

Lifestyle of the Kingdom

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The Kingdom of God Series

Matthew 5:38-48

Over the past several months I have been doing a series on the Kingdom of God. I have tried to make a few points over the course of this series. This is going to be the last message in this series, I believe. But the few points that I have tried to make are these:

First of all the kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus. What he said and what he did, all that he was about concerned the kingdom of God. And if you don't understand the kingdom, you don't understand the ministry of Jesus or the ministry of the apostle Paul, who preached a similar message.

We have also found that there were three essential elements to Jesus' kingdom message and ministry. Jesus taught that when the kingdom came it would mean a defeat of the enemies of God's people. He taught that when the kingdom came, God would bring in a reign of blessing, peace and prosperity – healing is part of the kingdom. The third thing Jesus taught was when the kingdom came, God's people would be called to a distinctive lifestyle in which they lived wholly unto God.

Today I want to talk about the distinctive lifestyle of the people of the kingdom. What does it look like for a person to be a follower of Jesus? What are the marks? How do we recognize someone to be a true follower of Jesus Christ?

One of the marks that Jesus lays out for us over and over again in his teaching, and also in his example and model, is the mark of non-retaliation when we are offended. The lifestyle of kingdom people has a great deal to do with issues of getting even, revenge, and retaliation.

There was an article in the newspaper just a few days ago which reported that one of the most often hit websites in recent weeks is a site devoted to two guys who buried something like 20-30 pounds of raw meat in their neighbor's yard. They buried this raw meat in his yard because they found out that their neighbor had read a postcard addressed to them. So they set up a video cam of this maggoty, rotting meat in their neighbor's yard to punish him for reading their postcard.

The Tokyo police recently arrested a man who was denied entrance to a graduate school 14 years ago. Since he was denied entrance to graduate school, he has averaged about 10 phone calls a night between 8-2:00 a.m. to a former professor who he blames for his lost opportunity. The police estimate that

14 years of annoying calls totaled up to 50,000 calls to his former professor. 50,000 calls. Revenge? He has taken it to a whole different level.

Revenge...retaliation...getting even. These are the normal impulses of every one of us when we are offended or insulted. It is our knee jerk reaction. It is just what comes out.

The administrator of the national highway traffic safety administration recently declared that road rage is now the #1 traffic problem, moving ahead of drunk driving as the biggest threat to public safety on the road. The problem is so serious that insurance companies are hard at work devising ways to deny insurance to aggressive drivers. Every year there are thousands, not 1000, but thousands, of violent incidents reported by the police nationwide that take place on our roads. Observers say that this is just the absolute tip of the iceberg. That for every police report and newspaper article, there are hundreds of thousands more incidents, which never get reported to the authorities.

A study has been done on people's driving habits. Listen to how average Americans have responded to various questions regarding their driving habits and ask yourself how you would have responded.

1. I tailgate other drivers to encourage them to speed up or go faster. Do you occasionally tailgate to encourage people to speed up? 68% of Americans say they do.
2. I occasionally use obscene gestures with other drivers. 80% of Americans admit that they do.
3. If someone cuts me off, I sometimes return the favor. 45% of Americans say they sometimes cut people off who have cut them off.
4. I feel like most other drivers in my city are complete idiots. 60% of Americans say most other drivers are idiots.
5. If someone "flips me off" I return the gesture. 53% of Americans say that if someone flips them off on the road, they return the gesture.

You have probably read of a recent horrific incident regarding two fathers who began fighting at a youth hockey game. One had made a comment to the other. Their words accelerated to an exchange of obscenities and pushing. Eventually one of the dads came back to the hockey rink where he pummeled the other dad, who was smaller, and literally beat him to death. The shocking thing about the incident is that it produced a ground swell of reports from around the country regarding adult behavior at youth sporting events. Anyone who has had a child in sports has watched an adult there, or themselves, make a complete idiot of themselves – yelling, shoving matches, cursing, and obscenities.

