

## Sermon on The Mount.

### Matthew 5:38 – 42. Jesus and Retaliation. (The RIGHT of payback.)

**38.** “You have heard that it is said, ‘Eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’<sup>1</sup>. **39.** But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other also. **40.**

And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have the cloak as well. **41.** If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. **42.** Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

#### A. Preamble.

Polysemy<sup>2</sup> - bringing clarity regarding the word Retaliation. I have used the word ‘Retaliation’ as my title for this session on our church series “Sermon on The Mount.” Briefly, retaliation is an action of harming someone because they harmed you or someone close to you. There are similar words for retaliation such as **retribution – literally ‘payback’, revenge and vengeance.**<sup>3</sup> This rule made the punishment fit the crime, thereby preventing the cruel and barbaric punishments that characterised many ancient countries such as Babylon and Mesopotamia.<sup>4</sup>

It is this retaliation - ‘payback’ model or normalised behaviour that Jesus wants to address in this passage of **Matthew 5:38 - 42.**

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<sup>1</sup> **Exodus 21:24.** Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

The “eye for eye” rule was instituted as a guide for judges, not for personal relationships or to justify revenge.

This rule made the punishment fit the rule, thereby preventing the cruel and barbaric punishment that characterized many ancient countries.

Jesus used this principle to teach us not to retaliate or take vengeance or seek revenge.

**Lev 24:20.** Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.

Basically, this rule was saying the punishment should fit the crime and not go beyond.

**Deut 19:21.** Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Again, these rules were set in place as guiding principles for judges and people who held positions of authority when dealing with relationship breaches and violations. This was ensuring that the punishment fit the crime.

**Verse 5:39 c.f. to Luke 6:29.** If someone strike you on the cheek, turn to him the other also. If some take your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

**Verse 5:42 c.f. to Luke 6:30.** Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

2. Polysemy =(Puh-Li -Suh – Mee) many English words have **multiple meanings** often based on varying usage and context

3. Revenge is a personal attack of retaliation driven by anger, while vengeance is a more intense dramatic noun representing the punishment itself.

4. NIV Bible- Footnotes page 139, 21:24,25.

**B. Text – Matthew 5:38. You have heard that it is said, ‘Eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.**

**First glance of this text, it appears to allow retaliation, right of payback.**

The original ‘eye for an eye’ was a principal finding it’s impetus or beginnings in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy intended to limit vengeance or ‘payback’ by making sure the punishment did not exceed the crime.

This code or legal framework was used as a guiding principle for people in authorities<sup>5</sup> within the geographic jurisdiction/boundary of Israel.

This principal of law, code regarding an eye for an eye was never intended for a personal vendetta or personal pay back or vengeance.

**Deuteronomy 32:35.** Vengeance is mine, and recompense: Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.

**Romans 12:19.** Beloved do not avenge yourselves but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” Says the Lord.

It was there to protect the public, punish offenders and deter crime.<sup>6</sup>

In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus clarifies that he did not come to abolish the law of Moses but to fulfil its true interpretation. He elevates the law from mere outward compliance to internal, heart-level righteousness, setting a standard higher than that endorsed and prescribed by the Pharisees. Jesus brings out the true and new intent.

**C. Historical Background.**

I want to look at the ancient past of Babylonia. About 3700 years ago. About 3 to 400 years before Moses. In Babylon they lived a King called Hammurabi.<sup>7</sup> King Hammurabi also ruled over Mesopotamia. Modern day Iraq.

King Hammurabi developed what we know today as the Codes (laws) of Hammurabi.<sup>8</sup> Round about 1755-1751 B.C. There were 282 laws within the code of Hammurabi. Theologians and Historians tell us that King of Hammurabi was a follower of Shamash the sun god, furthermore it is purported that Shamash gave him these laws.<sup>9</sup>

Part of these Codes-laws of Hammurabi included ‘an eye for an eye.’ Dare I say it and I will say it – it could be said, “that may be Moses plagiarised this from Code of Hammurabi.

**D. Introduction.**

Plain and simple these verses tell me or us, if someone hurts me, I can hurt them back. It is my RIGHT to inflict pain on them. If he or she, causes harm to my eye, then I can inflict pain on their eye.

I have a right to inflict pain.

I have a right of payback.

I have right to retaliate.

I have a right to exact revenge.

Our Rights.

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<sup>5</sup> Priest, Kings, Judges and leaders within the nation of Israel, who administered their civil, religious courts. Deuteronomy 16, 18, 19 and 20.

<sup>6</sup> NIV application commentary. Wilkins, Matthew Michael J. Pg 248.

<sup>7</sup> King Hammurabi-aka-King of Shinar-Amraphel - Genesis 14:1. Pg 248.

<sup>8</sup> NIV application: Commentary: Matthew, Michael J. Wilkins. Pg 248.

<sup>9</sup> Google – code of Hammurabi.

