

Repay No One Evil for Evil

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 May 2025

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] We are in a sermon series in the Gospel of Matthew. We're in the Sermon on the Mount, which is the most famous sermon ever preached.!

And we deeply desire to resemble you in this manner, to be characterized by selfless love, to have the meekness and humility of your Son, Jesus Christ.

But Lord, we also come to this radical text well aware of our inadequacies, that we cannot live like this in our own strength.

So Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit. Help us to commune with Jesus by your Spirit more and more through faith.

Conform us to the image of your Son, even in this reading and preaching of your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[1 : 32] Please stand, if you're able, for the reading of God's Word, to honor God as He addresses us from His Word. Matthew 5, 38-42.

You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil.

But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

This is God's holy and authoritative Word. Please be seated. Niccolo Machiavelli was a 15th century Italian philosopher and politician.

[2 : 39] He authored the famous book called The Prince, which is still avidly studied by political scientists all throughout the world. But his work is born of cynicism and pragmatism, and it prioritizes strategic cruelty over moral idealism.

And as a politician, he was well aware of at times needing to enforce his policy and punish people that don't fit his policies. And yet he was well aware of the possible cycle of vengeance and retribution that can take over.

And so this was his solution for ending that cycle. He said, If an injury has to be done to a man, it should be so severe that his vengeance need not be feared.

His political philosophy is still highly influential today. To give you a couple examples, Malcolm X, the 20th century African American revolutionary and human rights activist, echoed the same sentiment when he said, Be peaceful.

Be courteous. Obey the law. Respect everyone. But if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery.

[3 : 51] He is still quoted and looked to for inspiration and guidance by many advocacy groups throughout the country.

Even our current president, Donald Trump, this is not a political statement. I'm just... He's often quoted as saying, If anybody hits me, I'm going to hit them 10 times harder.

Maybe you grew up with your parents telling you to do the same thing at school. All that to say, the idea of tit-for-tat retaliation is deeply ingrained in our culture and society.

We admire, actually. We admire people who take nothing from nobody. Who stand up for themselves. Who don't let anybody push them around. But that is a worldly idea.

Not a biblical idea. Repay no one evil for evil as Christ suffered evil for our sake. That's the main point of this passage.

[5 : 04] First, we're going to talk about the law of retribution. And secondly, we'll talk about the principle of non-retaliation or probably better put, non-resistance as Jesus puts it here. Once again,

Jesus cites a popular misapplication of the Old Testament to start.

It's in verse 38. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This is a famous legal principle called the lex talionis, which is Latin for law of retaliation.

We find it explicitly stated three times in the Old Testament. Exodus 21, 24. Leviticus 24, 20. Deuteronomy 19, 21. This principle was articulated in a memorable way so that people could easily remember.

Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life. It was meant for rhetorical effect. However, it was never intended in the Bible to be applied literally.

We know that that's the case because in Exodus 21, where we first learned this principle, the specific punishments that are stipulated for certain crimes are not literally eye for eye.

[6 : 12] For example, when a man strikes and injures someone, the law stipulates not that that person also be struck and injured in the same way, but rather it says that that person needs to pay a financial fine.

So the point of this law is not that the punishment should be identical to the crime, but that the punishment should be commensurate with or proportionate to the crime.

This is a sound legal principle. Let me provide some examples to prove that this is a wise and necessary principle still in our day. In 2018, Tangaraju Supia was executed in Singapore.

What was his crime? He helped people smuggle in 2.2 pounds of marijuana. I think if he followed that law here, like quarter of high schoolers would be executed.

I think smuggling drugs is a terrible offense, but I still think that's excessive, a death penalty. That's more like lie for eye, not eye for eye.

[7 : 22] In 2015, a California university student was convicted of sexually assaulting an unconscious woman at a party. And because of that, he was convicted for this.

He was proven to be guilty. He was convicted, and then he served a whopping three months in jail. That's more like eye for life.

Eye for eye would have been more just. The eye for eye principle of retributive punishment is still the biblical and wisest judicial practice for society at large because it promotes justice by ensuring that the punishment is proportionate to the crime no more and no less.

Why then does Jesus set his teaching here in the Sermon on the Mount in contrast to that wise Old Testament principle? He says in verse 38, but I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil.

The problem was not with the law of retaliation itself, but with how the Jews of Jesus' day were applying that principle. Jesus provides three examples of his teaching not to resist the one who is evil in verses 39 to 42.

[8 : 40] And all of them, if you look at them, deal with personal offense, interpersonal conflict and relationships. This is not the case of a governing authority enforcing law and order and punishing the evildoer.