Revenge...retaliation...getting even. Of course, this is not just confined to adult behavior. The naturalness of seeking revenge and getting even is in the heart of children. It is part of our fallen humanity and starts when we are very young.

There is a great children's book by a woman named Judith Viorst called *I Will Fix Anthony*. This younger brother is complaining about the way his older brother, Anthony, treats him. He says, "My brother, Anthony, can read books now, but he won't read any books to me. He plays checkers with Bruce from his school, but when I want to play, he says, 'Go away or I will clobber you.' I let him wear my Snoopy sweatshirt, but he never lets me borrow his sword. Mother says deep down in his heart Anthony loves me. Anthony says deep down in his heart he thinks I stink. Mother says deep, deep down in his heart, where he doesn't even know it, Anthony loves me. Anthony says deep, deep down in his heart he still thinks I stink. When I am six, I am going to fix Anthony. When I am six I'll float, but Anthony is going to sink to the bottom. I will dive off the board, but Anthony will change his mind. I will breathe in and out when I should, but Anthony will only go glub, glub, glub...right down to the bottom of the pool. When I am six my teeth will fall out and I will put them under the bed and the tooth fairy will take them away and leave dimes. But Anthony's teeth won't fall out. He will wiggle and wiggle them, but they won't fall out. I might sell him one of my teeth, but maybe I won't. Anthony is chasing me out of the playroom. He says I stink. He says he is going to clobber me. I have to run now, but I won't run when I am six. When I am six I will fix Anthony."

Does that express it well? There is an old joke in which an ex-wife is walking along a beach where she finds a magic lamp. She rubs the lamp and a genie comes out. The genie says, "Thanks for freeing me. I will grant you three wishes." She says, "Anything I want?" The genie says, "Yes, anything you want, except that whatever you ask for, your ex-husband gets twice as much." She said, "You mean if I wish for something, my ex-husband gets double the amount?" The genie said, "That's the condition." She said, "okay, give me a million dollars." Immediately she received a million dollars, but her ex-husband has this blinding flash of light and there are 2 million dollars placed at his feet. She says, "okay, give me a huge diamond necklace." She received a new diamond necklace and immediately her ex-husband gets one twice as big. Then she says to the genie, "okay, I know what I want for my third wish." The genie says, "What is it?" She says, "Scare me half to death."

Over against the road ragers and the Tokyo phone caller, the little boy who wants to fix his brother Anthony and this ex-wife, we are going to consider the lifestyle, the mark, the identifying badges of the people to whom God's kingdom has come. I have called today's talk "The Lifestyle of the Kingdom." Let's pray.

If you have a Bible, I would like you to open up to Matthew 5. This is probably the most famous sermon that's ever been preached in the history of the world. It is called The Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:38-48

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth,' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

One of the great challenges of this text is that it is fraught with all kinds of interpretative problems. I mean truly the church has taken this particular passage and bent it in more directions than almost any other passage I am aware of in the New Testament. I mean it's been used to launch political movements, to justify running around naked in the street. People have gone a thousand different ways with the text, beginning with the first verse, which reads: *You have heard that it is said, 'An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth.'* People who are critical of the Bible, those who are antagonistic to the Christian faith will often quote this phrase: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" to attempt to demonstrate how terrible the ethics of the Old Testament were.

They say, "How can you claim that this ancient book, this Old Testament ethic, has anything to do with God?" We are talking about the most primitive kind of vengeance – there's no forgiveness, no mercy, there is no end to the cycle of violence and retribution. Any book that would say "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is all about blood and guts and hostility. How can you claim God inspired this kind of ethic when it appeals to the worst of our human instincts? It is exactly what the little boy in the book was talking about when he said, "I will fix Anthony. When he jumps in the pool he is going to go glub...glub...glub right down to the bottom, while I float to the top."

Is this "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" some sort of primitive ancient ethic that is unworthy of any kind of civilized way of relating to people who have injured us?

