

**Is Revenge Really Sweet?**  
**Matthew 5:38-42**

**INTRO.:**

1. **INTRO.:** One winter day a man went shopping at the local neighborhood mall.
  - a. When he returned to his car he noticed a rather foul odor coming from under the hood and so he checked the engine.
    - 1) In the compartment he discovered a dead cat rather mutilated from being caught in the fan belt.
    - 2) The poor cat had sought shelter from the cold and snow and did not realize the dangers of resting on the engine block.
  - b. Mr. Jones was lucky though, as one of his shopping bags was made of plastic and so he emptied its contents and proceeded to scrape, pull and push the cat corpse into the bag.
  - c. Finally finished, he slammed the hood down and walked off to wash his hands, but looking back he noticed something unusual.
    - 1) He had forgotten and left the bag on the hood of the car.
    - 2) He was about to return and pick it up but just then a lady walks by, looks suspiciously in both directions, and then she grabs the bag, and speeds off for the mall.
  - d. "Well this is too good to be true!" The man thought as he laughed at the lady.
  - e. He decided to follow her and see what would happen next.
    - 1) She went to a restaurant and proceeded to survey her prize.
    - 2) "Yeek!" She screamed as she looked in the bag, and then over she fell.
  - f. Of course, the management was equally alarmed that a customer had fainted in their establishment and so they called the paramedics.
  - g. In no time the woman was strapped to a cart and ready to be hauled off to the ambulance.
    - 1) But the man couldn't resist.
    - 2) "Hey lady!" He shouted, "Don't forget your package!"
    - 3) And with that he gently laid the cat corpse filled bag on the lady's chest, just as the ambulance doors were closing!
2. I am sure that most of us find this story funny because it illustrates an action that many of us would like to take against people who have taken advantage of us.
  - a. We like it because, "She got what she got what deserved."
  - b. And perhaps, under our breath we are saying, "Right on," because you know the feeling this man had.
3. The truth is that revenge and spite, are powerful motivators and we all feel we have a right to retaliate when someone does something to us.
  - a. One of the favorite sayings of a woman we knew years ago was, "I don't get mad, I get even."
  - b. But the problem is that for most people that that is not even enough.
  - c. In reality, we do not want to get even, we want to get ahead.
  - d. For example, I am sure that some of you have worked with people where you were always playing jokes on one another.
    - 1) Each time a prank is played, the recipient will think up a way to get the person back and even more.
    - 2) Sadly, many times what starts as an innocent prank can get out of control and end up with someone really getting hurt.
4. The desire to get "even" or to seek revenge on someone is one of the toughest things for most of us face.
  - a. Retaliation has been the way of life since the beginning of time for human beings.
  - b. When people wrong us, insult us or take our property, our desire is to see them pay for what they did to us.
  - c. People very much like the kind of justice that says an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.
  - d. The only problem is that sooner or later the entire world will be blind and toothless.
  - e. This is especially the case when we are left to administer the justice ourselves.

5. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deals directly with the issue of revenge.
  - a. He reveals how we are to respond when we have been wronged.
  - b. He gives us a valuable insight into the selfish desires which drive us and cause us to be consumed with self-interest.
  - c. And in so doing, He reveals how we can avoid becoming blind and toothless ourselves.
  
6. In Matt. 5:20 Jesus said that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we will not see the kingdom of heaven.
  - a. So in our text Jesus challenges us with the question of, “Just how far will we allow our faith to penetrate our lives?”
  - b. How should one who has their citizenship in heaven respond when bad things happen to them?
    - 1) Should we respond like the world would, or does Jesus expect something more from us?
    - 2) As we continue to look at the radical life that Jesus calls His disciples to live, let us notice what He says to us about revenge, or getting even when others wrong us.
  
7. In our lesson today, I want to simply look at each verse as we draw some thoughts from each.

### LESSON:

- I. In vs. 38 Jesus talks about the old way of conduct: (Read).
  - A. First, notice the law Jesus was referring to:
    1. Ex. 21:23-25: (Read).
    2. Lev. 24:19-20: (Read).
    3. Deut. 19:16-21: (Read) – This verse puts the law into context.
  
  - B. Several important points to notice from these verses:
    1. In each case the law referred to was one of civil justice.
      - a. These laws were designed to protect both personal and property rights by a judicial punishment merited out by the civil authorities (priests & judges).
      - b. These laws were obviously restrictive in nature, limiting the punishment to fit the crime, and no more.
      - c. An eye for an eye was the worst punishment that could be given.
      - d. These laws were to encourage those people who has suffered personal injury, or the loss of personal property to seek resolution from the courts, and not to attempt to take justice into their own hands.
    2. This law protected society by dealing with those who committed the crimes.
      - a. It protected justice by dealing fairly and exactly with criminal behavior and punishment.
        - 1) The punishment awarded was to fit the crime, nothing more nor less.
        - 2) The law would restrain a vengeful judge from inflicting too severe of a punishment on the one guilty of injuring another.
      - b. It also protected people by assuring that justice was fair and that people received no more or less than they deserved, whether they were victims or criminals.
      - c. This law was intended to stop further violence rising from a vindictive spirit of revenge.
  