That we still need. This is instead the case of a Christian relating to bad people who take advantage of them and wrong them in their personal lives.

That's the key difference. According to scripture, it's the government, not individuals who have the authority to bear the sword to punish evildoers. It says in Romans 13, one to four, let every person be subject to the governing authorities.

For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment.

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. If you do wrong, be afraid. For he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

[9 : 51] The governing authorities and the courts must uphold the eye for eye principle for the sake of justice, for the sake of order in society. The problem was that some Jews were making this legal principle that should be enforced by the civil authorities a personal principle of retribution and revenge.

They were engaging in this tit-for-tat personal ethic. You cut me off on the road, watch out, I'm cutting you right off. You ate my food in the fridge, if you guys have roommates, I'm going to eat your food.

You said something bad about me, I'm going to say something bad about you. your kid hit my kid at school, I'm going to teach him karate and teach him to hit your kid back.

You're being difficult and cold toward me at work, I'm going to be ice cold toward you. When you take this kind of personal ethic to an extreme, you get the never-ending blood feud between families and tribes and clans that you see in some parts of the world even today and also the endless cycles of vendettas between gang members here in the U.S.

while they avenge one of their members and vengeance, the cycle of vengeance continues again and again and again. It never leads to peace. It always leads to more violence.

[11 : 30] Jesus said those who live by the sword will die by the sword. the principle that God intended for his people as a way of helping them to love their neighbors by getting justice, ensuring justice in society was instead being twisted as a way to love ourselves, love themselves at the expense of others and that's what Jesus is correcting here in this message.

The principle originally comes from Leviticus 19, 17-18. You shall not hate your brother in your heart but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor lest you incur sin because of him.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. Even in the Old Testament bearing a grudge against someone and taking vengeance against someone was never meant to be a part of our personal ethic but people were misapplying that eye-for-eye tooth-for-tooth principle so Jesus here restores the heart and spirit of the original law by completely overturning that retaliatory personal ethic of his day.

Instead he teaches us to be selfless to live so selflessly that we endure even wrongful dishonor lust loss suffering and persecution at the hands of our neighbors.

Jesus says in verse 39 but I say to you do not resist the one who is evil. You heard that right. Do not resist the one who is evil.

[13 : 09] It's a surprising command in a society where resist is one of the most popular slogans.

We love resisting because it makes us feel strong makes us feel independent it makes us feel important but Jesus says do not resist and not only does Jesus say do not resist he specifically says do not resist the one who is evil.

That's more shocking. This is not the case of a good doctor giving you a painful shot in an arm and saying hey don't move don't resist this is going to be good for you. No. This is an evildoer who is selfishly seeking to do us harm and Jesus says do not resist him.

Obviously that's going to require some explanation. Jesus helpfully gives us four illustrations. The first is in verse 39 but if anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to him the other also.

A slap in the face is a common idiom that we often use to refer to a rebuff or an insult because slapping someone is primarily intended to cause humiliation more than physical damage.

People who are trying to do and some of you guys are maybe laughing there's a I heard there's nowadays this thing called power slap or something it's like a competition where people slap each other as hard as they want I mean that's barbaric you know but this is I mean if you're doing that you might actually get hurt but you know this is not the normal that kind of slap this is just like a slap to humiliate somebody and you're if you're trying to hurt somebody you punch them because you have a more concentrated area for your force to deliver the blow and to cause damage you don't slap them a slapping is for expressing your contempt for someone disdain for someone humiliating someone and the main purpose it's here that that main purpose of slapping is confirmed by the fact that Jesus specifically mentions the right cheek why is that important why does Jesus mention right cheek most people if you know are right handed and in order to strike someone on the right cheek with your right hand you need to do it with the back of your hand that's even more insulting as that's that's the way it's viewed in most most ancient cultures at least there is for example an ancient

[15 : 41] Jewish commentary in Exodus 21 which prescribes a double fine for the backhanded slap as opposed to the palm slap because it's just that much more humiliating so Jesus is illustrating here a particularly insulting situation he's not talking about physical abuse he's talking about when you're dishonored maybe you're in a work meeting every time you say something there's a co-worker or a boss who just rolls his eyes and sighs audibly as if you just can't get your act together maybe your sibling or housemate calls you names and belittles you with biting sarcastic comments that make you feel small and embarrassed maybe someone leaves a harsh mocking comment on your social media maybe an entitled client or entitled customer insults you and treats you with scorn as you're just trying to do your job every fiber of your pride tells you to slap back but

Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek don't respond to insult with insult instead choose humility and meekness I think we're missing the point of Jesus teaching if we turn this idea of turning the other cheek into a legalistic practice that you obey literally on every occasion it certainly does not mean that a victim of domestic abuse should stay mum and report nothing to the police or take no steps to protect herself remember what's in view here primarily is insult not injury for example when Jesus is unjustly struck by one of the officers of the Jewish high priest he doesn't literally turn the other cheek isn't that interesting he challenges the injustice of the abuse he says if what I said is wrong bear witness about the wrong but if what I said is right why do you strike me John 18 22 to 23 Jesus does not hesitate to point out the high priest sinful abuse of power but also important to note Jesus does not retaliate he does not lash out at his abuser with insults and invectives he calmly and meekly appeals to the proper authority in which case it is the high priest who is insulting him in this way turning the other cheek doesn't mean that we cannot call out injustice or hold people accountable it does mean however that we do not retaliate for personal vengeance we are to respond not out of pride but humility not out of a self preserving instinct but out of a meekness that entrusts ourselves to God's defense and care remember the beatitudes it's those who are poor in spirit those who mourn their sins those who are meek who can turn the other cheek lamentations 3 24 to 33 demonstrate this principle really well it speaks of bearing under the yoke of suffering and insults recognizing that

God is still sovereign over all of that and trusting that God will eventually have compassion on us and mercy on us if we continue to hope in him and wait on him this is a remarkable passage follow along with me as I read the Lord is my portion says my soul therefore I will hope in him the Lord is good to those who wait for him to the soul who seeks him it is good that one should wait patiently for the salvation of the Lord it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him for the Lord will not cast off forever but though he cause grief he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of man why do we give our cheek to the one who strikes and let ourselves be filled with insults because for the

Lord will not cast off forever even though God in his sovereignty has allowed me to be insulted and disrespected in this present moment we say I know that God does not grieve or afflict me from his heart soon he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love so I say the Lord is my portion I will hope in him and wait for him that's the spirit of those who turn the other cheek David is temporarily overthrown by his son Absalom in 2nd Samuel 16 he is fleeing Jerusalem and a man from the house of Saul Shimei starts pelting him stones and cursing him proverbially slapping him back and forth get out get out you man of blood you worthless man the Lord has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul in whose place you have reigned and the

[21 : 28] Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom see your evil is on you for you are a man of blood that's a backhanded slap but David's response is exemplary mind you David is not alone when this happens he's surrounded by his army and by his mighty men and one of the mighty men Abishai says to David why should this dead dog curse my lord the king let me go over and take off his head he's looking for that personal vengeance life for I but this is what David says if he is cursing because the Lord has said to him curse David who then shall say why have you done so leave him alone and let him curse for the Lord has told him to it may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today maybe it's what we say to ourselves when we're insulted when we're dishonored maybe maybe it's the Lord who is ordaining his goodness and his sovereignty for me to be dishonored today to be disrespected today to be insulted today if so then I will silently bear under the yoke and entrust myself to his steadfast love and compassion because I know if I wait on him and hope in him he will not disappoint that's what it looks like to turn the other cheek verse 40 gives us a second example and if anyone would sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well what's in view here is the old testament law governing the treatment of the poor poor people in those days had just two garments the inner garment here called the tunic and the outer garment the heavier the thicker garment called the cloak the cloak was the more essential garment because it was able to keep them warm and because for the poor you served also as a blanket when you slept outside kind of like a sleeping bag sometimes a poor person would give his cloak as a pledge to someone when borrowing money from a neighbor

I really need this money to get this bread for my kid I don't have anything to give you as a pledge that I'll repay this debt so I'll give you my cloak this is the best I have so the lender takes the cloak but if the poor person was not able to repay the debt to get the cloak back Exodus 22 to 25 to 27 demanded that the lender still return the cloak to the poor person before sundown and the biblical rationale was this this is his only covering and it is his cloak for his body in what else shall he sleep this is God's compassion but Jesus here commands his followers to relinquish even that basic right if anyone would sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well this is reminiscent of what

Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 7 in this situation one Christian has defrauded another stolen a lot of money from a fellow Christian brother and that other brother that's been defrauded is suing this brother now for defrauding him and Paul interestingly enough doesn't rebuke only the fraudster he also rebukes the person who's bringing the charge he says to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you why not rather suffer wrong why not rather be defrauded does does your money does your property matter that much to you do you drag a fellow Christian brother or sister to court display that in front of unbelievers when we fight tooth and nail for my rights and my due and my entitlements to make sure that we get our stuff and keep it what message does that send to the world it reveals to the world that we are a people whose hope is not in the life thereafter in eternal life kingdom of