Let me share with you a basic principle of understanding Old Testament law. A lot of people don't understand why the Old Testament laws were written the way they were. The basic principle of Old Testament law is that the Law of Moses was designed to restrain and restrict our excesses. The law was given to keep

within bounds our evil tendencies. Let me illustrate. If you are taking notes, you might want to jot down Matthew 19 when Jesus taught on divorce.

He said that God's plan from the beginning was to unite a man and a woman and the two would become one flesh. Then he concluded with words that are repeated in many Christian wedding ceremonies. He said, "What God has joined together, let man not separate." And after Jesus talks about the permanence of marriage, the Pharisees immediately ask a question from the Old Testament law from the book of Deuteronomy. They say to Jesus, "Well, why then, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" In other words, if God's original purpose was permanence in marriage – no separation, no divorce, that man shouldn't separate what God has joined together, then why do we have this command of Moses, why this Old Testament law that a man should give his wife a certificate of divorce?

Jesus answered and here is the key language. Jesus said, "It was for your hardness of heart that Moses permitted you to divorce." In other words, this Old Testament law about a certificate of divorce was given because without it you would have done worse. This Old Testament law about a certificate of divorce was given to restrain your tendency to do even worse evil to your wives. Because of your hard, unconverted hearts, had you not been given a legal process by which you can end what God had intended to be a permanent relationship, you likely would have just tossed your wife aside. You would have put her out on the streets. You would have sent your wife away without any provision or brought other women into your homes to compete with her. She would have been thrown away and have no clarity about her legal status. The law was given, Jesus says, to keep you from doing worse.

And that is a basic principle you need to keep in mind when you read Old Testament legal provisions. The law was a holding pen, the apostle Paul says. In Galatians 4 he says, "Before faith came we were held prisoners by the law, locked up, until faith should be revealed." Until Christ converts somebody by his Spirit, what keeps us in bounds is law. And this is, by the way, the essential principle of law. To check our worst instincts. That is not only what we are talking about with God's law, but also the laws of the state. The reason we have laws is to restrain evil, to control our tendencies toward excess.

So we have this law "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." And what is the law about? How does it restrain excess?

Well, it says to us the punishment must fit the crime. That we don't use excessive punishment. We don't shoot someone who cuts us off on the highway. We don't assault someone who talks to our girlfriend. You don't bury 30 pounds of raw meat in someone's yard if they have read a postcard of yours.

My nephew told me a few weeks ago that some of the neighborhood kids poured paint remover all over his car. It destroyed the paint job. It cost him several thousand dollars to have his whole car stripped and repainted because he asked a few of them to turn down their music. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" keeps us from pouring paint remover all over someone's car for the offense of them asking us to turn down our music.

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is not primitive. It is the basis for our legal system. We say in jury cases that the award of damages should not be excessive. That reparations should make a person whole, but not turn the plaintiff into a lottery winner.

A second objection that people have is that Jesus is being totally unrealistic when he says, *"Don't resist an evil person. When someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to them the other also and if they want to sue you and take your tunic, let them have your cloak as well. We should give to everyone who asks...[and then he culminates it with] love your enemies."* This new ethic of Jesus, many people say, can not be done. Well, if we were transported out of the world. If we lived out in the country in some little community where everyone was Christian perhaps we could do this stuff that Jesus is telling us to do. One of the accusations against this text is "Jesus, you are being unrealistic. You don't know how wicked people are. How they will take advantage of you. Jesus, this is unrealistic. You have a naïve view of life."

Now, let me tell you something. One of the things you can never accuse Jesus Christ of being is unrealistic or naïve. He is not giving us an ethic for some utopian Christian commune out in the country somewhere. If anyone ever knew the hard edge of this world, if anyone was ever totally clear-eyed and completely truthful about the sheer wickedness of other human beings, it was Jesus. Whatever else you say about Jesus' teachings, never accuse him of being unrealistic or idealistic. Never say to yourself, "Wouldn't that be nice if it were so? But we all know it is not so. This is impractical. It cannot be done." No one ever knew more about what was in the human heart than Jesus.