  - C. But notice how the scribes and Pharisees perverted the law.
    1. In order to accommodate their own sinful desires they made it into a law that allowed personal retaliation.
    2. It became the justification for inflicting wrong upon another in the name of justice.
    3. It fed that selfish human desire to get even.
    4. Because of their legalistic approach to this law the scribes and Pharisees saw it as a matter of right and duty to personally demand an eye for an eye, etc.
      - a. If you knock out my tooth, even by accident, it is my right to knock your tooth out.
      - b. And I can do it even if it takes me several blows to your face to knock your tooth out.

5. They allowed no room for mercy and forgiveness.
6. Their very interpretation ignored the other laws that disallowed revenge:
  - a. Lev. 19:18: “*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*”
  - b. Prov. 20:22: “*Do not say, “I will recompense evil”; wait for the LORD, and He will save you.*”
  - c. Prov. 24:29: “*Do not say, “I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.”*”
7. The eye for an eye philosophy caused people to be just what God did not want them to be, vengeful.

D. Commenting on this verse, William Barclay said: “So, then, ancient ethics were based on the law of tit for tat. It is true that the law was a law of mercy; it is true that it was a law for a judge and not for a private individual; it is true that it was never literally carried out; it is true that there were accents of mercy speaking at the same time. But Jesus obliterated the very principle of that law, because retaliation, however controlled and restricted, has no place in the Christian life.”

E. Jesus is going to replace the eye for an eye with a higher standard of conduct.

1. The question is how far are you willing to go with Jesus?
2. Are you willing to trust that God will do what He says He will do?

F. In the rest of our text we will see that Jesus was not contradicting the Law of Moses, but rather correcting the conduct of those who were seeking to carry it out in their personal relationships.

1. Jesus reveals to us that God has a higher purpose for our lives than seeking revenge.
  - a. He does not call us to retaliation; rather He calls us to a life of compassion and forgiveness.
  - b. We can either assert our rights or we can live by a higher law.
  - c. We can either live by the standards of the world, or become a testimony to God’s mercy.
2. What Jesus was saying here is that we are never to personally retaliate against other person.
  - a. We are never to take matters into our own hands as if justice depended upon us.
  - b. For when we do that, we merely feed the selfish, sinful desires of our own human hearts.
3. Simply, we sow the seeds for our own destruction when we take the matter of divine justice into our own hands and seek personal retaliation.

II. In vs. 39 Jesus calls for us to be willing to suffer personal insults rather than retaliate.

A. When Jesus says do not resist him who is evil, He was not implying that we should not resist evil.

1. And He was not implying that we should not protect ourselves or our families from harm.
2. Rather He was saying that we are not to take matters into our own hands, as if justice depends on our reaction.

B. In this verse Jesus gave us the solution: Rather than retaliate, turn the other cheek.

1. A slap across the face is almost universally considered as a personal insult, or act of violence.
  - a. To the Jewish mind to hit a man with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as to hit him with the flat of the hand.
  - b. Have you ever wondered why Jesus said, “*the right cheek*”, instead of just saying “the cheek?”
    - 1) The people Jesus was speaking to understand what Jesus meant when he used the term “*right cheek*.”
    - 2) ILLUST.: (Seek a volunteer to demonstrate the “right cheek” slap.)
      - a) Let me illustrate it to you.
      - b) When a right-handed person punches someone else, the blow normally lands on the assaulted person’s left cheek because they are facing one another and the left cheek is the closest target to punch.
      - c) But If I were to hit you with a backhand using my right hand, where does that blow land? - It hits against the right cheek of my opponent.
      - d) Which hit does the most damage physically?
      - e) Which does the most damage to your pride?

2. So the worldly-minded person (someone who is evil) would immediately seek to defend himself when slapped, not so much from physical harm, but from insult.
  - a. They feel they have a right to get back, or get even.
  - b. They want to defend ourselves; to be vindicated; to be compensated.
3. But Jesus calls us to a higher law or standard.
  - a. The man Jesus describes is one who is free from over-concern about self.
  - b. Jesus calls for us to show mercy and compassion, where mercy and compassion are not deserved.
  - c. A citizen in God's kingdom is one who does not need to seek revenge upon a hateful and evil person, and his turning the other cheek is evidence that he is free from any vindictiveness or spite.
4. Here Jesus tells us that when we choose to be His disciple, we may suffer some personal insult or injury for His sake.
  - a. Jesus said that rather than retaliate when insulted; we are to use that as an opportunity to witness to others.
  - b. **ASK:** Are you willing to suffer insult for Christ, or do you have to get back at the person who insulted you us, an insult for an insult?

