

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 5 (PART 7)

MATTHEW 5:38-42

THIS IS ADDRESSING RETRIBUTION, RETALIATION AND JUSTICE. THERE ARE TWO EXTREME WAYS TO DEAL WITH SUCH MATTERS. ONE OF THOSE OPTIONS WOULD LOOK LIKE THIS: IF SOMEONE POKES YOU IN THE EYE - YOU CAN KILL THEM. AFTER ALL, THEY STARTED IT, AND YOU SHOULD GET THE LAST WORD! THE OTHER EXTREME WOULD BE IF SOMEONE POKES YOU IN THE EYE YOU DO NOTHING OR SAY NOTHING, BECAUSE LIFE IS HARD AND YOU PROBABLY DESERVED IT.

(THIS SECTION IS TALKING MOSTLY ABOUT INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND NOT RULES FOR AUTHORITIES AND NATIONS.) IN THE MOSAIC LAW, YAHWEH OUTLINED A SYSTEM OF RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE THAT WAS BASED ON EQUITY RATHER THAN ONE UPMANSHIP. THIS IS THE PRINCIPLE JESUS IS REFERENCING IN THIS SECTION.

LEVITICUS 24:17-22

EXODUS 21:23-25 - "BUT IF THERE IS ANY FURTHER INJURY, THEN YOU SHALL APPOINT AS A PENALTY LIFE FOR LIFE, 24 EYE FOR EYE, TOOTH FOR TOOTH, HAND FOR HAND, FOOT FOR FOOT, 25 BURN FOR BURN, WOUND FOR WOUND, BRUISE FOR BRUISE.

DEUTERONOMY 19:21 - "THUS YOU SHALL NOT SHOW PITY: LIFE FOR LIFE, EYE FOR EYE, TOOTH FOR TOOTH, HAND FOR HAND, FOOT FOR FOOT.

AS WE HAVE SEEN THROUGHOUT THIS SECTION, JESUS QUOTES THE ORIGINAL OLD TESTAMENT COMMAND AND THEN TEACHES IN LIGHT OF THE COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD OR PRACTICED INTERPRETATIONS. IN THIS CASE, JESUS GIVES THREE CASE STUDIES. THESE THREE EXAMPLES CAN BE BEST UNDERSTOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS DAY, IN LIGHT OF THE OTHER RABBIS AND THE ROMAN WORLD.

MATTHEW 5:39 - BUT I SAY TO YOU, DO NOT RESIST AN EVIL PERSON: BUT WHOEVER SLAPS YOU ON YOUR RIGHT CHEEK, TURN THE OTHER TO HIM ALSO.

IF ANYONE SLAPS YOU ON THE RIGHT CHEEK PICTURES A BACKHANDED SLAP GIVEN AS AN INSULT (A RIGHT-HANDED PERSON WOULD USE THE BACK OF THE HAND TO SLAP SOMEONE ON THE RIGHT CHEEK). JESUS SAYS TURN THE OTHER TO HIM ALSO. HERE IS WHAT THE RABBI'S SAID:

"ONE WHO STRIKES ANOTHER MUST GIVE HIM A *SEZA*. RABBI YEHUDA SAYS IN THE NAME OF RABBI YOSEI HAGELILI THAT HE MUST GIVE HIM ONE HUNDRED DINARS. IF HE SLAPPED ANOTHER ON THE CHEEK, HE MUST GIVE HIM TWO HUNDRED DINARS. IF HE SLAPPED HIM ON THE CHEEK WITH THE BACK OF HIS HAND, WHICH IS MORE DEGRADING THAN A SLAP WITH THE PALM, HE MUST GIVE HIM FOUR HUNDRED DINARS. IF HE PULLED HIS EAR, OR PULLED OUT HIS HAIR, OR SPAT AT HIM AND HIS SPITTLE REACHED HIM, OR IF HE REMOVED THE OTHER'S CLOAK FROM HIM, OR IF HE UNCOVERED THE HEAD OF A WOMAN IN THE MARKETPLACE, IN ALL OF THESE CASES, HE MUST GIVE THE INJURED PARTY FOUR HUNDRED DINARS. THIS IS THE PRINCIPLE OF ASSESSING PAYMENT FOR HUMILIATION CAUSED TO ANOTHER: IT IS ALL EVALUATED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE HONOR OF THE ONE WHO WAS HUMILIATED, AS THE GEMARA WILL EXPLAIN." (MISHNAH BAVA KAMMA.8.7)

THE IDEA OF THIS IS IF YOU TURN YOUR CHEEK OFFERING ANOTHER CHANCE TO SLAP, THE PERSON WOULD BE FORCED TO SLAP YOU WITH THEIR RIGHT HAND PALM - WHICH WOULD BE THE SLAP GIVEN NOT AS AN INSULT TO DEGRADE SOMEONE BUT THE SLAP AMONGST EQUALS. RATHER THAN TELLING US TO SLAP THEM BACK AND ESCAPE THE SITUATION, JESUS IS SAYING THAT BY TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK, YOU'RE MAKING THE PERSON TREAT YOU AS AN EQUAL WHICH WAS ABSOLUTELY WHAT THEY WERE TRYING TO AVOID!

MATTHEW 5:40 - "IF ANYONE WANTS TO SUE YOU AND TAKE YOUR SHIRT, LET HIM HAVE YOUR COAT ALSO.

IF SOMEONE WANTS TO SUE YOU TO TAKE YOUR SHIRT, THAT WOULD BE A PROBLEM BECAUSE ALL MOST COMMON PEOPLE WOULD HAVE LEFT IS THEIR COAT OR TUNIC. SO RATHER THAN THE TIRESOME BACK AND FORTH OF LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AND HE-SAID-SHE-SAID ARGUMENTS, DON'T JUST OFFER YOUR SHIRT, OFFER YOUR COAT AS WELL!

THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE WHAT JESUS IS SPEAKING HERE WOULD EITHER GET A CHUCKLE OR GASP FROM HIS AUDIENCE. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A SHIRT OR A COAT, YOU'RE STANDING BEFORE YOUR OPPONENT NAKED (OR JUST IN YOUR UNDERWEAR). IN A SHAME/HONOR CULTURE YOU CAN IMAGINE THE ORIGINAL PERSON WHO WANTED TO SUE YOU FOR YOUR SHIRT CHANGING THEIR MIND ABOUT THE WHOLE THING.

JESUS IS TEACHING A NEW WAY - DON'T JUST GET BACK, DO THINGS IN A WAY THAT APPEALS TO A HIGHER STANDARD AND CAN EVEN TURN THINGS IN YOUR FAVOR, BUT IN A WAY THAT ISN'T VIOLENT OR RETALIATORY.

MATTHEW 5:41 "WHOEVER FORCES YOU TO GO ONE MILE, GO WITH HIM TWO.

IN NT TIMES ROMAN SOLDIERS HAD THE AUTHORITY TO PRESS CIVILIANS INTO SERVICE TO CARRY LOADS FOR THEM. THEY WERE ALLOWED TO COMPEL YOU TO CARRY THEIR PACKS ONE MILE - NO MATTER WHAT YOU WERE DOING OR WHERE YOU WERE GOING. JESUS SAYS RATHER THAN SAYING NO AND REBELLING, DON'T JUST CARRY IT ONE, CARRY IT TWO (THE PHRASE "GOING THE EXTRA MILE" COMES FROM THIS REFERENCE). ONLY A FELLOW SOLDIER OR FRIEND WOULD CARRY SOMEONE'S LOAD LONGER THAN THE LEGAL 1 MILE - AND SO JESUS IS AGAIN TURNING THINGS AROUND. THE SCENARIO STARTS WITH A RULING EMPIRE'S REPRESENTATIVE EXERTING THEIR AUTHORITY OVER A PEASANT - BUT THE STORY ENDS WITH THE PEASANT ELEVATING THEMSELVES TO A FRIENDSHIP LEVEL. CAN YOU EVEN IMAGINE HOW THE SOLDIER MAY HAVE RESPONDED?

MATTHEW 5:42 - "GIVE TO HIM WHO ASKS OF YOU, AND DO NOT TURN AWAY FROM HIM WHO WANTS TO BORROW FROM YOU.

JESUS IS LIKELY REFERENCING ANOTHER OLD TESTAMENT TRUTH, FOUND IN DEUTERONOMY

DEUTERONOMY 15:7-11

AS HIS MANNER IS, JESUS SPEAKS TO THE HEART OF A PERSON ON THESE MATTERS. IT IS SO EASY TO BECOME HARDENED BECAUSE OF BEING MISTREATED. THAT ONE TIME YOUR NEIGHBOR BORROWED YOUR CASSEROLE DISH AND ACCIDENTALLY SHATTERED IT ON THEIR TILE FLOOR TEMPTS US TO NEVER LET ANYONE BORROW SOMETHING OF OURS AGAIN.

WE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO THINK THAT IF WE GIVE SOMETHING TO SOMEONE, THEY MAY MISUSE IT OR NOT GIVE IT BACK. PERHAPS WE WILL ONLY GIVE TO PEOPLE WHO WE KNOW WILL GIVE TO US (MORE ON THIS IN THE NEXT SECTION OF VERSES). JESUS IS CALLING FOR HIS DISCIPLES TO HOLD TIGHTLY TO THE PROMISE OF THE COMING KINGDOM AND LOOSELY TO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD. IT IS BETTER TO HAVE A GENEROUS SPIRIT AND BE MISTREATED THAN BE HARD HEARTED AND STINGY BUT HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF THINGS FOR YOURSELF.

IT'S EASY TO MAKE EXCUSES ON THIS TOPIC. IT'S EASY TO THINK OF WHAT MAKES SENSE OR BE CALCULATED IN OUR GIVING. IT'S EASY TO CITE EXAMPLES OF TIMES WE HAVE DONE SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE AND IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN APPRECIATED MORE BY SOMEONE ELSE. WE CERTAINLY CAN ALL THINK OF THE FOLLY OF GIVING MONEY TO A HOMELESS PERSON ONLY FOR THEM TO SPEND THE MONEY ON ALCOHOL OR DRUGS. BUT THE REALITY OF ALL OF THOSE SITUATIONS HAVE THE TENDENCY TO CAUSE US TO NOT LISTEN TO JESUS AND HIS DIRECT COMMAND.

WE WANT TO ERR ON THE SIDE OF GIVING AND HELPING. IF A HOMELESS PERSON WILL TAKE THE MONEY YOU GIVE THEM FOR DRUGS, THEN MAKE THEM A MEAL AND BUY THEM SOCKS INSTEAD. IF SOMEONE NEEDS A CASSEROLE DISH BUT YOU'RE AFRAID THEY MIGHT SHATTER A FAMILY HEIRLOOM, GO TO THE STORE AND BUY THEM A BRAND NEW ONE THAT THEY CAN KEEP. LET'S BE PEOPLE WHO DON'T TRY TO WIN THE EYE FOR EYE BATTLE BUT WHO ARE COMMITTED TO RADICAL AND GENEROUS LOVE. THIS ATTITUDE DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO THE WORLD, BUT IT MAKES GREAT SENSE TO THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS - WHO HIMSELF WAS GENEROUS AND GAVE MUCH TO THOSE WHO WERE UNDESERVING.