God but in this life in this world when we have an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled unfading kept in heaven for us it says in first Peter when our heavenly father it says has many rooms for us why do we care so much about losing our earthly property Hebrews 10 34 commands persecuted believers who joyfully accepted the plundering of their property since they knew that they themselves had a better possession and an abiding one the Bible consistently teaches us that we should be willing to suffer wrong and incur loss at the hands of our neighbors knowing that we will get justice and reward from the Lord in the future here's the third illustration if anyone forces you to go one mile go with him two miles this is where we get the popular idiom go the extra mile which we use in a more general sense to just give that extra effort go beyond and above and beyond what is expected but the original context of this illustration is a little more specific than that because the Jews at the time were under and the Roman soldiers had the legal right this was written in the code the legal code the Roman soldiers had the right to impress into service any subjugated people which includes the Jews to basically do to be their servants for a length of time so if a Roman soldier is carrying his heavy equipment and tracking down and then he sees a Jew minding his own business and doing some farming and it was legally required for the Jew to carry his stuff for up to a mile there was an oppressive practice that Jews resented and they complied very begrudgingly however Jesus says if anyone forces you to go one mile go with him two miles but Jesus why would I do that these are unjust rulers oppressive tyrants we should resist them you misspoke right [28 : 32] Jesus you meant you know if he forced you to go one mile go half a mile and say yeah I'm done that was about one no Jesus says if he forced you to go one mile go with him two miles to this to do this for our friends is one thing to do it for our enemies the occupiers is another!

only way we can do this is if we have an unshakable confidence in divine justice Proverbs 20 verse 22 says do not say I will repay evil wait for the Lord and he will deliver you again Old Testament New Testament consistent Romans 12 19 says the same thing beloved never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written vengeance is mine I will repay says the Lord too many of us are vigilantes in the way we relate to divine justice there has been a troubling rise of vigilantism in the US with ordinary citizens forming border militias and trying to deport illegal immigrants themselves the rise of so called pedophile hunters posing as minors to lure and confront alleged offenders these people might be well meaning but the problem with vigilantes is that they actually undermine the rule of law and they frequently miscarry justice by acting independently of legitimate legal authorities they take justice into their own hands without due process and because they don't act with full information or with the checks and balances of the law they often make mistakes they act out of their own biases and misinformation and disproportionate self-righteous anger we do the exact same thing when we take justice into our own hands when it comes to personal vengeance when we are personally disrespected by someone or insulted by someone when we are defrauded and taken advantage of and unfairly treated can we really trust ourselves to respond fairly and justly to be unbiased in our assessment to be measured and proportionate in our response

I don't trust myself with that and thankfully I don't have to because God is just he sees everything we don't have to be vigilantes who take vengeance into our own hands because we have a divine lawgiver and ruler who misses no crime and miscarries no justice that's the key to not resisting the one who is evil fourth and final illustration of this principle is in verse 42 give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you that everyone is selfishly motivated in the terms of economics that they have self interest is taken for granted in our economy everyone is looking for profit everyone is looking out for their own backs and their own economic interests but Jesus turns that also on its head he says verse in

Luke 6 30 is even more blunt and comprehensive give to everyone who begs from you and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back Jesus is telling us to be taken advantage of financially he's calling for a radically unselfish uncalculating generosity what if we were a self forgetful people who loved our neighbors in such a profound way that when they ask us for money we don't selfishly imagine all the things that we can do with that money if we didn't give it away but instead we simply give it once again I think this is meant to be a general principle to guide us to counteract our natural selfishness!

And to incline us toward radical generosity I don't think it's meant to be a legalistic practice because if you make this a legalistic practice inevitably you run into situations where this command is in tension with or in contradiction with other parts of scripture for example in 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 10 to 12 Paul rebukes those who are being lazy and idle he says that they are not busy at!

[33 : 38] but earn their own living and he gives this command if anyone is not willing to work let him not eat so what should we do when a professional beggar who is able bodied and able to work but is unwilling to work asks us for money I really hope I'm not over qualifying God's word here but I don't think you're obligated to give in that situation 1 John 3 17 to 18 says but if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him how does God's love abide in him little children let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth this command assumes!

two things one that you have to have the world's good and two that your brother has a genuine need if you are so poor that giving money away to someone who asks you is going to lead you to be unable to feed your family then I think you can be released from this command because you don't have the world's good 1 Timothy 5 8 says if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household!