And no one better lived his teachings than Jesus. He literally did turn the other cheek. Not just metaphorically. He literally did turn his cheek to be slapped again and to have his beard pulled out. He literally did allow his clothes to be taken from him. And Jesus literally did, from the cross, pray for his enemies. This is not unrealistic.

Throughout the history of the church the people of the kingdom have attempted, however, to misapply these verses by calling various governments of the world to turn the other cheek, to not resist evil people. Throughout history there has been a Christian utopian movement where, on the basis of the words here in Matthew 5:38ff, they have advocated unilateral disarmament. They have pressured the government to get rid of their weapons. They pressured the government to not

resist the expansion of communism or National Socialism. Perhaps the most famous example in history of someone who attempted to apply these words to society in general, especially to the State was the Russian author Leo Tolstoy. He was the 19th century writer who wrote War and Peace.

Very simply – I do not believe that Jesus was intending to give instruction to the government, to the State, to the legal system regarding how the government conducts its affairs. Jesus is not saying to the police, “Put down your weapons. Don’t restrain someone who is breaking into a house. By serving them and not resisting, they will return to their senses and return all of the property.”

Jesus is not saying to the police, “Don’t stop speeders. If you just turn off your sirens and turn off your radar guns, people will naturally come to a place of obeying the speed limit. Jesus is not saying, “Police, refuse to investigate the build-up of gangs in various neighborhoods. If you just leave them alone, instead of beating people up or robbing store owners, the gangs will be converted into Boy Scout troops, which will go around doing good deeds and helping elderly women across the street.

Jesus was not talking to the State, to the governments, to the police force when he said, “Don’t resist the evil person. Turn the other cheek.” And I am not saying, friend, by the way, that there isn’t some wisdom in the practice of non-retaliation in terms of ending cycles of violence at a national level. Certainly in the Middle East or in Bosnia, people would have much to learn about breaking cycles of violence by studying Jesus’ word. But his words were not primarily aimed at the State or the government.

We need to remember that Matthew 5:38-48 was not said in a vacuum. It is part of the Sermon on the Mount. It is part of a whole sermon. You just don’t take someone’s words from the middle of a sermon and read them out of context. The Sermon on the Mount is a message given to kingdom people – to people whose hearts have been changed by the invasion of the kingdom of God in their lives. The Sermon on the Mount is written for those who are born again, who have been converted. The Sermon on the Mount is written for the people of God, who have a distinctive lifestyle. He is laying out a style of life for his followers, not for the whole world. This stuff is impossible unless the Spirit of Jesus has entered you.

Why am I so sure that this is for followers of Christ? Well, look at how the Sermon on the Mount begins. In Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The message is for those who are poor in spirit, who have come to a place of recognizing their total spiritual poverty. It is for people who have come to God and said, “God, I have tried life my own way and on my own terms and it hasn’t worked. I have ended up a total failure. My efforts produced nothing in terms of spiritual success.”

It's for the poor in spirit. It is for those who mourn over their sins and have come to be horrified by who they are and what they are capable of. It is for people who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Matthew 5:38-48 is not laying out a way of life for the State or the government. It is not speaking to people naturally laid back. We are talking about the lifestyle of kingdom participants who are living in this world, not in some utopia, but in this world. Who are living out the implications of Jesus coming.

And it is plain that we are talking about followers of Christ and not the whole world. If you look at Matthew 5:46, he says, *"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? If you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than the others? Do not even the pagans do that? Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."* The ethic, the behavior, the lifestyle that Jesus is calling for is a lifestyle that is different than the pagans, different than the world, different than the government. A lifestyle that can only be lived by the empowering of Jesus' spirit.