III. In vs. 40 Jesus talks about suffering the loss of our property for Him.

- A. The law Jesus was referring to did not allow the outer garment to be taken from a person since it protected them from the cold.
  1. The tunic/shirt, or undergarment, was the long, sack-line inner garment made of cotton or of linen.
    - a. The poorest man would have a change of tunics.
    - b. Thus giving up one tunic would be a loss, but not disaster.
  2. The cloak was the great, blanket-like outer garment which a man wore as a robe by day, and used as a blanket at night.
    - a. Most Jews would only have one of these.
    - b. Now it was actually the Jewish law that a man's tunic/shirt might be taken and kept as a pledge, but not his cloak.
    - c. Ex. 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, 27 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."*
    - d. The point is that by right a man's cloak could not be taken permanently from him.
  3. Thus Jesus was saying that it would be better to suffer a small lose than to have an attitude of revenge.
  4. Paul expressed this same attitude to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 6:7-8: *"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? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren."*
  5. The point is that we are better off being taken advantage of than bringing shame upon the name of Christ.
- B. **NOTE:** This does not mean that we should allow someone to take everything we have and do nothing.
  1. The principle is that we are not to allow material things to get in the way of our witness for Christ.
  2. Sometimes in order to follow this principle it will cost us some of our material possessions.
  3. Jesus seems to be showing that insisting on our rights can be used in a spirit of revenge and vindictiveness and He forbids that.
  4. The point is that we are not to be selfish like the world; we are to be different.
    - a. There will be times when our faith in Christ will cause us a loss of property.
    - b. If we are losing it for Christ's sake, then we have to believe that God has something better in mind for us.
  5. How far are we willing to let our faith in Jesus take us?
    - a. To the point of material loss?
    - b. Or will we allow keeping our material things to be more important than spreading the gospel?

IV. In vs. 41 Jesus talks about suffering the loss of our rights for Him.

- A. The illustration Jesus used here was regarding their rights when compelled by a Roman soldier.
1. This was one of the worst things that could befall a Jewish citizen.
  2. The Roman law gave a soldier the right to commandeer local civilians to carry his military equipment or his personal items for one mile.
    - a. This practice especially infuriated the Jewish population of Palestine.
    - b. In fact, historians tell us that the Jews had set up road markers at every mile and as soon as they reached the mile marker they would drop their load and refuse to carry it any further.
    - c. Thus in calling for His disciples to carry it another mile, Jesus was telling the people to do joyfully what was repulsive to them; that is, helping out the Romans who dominated them.
    - d. By alluding to this practice, Jesus was charging His followers to volunteer for extended service, rather than experience outrage or resentment.
    - e. Once again Jesus assumes a new starting point for human relationships based upon kingdom principles that even responds to humiliating situations by doing good.
- B. There are times when it can be a burden to sacrifice our rights, but there are times that we must be willing to do that.
1. The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of this.
    - a. In Philippians 1, Paul said his was in prison for the furtherance the gospel.
    - b. Paul really did not belong in prison, but he went willingly.
    - c. And while Paul was imprisoned, he was the model prisoner, and able to witness to the whole Praetorian Guard while in chains.
  2. But some will object and ask, “Was Jesus telling us that we are to always give up our rights?”
    - a. The answer is, “No.”
    - b. Paul, for example, appealed to his Roman citizenship at times when it served his purpose in spreading the gospel.
    - c. But he also gave up his rights when there was a greater good that could be accomplished for Christ.
  3. How far are we willing to go with Jesus?
    - a. Will we be people who are always demanding on our rights in every situation?
    - b. Or are we willing to sacrifice our rights if it will spread the gospel?

V. In vs. 42 Jesus calls for us to be generous when called upon to do so.

- A. Here Jesus turns from the negative side of things to the positive.
1. Jesus tells us that when we have the opportunity to help people, that we should take advantage of the opportunity.
  2. Behind this statement are a number of O.T. passages that talk about being generous with those who are poor or needy.
  3. The point is that a generous, benevolent spirit eliminates revenge and vindictiveness.
  4. ASK: Can you see an "eye for an eye" man acting with benevolence toward his fellow man?
- B. The question is, “Will we trust God enough to go the extra mile and help people when we have the opportunity?”
1. “Or will you selfishly hoard what God has blessed us with?”
  2. Again, “How far are you willing to go with Jesus?”

CONC.:

1. Jesus calls us to live by a higher standard than the world.
  - a. He calls us to show compassion on those who have wronged us in order to show the love of God through our lives.
  - b. By so doing, we can become a living testimony of the grace and mercy God has bestowed upon us.
2. In each of Jesus' illustrations He proposes a course of action that runs counter to conventional thinking and behavior.
  - a. These illustrations are intended to radically challenge how we think and respond to all instances of abuse, insult, and injustice.
  - b. In an unredeemed world the radical selflessness of genuine discipleship constitutes a powerful witness to the presence of the kingdom and a new way of righteousness.
3. God has a purpose for each of our lives.
  - a. His purpose is to show His grace through His people.
  - b. His purpose is to touch people's lives by His mercy.
  - c. His purpose is to develop our character so that we are conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.
  - d. His purpose is to reveal His kingdom on earth through His people
4. Jesus has called us to a different standard and a different life.
  - a. Sometimes answering His call will involve some tough choices.
  - b. But they are choices that we need to be willing to make for the sake of the Jesus whom we love!
5. The choice is yours.
  - a. You can either choose to take matters into your own hands, or be an agent of the kingdom of God.
  - b. You can assert your rights, or reach out to others.
  - c. You can retaliate or you can show compassion.
  - d. Which will it be??? Which way will you choose???