he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever once again if you press Jesus' command here in Matthew 5 42 to legalistic application then it creates these contradictions within scripture having qualified that let me qualify my qualification yeah I think most of us are not anywhere close to being so poor that we are unable to give radically if you're thinking oh man if I give that away give that to that person I really I can't pay for my Netflix subscription you're missing the point most of us have the world's goods secondly we need to ask ourselves does the person who is begging of us and seeking to borrow from us have genuine need in the book of

Proverbs while the word poverty is used in a consistently negative way the word poor is used consistently in a positive way poverty in biblical wisdom literature is a result of divine judgment for sins such as laziness stinginess love of luxury and pleasure carelessness and idle talk but the poor in biblical wisdom literature are poor because of circumstances outside of their control in hands injustices and therefore they receive God's special care and compassion if the Bible makes that distinction I do think it's wise for us at some point to make that!

distinction! money is a fraudster or a drunkard or a drug addict I don't think we should keep enabling their behavior by giving them cash a drunkard who is begging for money so that he could just get another swig of alcohol doesn't have a real need maybe buy him a meal instead of giving him money a fraudster doesn't have actual need maybe he has come up with some elaborate sob story but it's not true of course we need to recognize that sometimes we're not going to be able to tell and it's okay if we are duped and taken advantage of if you're trying to be selfless and live with this kind of generosity unavoidably you're going to be taken advantage of sometimes all that to say Jesus is here correcting the Pharisees legalism and trying to get to the heart of the matter so don't turn Jesus teaching into another set of legalistic practices as I've been saying throughout the sermon on the mount

[37 : 55] Jesus after our hearts in all four of these illustrations Jesus is preaching against our natural selfishness when you are disrespected or insulted when you are taken advantage of when

you incur loss do you react out of pride and self righteousness and anger a tit for tat mentality that demands our rights and dues an attitude love that's what Jesus is after here so don't get lost in all the legalistic details although I know some of you are going to ask me after the sermon what should I do in this particular situation which it's okay you could ask me that's fine instead as you live your life examine your heart and ask yourself am I seeking eye for eye and tooth for tooth in this situation for my personal gain or am I driven by the pursuit of the glory of God and the love of neighbor

Jesus commands us to repay no one evil for evil but only those who know Jesus Christ those who have been united to Jesus by faith can actually obey that command that's why the Beatitudes precedes all of the Sermon on the Mount Isaiah 50 verse 6 is a prophetic text where the messianic servant of the Lord speaks and this is what he says it's amazing how Jesus fulfills all these prophecies I gave my back to those who strike and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting Jesus is the Messiah who fulfilled this prophecy Jesus gave his back to those who strike him he got flogged right before his crucifixion he gave his cheeks to those who pull out the beard think about how humiliating that is perhaps even more humiliating the slap in an ancient world where all dignified men have long beards

I would have had a hard time being dignified yeah Matthew 26 67 says those who falsely charged Jesus spit in his face and struck him and some slapped him Jesus is the king he's the son of God he's the savior of the world the blameless lamb of God and he faces the dishonor that we cannot bear for ourselves they didn't merely take his tunic they took his cloak as well is in Matthew 27 35 when they had crucified him they divided his garments literally they divided his cloak and among them they cast lots Matthew 27 32 we find the only other instance of this word used in Matthew 5 41 referring to how the Roman soldiers impress a Jew into forced labor as a porter when the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to help him carry Jesus cross because Jesus is so exhausted and worn out from the flogging why does Jesus have to carry that cross up the hill of Calvary he didn't sin he he is carrying that cross that we should have carried he is bearing the burden of sin that we could not bear Jesus gave everything he gave everything he had for sinful beggars like you and me he endured insult after insult reviling after reviling loss after loss and he died and he hung on that cross naked and poor with nothing to his name he was condemned so that we could be forgiven he was ripped naked so that we can be clothed with his righteousness it's because he was wounded for our sake that we are healed because he died and rose again that we can have eternal life only those who have known love like that only those who believe in

Jesus who has done that for us and are united with him by faith can live like this passage let me close with this what we read in the assurance of pardon one more time 1st Peter 2 19 to 24 for this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly for what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure but if when you do good and suffer for it you endure this is a gracious thing in the sight of God for to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps he committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed so let us repay no one evil for evil just as

[44 : 12] Christ suffered evil for our sake in prayer and hope that just maybe as we bear suffering witness for Jesus sake that these people who wrong us insult us and defraud us might be saved let's pray oh Lord Jesus what indignities you suffered at the hands of sinful men that should not happen you it should have been me but you God you Lord Jesus gave yourself for us and for that you deserve glory honor authority power praise

Lord captivate us and transform us with that love you have shown us so that we too can live as people who repay no one evil for evil in Jesus name we pray amen him him him him him