Over these thousands of years our psyche (within the heart of man) has built these inalienable<sup>10</sup> rights to inflict pain, to payback, to retaliate, to exact revenge. Here in New Zealand, we have a number of laws that spell out these rights.

The maori word for retaliation or payback is utu.

1. NZ Bill of Rights Act 1990 (NZBORA.)
  - . Civil and Political Rights.
  - . Electoral Rights.
  - . Peaceful assembly.
2. Human Rights Act 1993.
  - . Disability.
  - . Religious belief.
  - . Political opinion and many others

**E. Text – 5:39. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other also.**

Here, Jesus moves from the Torah<sup>11</sup> first five books of the Old Testament to a personal pronouncement. **Verse 39 - 39a BUT I TELL YOU.** Jesus challenges his disciples to look at a new behavioural pattern, at new way of dealing with these generational laws. These laws handed from God to Moses and now Jesus recounts these generational laws. Which have existed for the last 1400-1500 years and for us today, these Mosaic quoted laws that have existed for the last 3400-3500 years.

For us here in New Zealand/Aotearoa our laws basically came into existence in 1854. While our initial laws were based on British laws, full legal independence was achieved in 1947. We are a very young country particularly when we stand alongside, the nations in the Old and New Testament.

Jesus in **Matthew chapter 5 pronounces nine “I” statements.**

1. **Matthew 5:18. I tell you the truth.**
2. **Matthew 5:20. For I tell you.**
3. **Matthew 5:22. But I tell you.**
4. **Matthew 5:26. I tell you the truth.**
5. **Matthew 5:28. But I tell you.**
6. **Matthew 5:32. But I tell you.**
7. **Matthew 5:34. But I tell you.**
8. **Matthew 5:39. But I tell you.**
9. **Matthew 5:44. But I tell you.**

Jesus’ usage of the “I” word is **reminiscent of his seven I am** Statements in John’s gospel. **e.g. I am the light of the world - John 8:12.**

When we look back into **Exodus 3:14.** We see the conversation between Moses and the burning bush. **“Tell them. ‘I AM WHO I AM.’**

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<sup>10</sup> Rights, possessions, qualities that cannot be taken away, surrendered or transferred to someone else. As Christians here in New Zealand, we have an inalienable right to worship, a right to pray, a right to read the bible. As citizens of New Zealand, we have a right to life and liberty, freedom of expression, freedom from discrimination.

<sup>11</sup> It refers primarily to the “Five Books of Moses (Genesis- Deuteronomy), broadly covers all Jewish authoritative teachings. Torah-Derived from the Hebrew root (yara) meaning to guide, teach and instruct.

The **Exodus 3:14** verse allows us to hear a conversation between God and Moses (The burning Bush). A conversation set in holy ground, A conversation between a Holy God and an ordinary human being. A Holy God revealing his holy name.

That holy name is carried in John's gospel outlined in the **seven I am(s)** and now God the Son, Jesus uses the "**I**" **nine times in Matthew 5**.

Jesus presents four opportunities for his disciples to serve those who offend them and instead of retaliation, but to do good to those who offend you physically.

1. The first opportunity, **verse 39 - 39b. do not resist an evil person. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other also.**

Jesus is not asking us to be pacifist or never to resist evil forces as mentioned in **James 4:7<sup>12</sup>** and **1 Peter 5:9<sup>13</sup>**. I think if a believer along with his or her family are threatened or under attack it is not wrong to take up defence or seek appropriate justice against the wrong doer.<sup>14</sup>

Let us look at how Jesus dealt with those who caused him harm. When he **was falsely accused, wrongfully arrested, crucified and died he did not retaliate, HE DID TURN THE OTHER CHEEK**, he did not say, "**do you know who I am?**" He did not say, "**do you know who my Father is?**"?

**Paul in Romans, sums it by this verse; 12:21. "Do not be overcome by evil. [Allow me to add my rendition to Romans 12:21 – Do not be overcome with anger and retaliate, Do not be overcome with vengeance, do not be overcome with shouting your rights, by saying do you know I am, but like Jesus turn the other cheek.] But...overcome evil with good.**

I think **Matthew 26:53**, absolutely highlights Jesus' obedience to the will of his Father; **SURRENDER AND SUBMISSION. 26:53. Do you not think I cannot call on my father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels. (approximately 72,000 angels)**

Jesus was NOT addressing those who came to arrest and falsely accuse him. Jesus was addressing his supporters.

2. The second opportunity, **verse 40. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have the cloak as well.** Verse 40 continues along this theme of retaliation. How do we as believers respond when some sues us as well as asking for our personal property, such as our clothing in this context. In the times of Jesus, a man could be sued for his under garments, and also **sued for his outer garment, his cloak<sup>15</sup>. Exodus 22:26 – 27.<sup>16</sup>** Until the sunset, then it must be returned.

Here, Jesus is saying, give him your cloak beyond sunset. Do not retaliate but give him your cloak as well and give it beyond sunset. There are no boundaries and time limits when giving.

