

October 30, 2022 Jesus Takes Life To Another Level Matthew 5:38-48

It has been 53 years since I entered the halls of Knox College to begin to study, in order that I might be a candidate for ministry. Something that is often misunderstood: students who study at our colleges in The Presbyterian Church In Canada are not being prepared for a career in ministry in the church. They are, and I was studying in preparation to be candidates for ministry. Only Presbyteries can admit candidates to ministry. They examine, they pray over, and they ordain ministers.

So! 53 years ago when I certified by the Presbytery of Superior as a student at Knox College, Dr. Glenn was the principal of the Knox College. He was also the professor who taught the courses on the New Testament. And occasionally, a student would challenge him on some point that he had made, on the basis of what the Scripture literally says. I have never forgotten the manner in which he responded to such a challenge. It usually went like this: "Well if we are going to be literal about what it says, let's be absolutely literal." And then he would proceed to parse the text before us...word, by word, by word.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "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 with him one mile, go two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.” (Matthew 5:38-42)

I don't think we immediately grasp just how radical the teaching of Jesus is at this point. First of all let's look at the “eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth” quotation. Exodus 21:23-25 is even more detailed. “If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” In Leviticus 24:20 the Scripture says, “If anyone hurts his neighbour, whatever he has done must be done to him; fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.” In Deuteronomy we find this text: “Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”(Deuteronomy 19:21)

Jesus says, “But I tell you, Do not resist the evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone wants to sue you to take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” You and I cannot unwrite what has been written. Jesus raises life lived with others to a whole new level.
His teaching is radical.

First of all, and it is easy to see why this upset the Pharisees, HE sets aside this teaching in the Law of the Old Testament. HE sets aside Scripture. Not so that things might be

more liberal. In fact Jesus calls us to a lifestyle that is harder than that proposed by the law. Someone hits you, let them do it again. Someone wants your shirt, do not just let them have your shirt, but your cloak as well. And I am going to say it again...Jesus sets aside Scripture. Jesus put HIMSELF above some of the brutal teaching in the Law. In fact Jesus calls us to fight brutality with love. Not just forgiveness, but radical, self-sacrificing love.

It is tempting to say talk is cheap. But Jesus did not just talk about it did HE? HE was crucified for us. Did nothing to avoid it. HE neither criticized HIS captors, nor did HE try to fight for HIS freedom, or his rights. HE did not say it was unjust...the crown of thorns, the whipping, the penalty of death. HE put HIS blood on the line for the things HE had taught and teaches.

And this matter of forcing you to go one mile, well go two miles, was not a metaphor. One of the things Roman soldiers would often do in their conquered provinces was just this: they would grab some poor unsuspecting person and make them carry their packs. Everything but their weapons, and their shields.

Simon of Cyrene was not an exceptional case, it happened all the time. Jesus is carrying the cross beam for the cross to which his hands will be nailed. Because of the loss of blood from the whipping he stumbles and falls. He literally cannot do another step carrying the cross. So they grab an innocent bystander, a spectator who is watching the soldiers

take their sentenced prisoner to Golgotha, and they make him carry it, so that Jesus will live long enough to die on the cross.

What was the alternative? Well, one of the soldiers could have carried the cross. Not on your life! They were in charge. They were not guilty. They grabbed Simon, and made him do it. There was no debate. And Simon knew what would happen if he resisted or asked them to get someone else to do it. He could have been killed on the spot. Jesus says...carry it even farther than Golgotha if they want it. Give more than is demanded. Just do it.

And there is a rationale to this radical teaching on the part of Jesus. We get into that in the second part of the reading I shared with you moments ago. Jesus says love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. And HE does not mean pray for them to stop persecuting you. You could try that. But Jesus is urging us to pray for the blessing of God to be on those we do not find it easy to like, or to live with. I begin to see that Jesus is not calling us to do something that is easy but something that is really hard. Something we rebel at considering. Something we plainly do not want to do. Jesus is talking about living life on a whole different level. As a child, as a servant of God.

Jesus asks the question, "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? HE is saying, there is no challenge there. That's easy. Anyone is capable of doing that. Even the tax collector is capable of that. Try loving the

unloveable. Try loving the person who goes out of their way to make you uncomfortable. Try loving people who hurt you. Yes, it is hard. In fact, it is very much like being crucified. It hurts. It involves risk. It could be dangerous. That scares me. I would rather turn and walk the other way. Maybe run.

Two big lessons this morning. There are moments in Jesus ministry when he does set aside some teachings in the Bible. And HE does not call us to something that is easier, HE calls us to something that is hard to do. HE wants us to think like HE does. HE wants us to reflect the radical love of God that saves people. Even when...perhaps especially when...it is going to cost us. It cost Jesus to save us from our sinfulness.

Jesus takes life to a whole new level. And HE invites us to join HIM living the life to which the Father calls us.

Let us pray;

Lord you open our eyes and YOU open our minds. YOUR apostle Paul said he wanted to show us the most excellent way to live. He talked about living without love as being like a cracked musical instrument that could not make the sound for which it was forged. He said love does not envy or boast or keep a record of wrongs. Help us to love people as YOU do. Help us to grasp that love does not fail. Help us to love like Jesus. Amen