

Revealing Real Righteousness III

People Matter More

Matt 5:38-48

As Jesus sat down to teach His disciples on the mount, He began with a list of promised blessings to those who bore the characteristics of His kingdom, a section of His sermon that we call the be-attitudes.

Right from the beginning Jesus sets out to establish the fact that He is more concerned with who we really are than what we merely appear to be before others.

From there, Jesus encouraged His listeners to live like salt and light in the world that may reject and persecute them, continuing by informing His listeners of His relationship with the law as He came not to destroy it but to fulfil it, which He did through:

1. **Prophetic Realization** – He fulfilled the predictive prophecies of the OT.
2. **Perfect Righteousness** – He satisfied the righteous standard of the OT.
3. **Proper Revelation** – He brought the right understanding of the OT.

He proceeded to present to His followers a better understanding of the law, applying it more deeply than others in an effort to reveal to them what real righteousness through the law looked like. What we have seen is that real righteousness is not only about our actions, but involves the attitudes and affections of our heart.

We continue on the same vein this morning, looking today at how real righteousness reacts to people who attempt to insult us, ask from us, and hurt us.

READ: 5:38-42

- Jesus again addresses a common law that was being wrongly applied in His time. Initially this law was intended to bring equality of punishment from the civil authorities who in the ancient world might demand a life for an eye. By this time, the law was being applied more generally as if were an obligatory response in every case.

NOTE: We ought to recognize that His examples address the response of individuals when they are personally ill-treated. He is not attempting to establish new laws for civil government, but principles that were to govern the hearts and minds of those who were His followers.

- In these verses Jesus uses two examples that are connected to our dignity and two that relate to our property.

How should we respond when people insult us?

1. People matter more than our pride.

a) It's better to receive than retaliate. 5:39

- Within the ancient world a slap on the right cheek was related more to **personal insult** than **physical injury**. A slap to the right cheek was in fact one of the most grievous insults in much of the ancient world, and an offense worthy of prosecution under both Roman and Jewish law.

NOTE: It is wrong to think that evil men should never be resisted, or that physical attack should never be defended.

- To the contrary, there are certainly times when evil must be resisted, and when good people must be defended. The point here is that when it comes to personal insult, it is better to receive more insult than retaliate.

NOTE: This attitude is not only something taught by Jesus, but also further developed and encouraged by the Apostles.

1 Peter 3:8-10

8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

Rom 12:17-21

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 Therefore

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1 Thessalonians 5:15

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

- This is one of those principles that is simple to understand yet difficult to apply practically, because when we are personally insulted our carnal inclination is to respond with retribution and defend our dignity. It helps then for us to remember that other people matter more than our pride!

b) It's better to give than grumble. 5:41

- Under military law, a Roman soldier could command a Jew to carry his pack for one Roman mile which is nearly 1.5kms, but no more than that. You can imagine such a request was unwelcome and that it would be grumbled against.

NOTE: Jesus is telling His followers to go beyond what was required and walk an extra mile out of their own free will. In doing this, the followers of Jesus would transform this exploitation and manipulation into a free act of love.

- Imagine the types of questions that a Roman soldier would have for a Jew who instead of grumbling chose to give? Such an out of character act of generosity would provide a wonderful witness of their king and an opportunity for them speak of Him.

APPLICATION: While we see the importance of people, we also see the importance of witness. When we choose to respond according to the standards established by Christ, we present to the world a testimony of what it is to belong to His kingdom, and an opportunity to tell others about Him!

NOTE: Others might respond to such an act of kindness negatively because the Jews despised the Romans. The followers of Jesus however were to extend kindness and generosity in every circumstance.

How should we respond when people want to take from us?

2. People matter more than our possessions

a) It's better to surrender than strive. 5:40

- The tunic was the inner garment, whereas the cloak was something worn over the tunic.

NOTE: In Exodus chapter 22:25-27, the Israelites were commanded never to take the outer garment as a pledge for a loan, and that if they did, they were to return it every evening.

- This reveals the value of these garments within the law and Jewish society. For those who are poverty stricken this may represent the extent of their possessions. This then presents a powerful image encouraging a willingness to surrender one's possessions rather than strive within the courts to retain them.

NOTE: Romans 13 teaches us clearly that governing authorities are established by God to execute wrath on evil doers. Courts, law enforcement, and punishment are all established by the Lord for good and justice. When it comes to courts, there may be times when litigation is

necessary but the attitude that Jesus desires for His followers to have is one that values peace with people over personal possessions.