Well, what is that lifestyle of God's kingdom people? What marks the Christian out? What does Jesus say? Does he say what marks the Christian out is that you don't smoke and they do? You don't drink and they do? You speak in tongues?

When we want to see that the kingdom has broken into someone's life, we just don't measure the level of their religious activity. Religious activity is very deceptive. You could go to church and not be a member of the kingdom. You could read your Bible and not be a member of the kingdom. You could pray and not be a member of the kingdom. Jesus says in Matt. 7 you can even cast out demons and heal the sick and not be a member of the kingdom. It is not a matter of religious activity that marks out a member of the kingdom.

What is it? What is the sure sign that you are a member of the kingdom? What tells you that you are truly a converted person?

Jesus says what tells you that you are truly a converted person is the way you respond to evil people. Verse 39, *"Do not resist an evil person."* The most distinctive thing about a member of the kingdom is that you do not respond to offenses or hurt or injury the way the rest of the world does. The most natural thing in the world is to seek to get even. To retaliate. To seek revenge. How do you know that the spirit of Jesus has entered your life? Because you no longer seek revenge. Because you find you are changed and you no longer seek to retaliate or get even.

I want you to see this. Jesus said, *You heard it was said 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' but I tell you do not resist an evil person.* He is laying out a principle of non-retaliation. And then he illustrates that principle of non-retaliation with four examples. Immediately, again, Jesus is not asking us to practice

denial. He doesn't say to us, "Look, when someone does you dirty, I want you to look below the surface of your life and remind yourself that the person probably meant well. They are probably good at heart." What the mother tried to convince the little boy of – deep in your brother's heart he really loves you. His brother was more truthful. Deep in his heart he said, "I really think you stink."

There is always this tendency toward a weak, water-downed kind of liberalism. The sort of thing a doting grandmother might say. "Oh, I just know that my grandson, who is on his way to jail, is good at heart. Sure, he's been arrested for a string of armed robberies and assaults, but if given a chance, he would do the right thing." Jesus is far more realistic than that. He says, "Don't resist an evil person."

There are people who are evil. Who are obnoxious. Who are annoying. Who drive others around them crazy. And some of us are those people in another person's life. We always think it is the other person. You are someone's annoying person.

Well, what do we do with such folks? First illustration is in verse 39: *If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.* What's he talking about? To be struck on the right cheek is not just an act of violence. It is an act of contempt. In the ancient Middle East and even today we are talking about a personal insult. To strike someone on the right cheek with my right hand means that I slapped them with the back of my hand. To be slapped with the back of the hand is to be personally insulted in the Eastern World.

Have you ever been personally insulted by someone? Of course you have. There is lots of insulting behavior, isn't there? You have invited someone to your house several times. They never return the invitation. You have given someone a gift and they don't say thank you. They insult you by their ingratitude. They give you a gift and it's clearly a hand-me-down. The bowl has obviously been used. It has dried food on it. Or the dress has obviously been worn. You are put down in a meeting at work. When you are insulted, when you are cut off in traffic, when your neighbor parks in your space, or plays their music too loud, or someone insults your intelligence by talking down to you or uses a racial or religious slur.

There are a million ways for people to be personally insulting. They could be thoughtless, ungrateful, stupid, annoying and obnoxious. When someone is like this with you, what are you to do? Seek revenge? Cut them off? Punch them in the nose? Use a racial slur back?

A relative of mine has systematically cut off from their lives virtually every single person on the planet other than my family and two other people because they have been hurt, because they have been offended, because they have been insulted. There are exactly six people in the world they relate to.

When Jesus says “turn the other cheek” what is he saying? Is he saying, “become a doormat?” Parents, be a doormat to your kids. Let your child curse you out. Scream at you and lie to your face. Steal from your purse. Sneak out of the house at night to do drugs. And you just do nothing. Is that what Jesus is saying? Let your child do as they please? Cut school, sleep with their girlfriend under your roof? And don’t resist them? Just let your child become a monster?