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12. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

<sup>13</sup>, Resist him firm in your faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

<sup>14</sup> Boice, James. The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 – 7. Commentary. Pg 135.

<sup>15</sup> **Boice, James. The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 – 7. Commentary. Pg 138.**

<sup>16</sup> **If you take your neighbours cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset. Because his cloak is the only covering, he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear for I am compassionate.**

This thought of giving property – personal property without return, can be an intimidating and very challenging particularly when we have worked all our lives. **Matthew 19:21.**<sup>17</sup> Again Jesus, challenges our very heart, about our property.

3. The third opportunity, **verse 41. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.**

In ancient times government and military officials could requisition the help of local civilians for official business.<sup>18</sup> This official business included, courier of correspondence, unpaid labours to be road builders, build fortifications for safety of their town.<sup>19</sup>

Jesus is saying if a Roman soldier instructs you to carry their military backpack for one mile go two miles and he was not to do it grudgingly and with obvious resentment, but to do it cheerfully and good grace.<sup>20</sup>

**John 19:17. Jesus carries his own cross.**<sup>21</sup>

4. The fourth opportunity, **verse 42. Give to the one who ask you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.**

**Finally, we have no right to our money.** What a way to conclude this session Jesus in verse 42. Give to the one who ask you! Do not turn away the one who wants to burrow from you.

We seem to work doubly hard and we are conscious a good portion is syphoned to national tax, local tax (rates), insurance companies **and now, Jesus is saying give it away to those who ask, as well not turning away the ones who want to burrow.**

Jesus confronts our deeply entrenched behaviour patterns regarding our responses to.

1. **Our safety** - Violence inflicted on us.
2. **Our personal property.** Our inner garments. Property that is relevant and intimate.
3. **Our service** to our neighbours and community. Jesus' time they were Roman oppressors and now.
4. **Our money.** Give to those who ask for it.

**Jesus is saying, the law says, but I say, here is a new way, a new model regarding your behaviour patterns** about violence, property, service and money.

A lot to take in, a lot to deal with, a lot of change, it is to over whelming, it is too much. Jesus did I sign up for all this when I became a Christian?

#### **PRAYER – 2 Corin 5:21 - 1 Corin 15:57 - PRAYER**

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<sup>17</sup> Jesus answered, **“If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.**

<sup>18</sup> NIV application commentary. Wilkins, Matthew Michael J. Pg 250.

<sup>19</sup> ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Boice, James. The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 – 7. Commentary. Pg 138.

<sup>21</sup> **Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)**

**Sermon on the Mount.  
Matthew 5:38 – 42.**

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39. But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other also.  
40. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let hm have the cloak as well.  
41. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.  
42. Give to the one who ask you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

**Sermon on the Mount.  
Matthew 5:38 – 42.**

**Retaliation.**

Retribution. Revenge. Get even. Payback.

**Historical Background.**

Babylonia – Mesopotamia 3700 years ago

350 – 400 years before Moses.

King Hammurabi – Codes (Laws) eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

**Sermon on the Mount.  
Matthew 5:38 – 42.**

**Introduction.**

First glance of Matthew 5:38 – 42, allows and grants permission for retaliation.  
Right to inflict pain. Right of payback. Right of revenge.

**Purpose of these laws.**

- Protect the public.
- Punish offenders.
- Deter crime.

**Text. Matthew 5:38**

You have heard it said, eye for eye and a tooth for a tooth.  
Exodus 21:24. Leviticus 24:20. Deuteronomy 19:21.

**Sermon on the Mount.  
Matthew 5:38 – 42.**

**Text. Matthew 5:39 (a).** But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other also.

1. ...I Tell you...appears nine time in Matthew 5.
2. Johns gospel reminds of the seven I am (s). John 8:12. I am the light of the world.
3. Exodus 3:14. I AM WHO I AM.

**Text. Matthew 5:39 (b).**

1. James 4:7. 1 Peter 5:9.
2. Romans 12:21. Overcome evil with good.
3. Matthew 26:53. Surrender and Submission.

**Sermon on the Mount.  
Matthew 5:38 – 42.**

**Text. Matthew 5:40.** And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let hm have the cloak as well.

- Personal clothing. Exodus 22:26-27. No boundaries. No time limits.
- Matt 19:21.

**Text. Matthew 5:41.** If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

- Go the extra mile. Roman soldier. John 19:17. Jesus carries his cross.

**Text. Matthew 5:42.** Give to the one who ask you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

- Give to the one who ask. Do not turn away. Give to the burrower. Finances.

**Sermon on the Mount.  
Matthew 5:38 – 42.**

**Jesus confronts our deeply entrenched, deeply rooted behaviour patterns regarding;**

- Our safety – right to retaliation, right of payback.
- Our personal property.
- Our Services. Go the extra mile. Free of cost.
- Our Finances. Give willingly.

**2 Corin 5:21.** God made him who had no sin to be sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**1 Corin 15:57.** But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory Through our Lord Jesus Christ.