APPLICATION: I know that this offends your flesh, in much the same way it would have offended those who heard Him speak it. Jesus is not afraid of causing offence to our flesh in order to direct our hearts and minds to a standard far beyond the inclinations of the human heart.

NOTE: When the world tells us to follow your heart, we ought to know that it is far better to follow our King!

APPLICATION: It is possible that you may have allowed the carnal inclinations of your own heart to rule your life, and in this case, you sit upon the throne of your life rather than Jesus. May you repent of this idolatry this morning and surrender once again to Him! Surrendering all to Christ is the first step to surrendering your possessions for the sake of others.

b) It's better to relinquish than refuse. 5:42

- Jesus offers general principles of His kingdom, but certainly doesn't discuss these subjects exhaustively. He is not asking us to give without discretion, but even in our discretion we ought to exercise a generosity to those who ask!

1 Tim 6:17-19

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Eph 4:28

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

- In the early church there were some people that were taking advantage of the generosity of the church and being unwilling to work they burdened others becoming busybodies in the church. Listen to how Paul addresses this issue:

1 Thessalonians 4:10-12

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; 11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

- Discretion shouldn't mean that we become stingy, if anything it means that we should become more deeply involved in giving.

James 1:27

27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

APPLICATION: Again, the natural inclination is self-preservation, but the supernatural instruction is that we give to those who ask. We may not always be able to give to them what they ask for, but our hearts ought to be willing and ready to give whatever we are able.

NOTE: Jesus now takes these seemingly impossible commands and applies them further to relationships where we would never imagine ourselves responsible to extend such grace – to our enemies!

How should we respond when people intentionally hurt us?

3. People matter more than our pain.

a) It's better to love than to loathe. 5:43-44a

- The law did teach love toward neighbors, and while it implied a special consideration from Jew toward Jew it nowhere explicitly teaches a hatred for your enemies in the way we might think of hatred.

Lev 19:17-18

'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 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.

NOTE: Merriam-Webster defines hatred as (*extreme dislike or disgust – ill will or resentment that is usually mutual*) The Greek word used here it means to detest or to love less. The Hebrew word used in Leviticus 19 links the idea of hatred to an enemy or a foe, so to love an enemy seems counter intuitive.

- The command of Christ to love others is a continual theme throughout the NT. We are commanded to love our families, the brethren, our neighbors, but perhaps the most difficult command to accept is this one, how can we possibly love our enemies?

NOTE: Jesus not only gave us these standards, but He also lived a life that exemplified this real righteousness!

b) It's better to rise above than respond in kind. 5:44b

- Jesus hammers home the same point, that as citizens of His kingdom we are not to stoop to evil but overcome evil with good!

NOTE: When someone speaks evil of you – do you bless them? When someone hates you, do you do good for them? When someone spitefully uses you and persecutes you do you pray for them?

- No matter what happens to us, the Lord's desire for us is to continue to rise above.

EXAMPLE: Paul, Silas, and the Philippian Jailer. Acts 16:25 He chained them up, but they set Him free!

4. People matter to our God!

- The example that we have for love is God Himself! Though it is natural to love those who love us, only those who operate according to a supernatural standard will love those who hate them!

NOTE: Jesus directed our attention to our heavenly Father, saying that the true sons of the father will bear the image of their father. We also do well to recognize that Jesus Himself lives an exemplary life when it came to these things, the greatest example of His love being demonstrated upon the cross.

Rom 5:6-10

6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

- Jesus reveals His love for us in that when we were yet His enemies, He died for us. We can love as He loves only when we know Him and choose to walk in His love!

1 John 4:7-11

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

APPLICATION: Most of us have people in our lives that we could say are enemies to us, while they will held to account for what they have done we remain responsible for how we respond. According to Christ the proper response is love.

NOTE: In John 15, Jesus encourages His disciples to abide in Him like a branch would abide in a vine. Through this abiding relationship Jesus promises that they would bear fruit. Listen to Paul

as he identifies the fruit that comes through this abiding relationship in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Gal 5:22-26

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

- Though Jesus lays out impossible standards here, as He reveals for us what real righteousness according to the law would look like, but He does not leave His followers powerless to live and love as He commands. The only way however that we can hope to live this way is through the strength provided through relationship with Him and the empowering work of His Holy Spirit in our lives!