Of course, he is not saying that. What we owe to each person is love. Love. This whole ethic of non-retaliation is in the context of love. So parents, don’t seek revenge. Don’t retaliate against your child in kind. Don’t merely protect your wounded pride. Fathers, from an ego need, a need to preserve your reputation or your standing in the community, don’t attack your child. But love toward your children requires that you check their selfishness. Love requires that your children learn the principle of consequences for their actions. Love requires that you assist your child to not be self-centered and self-indulged. And that you don’t turn this selfish person out onto an unsuspecting world.

Jesus is not saying by “turn the other cheek” that you should become the world’s doormat or punching bag. He is not asking a wife to continue to live in a situation of abuse or to allow violence against her children. He is not even speaking about a person intervening to defend the defenseless or to restrain a bully.

Let me put it as plainly as I can make it. Jesus, by this teaching, is not asking you to become a weak person, a doormat, someone who the rest of the world just wipes their feet on. Quite the contrary. Jesus is saying that the people of the kingdom are the strongest people in the world. Because the people of the kingdom are people who have ultimately taken control of their feelings, or better stated, the Spirit of God has gripped them so that their feelings and natural tendencies are brought under control.

The people of the kingdom are folks who have learned self-control. They have mastered their tendency to whine or their tendency to anger or to helplessness or to revenge or to get even or escape in a bottle or escape into sex, TV or drugs. That stuff has been brought under the Spirit’s control. Far from being the weakest people in the world, the people of the kingdom are the strongest because they have mastered themselves. They no longer do what comes naturally. They do what comes unnaturally – they bear insults.

Rather than respond in kind to the person who flips you off on the road, the people of the kingdom are strong and smile. Rather than refuse to give another gift unless a friend or relative sends you a thank you card, the people of the kingdom, where appropriate, will give another gift.

See, Jesus is saying, “I can make you strong. I can enable you, when I come into your life, to bear and forebear.” Do you see this mark of bearing and forbearance in your life?

Jesus goes on to say, “And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” What is he talking about? He is talking about the people of the kingdom’s response to having their legal rights violated. Not just personal insult, but having one of your legal rights violated. The Law of Moses said that a person had an unalienable right to their cloak. That you couldn’t have everything taken from you.

Now there is a lot of bad teaching out there that says that Jesus and Paul essentially teach us that we have no rights. They say the problem with the world is that all of these people are running around asserting their rights. People claim they have a right to everything – a right to happiness, a right to express their sexuality any way they see fit, a right to a high paying job, a right to never experience injury or hurt – without suing someone. Christians understand that we have no rights. Let’s get it straight.

That’s not what Jesus teaches. That’s not what the New Testament teaches, that you have no rights. Verse 38 lays out your rights by law – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That’s what justice is. You have rights. Jesus, however, is saying to a member of the kingdom, to people for whom the strength of the Spirit has come, I want you regularly to renounce your legal rights.

Members of the kingdom are people who say this: I have a right to sue. I could assert my rights. I have a right to enforce this contract to the letter of the law. I have a right to defend myself, but I won’t. I will let you, in this instance, take advantage of me. Not because I am weak. Not because I am stupid. Not because I don’t understand my rights. Not because I can’t afford a very good lawyer and crush you like a bug.

But I won’t. Out of the strength of the Spirit, I will restrain myself. I will not retaliate in kind. Members of the kingdom will often be called upon to reject the advice of their lawyers. okay, I understand what our legal position is. I could enforce this non-competition clause against a former employee. I could make them not take any more of my business. I could go for the jugular against my ex-spouse, or my ex-employer, or ex-partner, or family member, but I am not going to. I am not going to spend the next five years of my life wrapped up in claims and counter-claims – eaten alive by a desire to win justice.

