

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – MATTHEW 5-7

Love Your Enemies, Part 1: Suffering Unjustly with Grace

Matthew 5:38-42

Faith Church of Linden

By Daniel Patz on September 20, 2026

INTRODUCTION

We come this morning to a text that will test our righteousness (our Christ-like Character) and bring us to the heart of what it really looks like in the life of a believer changed by God's grace.

The whole law can be summed up in this: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14). The neighbor in this passage we're called to love here is **the evil one** — the person who seeks to make our life miserable, who treats us unfairly, who seeks to hurt us, sue us wrongly. Scripture calls him our enemy. And we are called to love him. Do have a picture of him or her in your mind? The coworker, family member...that person that claims to be a Christian...perhaps it's the person that cuts you off in traffic on your way to church.

How do we respond to those who treat us so unfairly at work, at school, at home? How do we respond to those who are disrespectful of Christ and us and treat us with contempt because of our commitment to Jesus? How do we face the difficulty of people who carelessly walk on our rights and care only for themselves?

I've entitled this sermon, and the one that follows it, “**Love Your Enemies**”. This week is part one. We'll look at verses 38 through 42, under the title ***Suffering Unjustly with Grace***. I hope you'll see why by the end of this morning.

Here's what I want to say in this sermon, because I believe this text leads us here:

With Christ leading the way, we must suffer unjustly with grace — forgoing all retaliation, not insisting on our rights, and

humbly giving more than is expected — as we entrust ourselves to a Father who judges justly.

We are in the Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew 5-7) and Jesus is teaching us what a greater whole-hearted righteousness looks like. This is the fifth example of a greater righteousness in this sermon. Remember, righteousness is the keeping of God's law in heart and action — embracing the spirit of the law and the letter with wholehearted obedience. It's doing this because we love God, and we have that love because he first loved us and saved us.

We could work through all of the Beatitudes here, but remember where it said, “Blessed are the meek”? The meek are those who are so amazed that God would have any regard for them, especially love and mercy. Meekness is “not weakness — it is God-given strength that enables us to submit to God in every circumstance and with every difficult person. Meekness's posture toward others as “we bear injuries, forgive injuries, and return good for evil”. They do not pursue their own rights, for they know themselves to be debtors of mercy to God's grace, and they treat others accordingly. With that in mind:

TEXT — MATTHEW 5:38-42 (ESV)

38 You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 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. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

1. THE MOSAIC LAW MISUSED

“You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

This is a quotation from the law — Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21. This was law according to kind. It was meant to

protect against a severe retribution that didn't fit the crime — to keep a wrong from becoming a blood feud, restricting people from lashing out in vengeance and escalating the situation. And it was meant to be carried out by the government, through judges — not by individuals settling the score through personal vendettas.

But what's implied here is that the Pharisees had taken this “eye for an eye” and made it something they were entitled to enact themselves whenever they were mistreated — taking personal vengeance and using God's law in a way it was never intended. They focused on the idea that they had the right to justice and to make sure justice was carried out in their person relationships. They used it to get even.

Don't we feel that impulse? Isn't there at least a temporary truth to the old line that “revenge is sweet?”

2. JESUS'S TEACHING ON THE AIM OF THE LAW

Jesus answers in verse 39: “*Do not resist the one who is evil.*”

Some have taken this in the wrong direction, building a case — a view popularized by Tolstoy — that Christians should never fight in a war, serve as a police officer, or protect themselves or others against a wrongdoer (even no self-defense). Now, it is true that if everyone lived by God's rule, we would not need police, military or judges in the land, but that is another matter altogether. This was not what Jesus means by not resisting the one who is evil.

“Do not resist the one who is evil.” Does this mean that if a homeless man wants your car, you should hand it over? Does it mean we should let an evil person attack our children, our family, our home? My friend Jason, in college, came out of a store late one night and saw, across the parking lot, a woman being assaulted by a man in her car. He ran over, pulled the man off her, and defended her — and later testified against him in court. A wrong reading of this passage would say he shouldn't have done that. But that would be a wooden, silly, literalistic interpretation, and we must not go there.

Let me also say this: Does “do not resist the one who is evil” mean we put ourselves in the way of abuse — that we tolerate manipulation, or

even enable an abuser, especially one who will go on to abuse others? No. Jesus is not handing us a passage to make us doormats. Spurgeon put it memorably: this text calls the Christian to be the anvil while wicked men play the hammer. But look at what an anvil actually is — not soft, not passive, but strong and sturdy enough to take the blow without being destroyed by it. Christ is the pattern here: he stood up fiercely for the weak and the lowly, but never to defend himself or serve his own interests. This passage does however confront the modern instinct of "I just need to look out for myself." But it doesn't hand us an unnecessary martyrdom either — enduring something we could rightly stop, or staying silent in a way that only enables an abuser to keep hurting people. These are real exceptions, and they call for wisdom and grace to apply well. But let's not let them cause us to miss the heart or principle of what Jesus is after here — the spirit of the law, which is love, held together with the specific, hard command in front of us.

What Jesus means is that the follower of Christ seeks no retaliation — He doesn't seek to get even - this is the acceptance of injustice without revenge or redress. And yet he goes further — like he has done elsewhere. This is a greater righteousness. He's bringing us to the heart of the law, which is to love our neighbor as ourselves by withholding our vindictiveness and looking on that person with generous grace. We've seen this thread throughout the sermon: we're not just to withhold anger from our brother, but to seek reconciliation in love. Here Jesus gives four illustrations of this idea and works it out.

