongs for revenge sake — law of love rules
    - b. “*An eye for an eye. . .*” *Lev. 24: 20* – part of civil law to hold together a people in anarchist world environment
    - c. **ILLUS.: WHAT IS YOUR STANDARD OF JUDGMENT?**
  2. Jesus rejects the common belief that “*might makes right*”
    - a. “*Do not begin to resist*”--Jesus does not just say “*stop doing it*”--doesn’t want force as an answer or option
    - b. Jesus’ focus is not so much on *passivism* but on an attitude which lets go offense given (forgive = send away)
    - c. “Slap” more of a personal insult to the pride rather than a physical injury incurred (**example from youth**)
    - d. Nursing hurt pride allows “*evil one*” to control me
- The fulfillment of the Law is **Love**
  1. “*The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*” *Galatians 5:14*
  2. **Quote: The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people**
  3. The next seven verses gives practical illustrations of this principle

**From redressing a wrong to reconciling a situation (Print/ read vss. 40-41)**

- The “*fleshly mind*” seeks “*my right*”
  1. Coming from a sinful selfishness to take back more than was taken from you and justify it as my *God-given right*
  2. The “*fleshly*” attitude is one where hatred simmers and self-destructs
    - a. “*For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.*” *Romans 8:6*
  3. “Leave room” for God to straighten out the injustice, **FULLY AND FINALLY**
    - a. “*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.*” *Romans 12:19*
- The “*spiritual mind*” seeks “*my witness*”
  1. *Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. . .Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* *2 Cor. 5: 18, 20*
  2. The “outer coat” was “valuable” personal item which God require to be return before nightfall if taken (*Ex22:26*)
  3. “*Send it away*” — same word for “*forgive and forget*” in the New Testament (40)
  4. Reconciliation at all cost—count greater value of other’s eternity jeopardized by ongoing war between you/them(41)
  5. **ILLUS.: FORGIVENESS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**From self-centeredness to other-centeredness (Print/ read vss. 42-48)**

- **Responsive** rather than **Reactive** living (vs. 42-46)

1. Our sinful, selfish first reaction is to ask, "What haven't they done...what if they come back? (vs. 42)
  2. Our self reaction is to *love the loveable* (vs.46) making us no different than the world
  3. Our response to God's *undeserved grace* is to give without thought of how it will affect me but how affect them
  4. Jesus does not says, "*you shall be holy*" but rather "*you shall be complete*" (as you already are in Jesus)
- **Reflect** rather than **Refract** the Father's love (vs. 46-48)
    1. **ILLUS.: WHO IS THE ENEMY?**
    2. "*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you.*" Eph 5: 1-2
    3. Because we bear the name of Jesus and are the Father's children
    4. Because if nothing else the other bears the faint image of God as one of his creation and we honor God by caring

### **THE HIGH COST OF GETTING EVEN**

During World War II, the U.S. Submarine Tang surfaced under the cover of darkness to fire upon a large Japanese convoy off the coast of China. Since previous raids had left the American vessel with only eight torpedoes, the accuracy of every shot was absolutely essential. The first seven missiles were right on target; but when the eighth was launched, it suddenly deviated and headed right back at their own ship. The emergency alarm to submerge rang out, but it was too late. Within a matter of seconds, the U.S. sub received a direct hit and sank almost instantly. In much the same way we can destroy ourselves by hostility toward others.

### **WHAT IS YOUR STANDARD OF JUDGMENT**

In *Words We Live By*, Brian Burrell tells of an armed robber named Dennis Lee Curtis who was arrested in 1992 in Rapid City, South Dakota. Curtis apparently had scruples about his thievery. In his wallet the police found a sheet of paper on which was written the following code:

1. I will not kill anyone unless I have to.
2. I will take cash and food stamps—no checks.
3. I will rob only at night.
4. I will not wear a mask.
5. I will not rob mini-marts or 7-Eleven stores.
6. If I get chased by cops on foot, I will get away. If chased by vehicle, I will not put the lives of innocent civilians on the line.
7. I will rob only seven months out of the year.
8. I will enjoy robbing from the rich to give to the poor.

This thief had a sense of morality, but it was flawed. When he stood before the court, he was not judged by the standards he had set for himself but by the higher law of the state. Likewise when we stand before God, we will not be judged by the code of morality we have written for ourselves but by God's perfect law.

### **FORGIVENESS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A South African woman stood in an emotionally charged courtroom, listening to white police officers acknowledge the atrocities they had perpetrated in the name of apartheid. Officer van de Broek acknowledged his responsibility in the death of her son. Along with others, he had shot her 18-year-old son at point-blank range. He and the others partied while they burned his body, turning it over and over on the fire until it was reduced to ashes. Eight years later, van de Broek and others arrived to seize her husband. A few [hours] later, shortly after midnight, van de Broek came to fetch the woman. He took her to a woodpile where her husband lay bound. She was forced to watch as they poured gasoline over his body and ignited the flames that consumed his body. The last words she heard her husband say were "Forgive them." Now, van de Broek stood before her awaiting judgment. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission asked her what she wanted.

"I want **three things**," she said calmly. "**I want** Mr. van de Broek to take me to the place where they burned my

husband's body. I would like to gather up the dust and give him a decent burial. "**Second**, Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. "**Third**, I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him, too. I would like someone to lead me to where he is seated, so I can embrace him and he can know my forgiveness is real." As the elderly woman was led across the courtroom, van de Broek fainted, overwhelmed. Someone began singing "Amazing Grace." Gradually everyone joined in. This woman understood that to be reconciled with God and to be reconciled with neighbors and enemies is to be free indeed.

### **WHO IS MY ENEMY?...**

Do not be too quick to assume that your enemy is a savage just because he is *your* enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy because he thinks *you* are a savage. Or perhaps he is afraid of you because he feels you are afraid of him. And perhaps if he believed you were capable of loving him he would no longer be your enemy. Do not be too quick to assume that your enemy is an enemy of God just because he is *your* enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy precisely because he can find nothing in you that gives glory to God. Perhaps he fears you because he can find nothing in you of God's love and God's kindness and God's patience and mercy and understanding of the weakness of men. Do not be too quick to condemn the man who no longer believes in God. For it is perhaps your own coldness and avarice and mediocrity and materialism and sensuality and selfishness that have killed his faith. *Citation: Thomas Merton in Seeds of Contemplation.*

### **Matthew 5:38-48**

<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 him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.

<sup>40</sup>"And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. <sup>41</sup>"And whoever shall force 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. <sup>43</sup>"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup>"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you <sup>45</sup>in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

<sup>46</sup>"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same?

<sup>47</sup>"And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

<sup>48</sup>"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. [NASB]