Now, again, love is the context of this. Sometimes love demands that we pursue legal action. It is not loving to other women for a rapist to be let go onto the streets again. It may not be loving to other women in a company to let a sexual harasser go scott free. It may not be loving to your employees to allow someone to illegally shut down your business. But members of the kingdom are folks who

often do not assert what is legally theirs by right. Instead, they surrender their rights.

Members of the kingdom are folks who have learned to deal with inequality in power by serving and by going the second mile. Verse 41: *If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.* We are talking about situations where there is an inequality of power. Jesus is talking about the common occurrence in his day where a Roman soldier would commandeer an ordinary citizen and force them to carry a load for a certain period of time. A guy is walking along the street and a soldier comes up and says, "You carry my bag for a mile."

There are lots of situations you are in that you can't get out of that are unfair and that you hate. Maybe you are a secretary and your boss loads you down. There is an inequality of power. Or you are a child and you are dealing with your parents or your in-laws. There is an inequality of power. You are a player and you are working with a coach. You are an employee working with a boss. How do you deal with situations where you are forced, through unfairness, to deal with a more powerful person?

There are lots of ways to handle inequalities of power. I used to work with a secretary, who would feign ignorance. The way she dealt with requests is that she would pretend to be the stupidest person in the world. She would make it so difficult for me to get anything, I would just do it myself. I would say to her, "I need Joe's phone number."

She would say, "Uh-huh."

I would say, "Do you have it?"

She would say, "Maybe."

I would say, "Well, could you look it up?"

She would say, "I guess."

I would say, "Would it be possible for you to look it up now?"

She would say "I could probably break away from what I am doing. I will have to look for my phone book."

I would say, "Do you know where your phone book is?"

She would say, "I am not sure."

By the time I got done pulling teeth with her, I realized maybe I won't ask her for things again. She got rid of the inequality of power by feigning to be the stupidest person in the world.

Your in-laws drop in for a few days to pay you an unexpected and unwanted visit. You can't get out of it. They are forcing you to carry their bags one mile. What do you do? Seethe? Gossip about them?

You get a call from Children's Ministry here at Vineyard. The coordinator says, "Well, you have joined the church and one of the responsibilities of membership is to serve in some way in Children's Ministry. We regularly assign people for a

couple of weeks every quarter.” You say, “How dare you commandeer me to walk with you one mile” and you try to get out of it. You get angry and depressed. You decide, “I am not going to show up. No one is going to force me to do what I don’t want to do.” You yell at the recruiter. You do it, but inwardly you plot their destruction.

Here’s how Jesus says you know that you have become a member of the kingdom. God’s Spirit in you can alter the balance of power. When someone forces you to go one mile with them, they force you to do what you don’t want to do, but they can force you because you have an inequality of power, voluntarily go a second mile. Friend, you forced me to go the first mile. The first mile was coerced. The first mile I had no choice in. But the second mile is my choice. In the second mile I am free, I am not your slave. The second mile was my decision. I did it because I am a member of the kingdom. You forced me to type your paper. I didn’t want to do it. But I am going to go the second mile with you and put it in a nice plastic cover. You forced me to accommodate you in love by dropping in unexpectedly at my home. But I am going to go the second mile with you and take you out to a really great restaurant and pay for the meal. You forced me to run one lap, coach, I am literally going to run that second mile.

Jesus is not calling for weakness. He is calling for strength, for liberty, for freedom for members of the kingdom.

Finally, he says, *Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.* He is not saying become a soft touch. Whenever an alcoholic or a professional beggar comes up to you, just empty your pockets. He is certainly not saying that every single solicitation you get over the phone during dinner for this or that charity or selling aluminum siding, you say, “Fine, come on over. I will get ten new storm windows.”

He is using these things to force us to think and to force us to a decision. When you feel put upon, when someone is asking you for some property, some money, some help, do you respond the way you always used to respond or has something happened because you are a member of the kingdom? Is your hand on your property much looser now? The way it is with your legal rights? The way it is with your personal dignity and honor? Do you give people just what they deserve or do you go beyond that? Beyond the letter of the law and show them mercy?