Four pictures of grace. Do you see it? Suffering unjustly with grace

1. Turn the Other Cheek (v. 39)

"If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Picture what's happening: a slap, specifically on the right cheek — to a right-handed striker, that's most naturally a backhand. In the ancient world (and ours), this wasn't first a matter of pain. It was a matter of insult, a deliberate act of contempt, one person publicly asserting superiority over another. It carried enough weight in Jewish culture that by Jesus's day, striking someone this way could bring a fine, and

it wasn't unusual for the insulted party to drag the offender into court over it — not unlike a modern defamation suit (reputation is at stake).

So when Jesus says turn the other cheek, is he telling his disciples to invite a second blow? No. He's reaching past the blow itself. He's telling them that demanding their dignity is not the Christian's response to an insult. Jesus said blessed are those who are persecuted for His sake or righteousness— his disciples will be reviled, and their reputation is already secure as children of God. They don't need a courtroom to prove it. They are to be longsuffering and patient – enduring evil. Let's see this gracious endurance...

2. Give Up Your Cloak Too (v. 40)

“And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”

Jesus isn't picturing a man left naked in the street — that would miss the point entirely. His hearers knew that a man's cloak was protected under the law almost like nothing else was. Exodus 22:26-27 required that if a cloak was taken as a pledge for a debt, it had to be returned by nightfall, because it was the poor man's only covering against the cold. It was, in effect, the one thing the law guaranteed you couldn't permanently lose.

That's exactly what Jesus tells his disciples to be willing to part with verses vindictiveness — don't run to rights – don't focus on what the law says you should have.

3. Go the Extra Mile (v. 41)

“And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”

This comes straight out of life under Roman occupation. Roman soldiers had the legal right to conscript a civilian into carrying their equipment for exactly one mile. It's the same idea Matthew shows later when Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus's cross (27:32). The average Jew in the crowd knew what it felt like to be stopped on the road and pressed into this — not for any wrong they'd done, but as a standing reminder that they were a subjugated people. It was a humiliating reality. And it was an easy practice for a soldier to abuse.

Jesus says: when it happens, go — and don't stop at the mile you're owed. Go a second, voluntarily. Show, in that moment, that you answer to a greater authority than the one giving the order. As Sinclair Ferguson has put it, the Christian does the unexpected, because grace makes him seek to win others through love rather than insist on his own rights.

4. Give to the One Who Asks (v. 42)

“Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

No law required this. But Jesus shows his disciples that a law given to restrain evil was never meant to be the ceiling of their righteousness — it was meant to point toward a whole life marked by grace. The question stops being what am I owed, or what's in it for me, and becomes what has God called me to do to show love to the person in front of me. In Ferguson's words: ***we do not make our rights the basis of our relationships with others. We are willing to take the lowly place, and to pay the price of imitating Christ.***

Four pictures, one pattern — never insisting on what's owed, always giving more than what's asked.

OUR FOUNDATION: CHRIST WHO LED THE WAY

Let's return, then, to where we started:

With Christ leading the way, we must suffer unjustly with grace — forgoing all retaliation, not insisting on our rights, and humbly giving more than is expected — as we entrust ourselves to a Father who judges justly.

The foundation and source of our being able to live this way — from the inside out — is our Savior and our Father. Let me lay 2 texts before you — 1 Peter 2 (start in verse 19) and Isaiah 50:6-9.

Jesus leads the way. He is the model — and in modeling it, he did more than show us; he rescued us from the bondage of our evil and made us his own.

1 Peter 2:23 – “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.”

I think it possible Jesus has Isaiah 50 in mind and he lived it out:

Isaiah 50:6-9 ESV 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. (7) **But the Lord GOD helps me;** therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. (8) He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. **Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.** (9) **Behold, the Lord GOD helps me...**

He entrusts himself to his Father. He knows that God will vindicate him. He knows that God is near. He knows the Lord will help him. The same chapter pictures him giving his back to those who strike him and his cheeks to those who pull out his beard, not hiding his face from disgrace and spitting (v. 6) — and still able to say, “He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me?” (v. 8).

INVITATION AND OPPORTUNITY – TRUSTING ENDURANCE

Let me invite you and encourage you with the opportunity

1 Peter 2:19-21 ESV For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. (20) 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. (21) 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.

Because of what Christ has done, we can love those who are evil — even our enemies. We are called to walk in his steps — light in the world! Because the Father will judge faithfully. He will not turn a blind eye; he will take everything into account. Mindful of God, we can surrender our rights because, in the end, we will enjoy all things in a

way that's hard to even imagine now. And even now, he gives us everything we need — he will not withhold anything that would be truly good for us.

I invite you to this Savior and to the Father! Dear Christian, I invite you once again to your Savior to help you in the difficult situation where you must apply this passage — and it hurts. He is a faithful Savior, and he has saved you. No one has been treated as unjustly as Jesus has been treated. There is no justice in this world like the justice that will come one day. Every sin will be paid for — either by the sinner, or by the blood of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:24-25 ESV 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. (25) For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Remember Joseph? A young man who sought to walk uprightly — who was different and special, and whose own brothers despised and rejected him and eventually betrayed and sold him into slavery. It didn't seem fair that God would let this happen to him. He suffered unjustly. He was faithful in the house of his slave master and was mindful of God — and even there slandered by Potiphar's wife. Yet it was a gracious thing in the sight of God that He kept entrusting himself to God. But in God's right time, he was brought out of prison and raised to glory. He became great in the land of Egypt, and the rescuer of the very brothers who had betrayed him. Would he get even? Grace not revenge was his way — he entrusted it to God. What man meant for evil, God intended for good (Genesis 50:20).

We have a Savior, Jesus — who is greater than even this Joseph of Genesis — who was betrayed by those who should have worshiped him, and he offers salvation to all sinners who will accept his gift of eternal life. He has called us to walk in these steps and enables us to have a relationship with God is that we are able.

Let us live and give grace — the grace of our Lord — to those who treat us unjustly.