Several years ago a relative of mine asked to borrow a substantial sum of money. I had loaned them money in the past, which was never repaid. I said, “Let me think about it.” I went before the Lord hoping that his answer would be, “It’s okay, you don’t have to give. They didn’t pay you back last time, forget it. This is a black hole.” As I went before the Lord, his Spirit moved inside of me and he kept saying one thing over and over again. “I want you to show them mercy. Give them what they don’t deserve.” I felt great joy in it. There was

great liberty. It was a free voluntary act. okay, okay. I am a member of the kingdom.

What drives the changed life of members of the kingdom? What drives it? Two questions, very quickly. *You have heard it was said love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* Someone offends you, they insult you, they take from you, they are pushing on your legal rights – the first question you need to ask yourself, if you are a member of the kingdom, “what action can I take that will serve this person’s salvation?”

You have enemies. Sometimes your enemy is named ex-spouse. Sometimes your enemy is the ex-spouse of your mate. Sometimes they are the former boyfriend or girlfriend of your present partner. Sometimes your enemy could be a sibling, an alcoholic parent. You have enemies. Who is your enemy? A creepy co-worker? Who are they? Jesus says, “Pray for them.” He reminds us that we are not alone in the world with our enemies. It’s not just you and your enemies. Me and my enemies. You and your ex-spouse. You and your obnoxious neighbor. It is you and your enemy and God. Pray, he says. Pray.

Your prayer sounds something like this: Lord Jesus, what must I do in this situation to insure that your death for this person is not in vain. How, Lord Jesus, may I be a good witness to this person, who treats me like an enemy?

A German pastor named Helmut Thielecke once remarked this way, he said, “You know, when you die and you stand before the Lord Jesus in judgment, you will not get off the hook by saying to Jesus, ‘I did to this other person what was legally correct. I gave them what they deserved. I did justice by them. Everyone I talked with said I was justified in doing what I did. I did nothing that he did not do to me first.’ We aren’t going to be able to say that as we look at the nail prints in the hands of our great crucified judge, the words will die in our mouths.” I gave him what he deserved.

Which leads to the second question: How has God treated you? What will serve this person’s salvation? How has God treated you? Jesus says, *That you may be sons of your Father in heaven, he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the unrighteous and righteous.* How has God treated you? How has God treated me? Has God treated us according to the law, giving us what we deserve? Has God returned evil for evil in your life? As you relate to God, has he responded to every injury to his honor every time you trample his good name into the mud? Has the Lord Jesus Christ practiced road rage with you, flipping you off when you flip him off?

Or has he borne your obnoxious behavior and my obnoxious behavior? Has he borne our ingratitude and our sin with great patience and endurance? Has God ever gone the second mile with you? How about the 1000th mile? To what

extent has the Lord gone to have a relationship with you and me? Has he been generous? Has he treated you with an open hand or has he been tight-fisted? How has God treated you?

The Lord says, "The members of my kingdom, who call God their King, will treat others the way their Lord has treated them." Let's pray.

Lifestyle of the Kingdom

Rich Nathan
September 9-10, 2000
The Kingdom of God Series
Matthew 5:38-48

I. Three Common Errors by Kingdom People (Matt. 5:38-42)

- A. This is Primitive
- B. This is Unrealistic
- C. This is for the Government

II. Four Great Marks of Kingdom People

- A. Personal Insults...Bear (Matt. 5:39)
- B. Legal Rights...Surrender (Matt. 5:40)
- C. Unequal Power...Serve (Matt. 5:41)
- D. Property Issues...Give (Matt. 5:42)

III. Two Big Questions for Kingdom People (Matt. 5:43-48)

- A. What Will Serve the Other Person's Salvation? (Matt. 5:44)
- B. How Has God Treated You? (Matt. 5:45)