

Taking An Insult

Turn the Other Cheek and Go the Extra Mile

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Today, I am going to continue the thought on how we should have a foot washing attitude every day of the year; it is not something we just focus on during the Passover season. To have a foot washing attitude is something we must do every day of our lives, and that means to have an attitude of forgiveness, humility, and service.

As I stated before, the concept of humility and meekness is seen as a weakness in the world today. They do not see humility as a positive characteristic and they never will. It is because man's carnal nature is what motivates them in this world, and here in the church, we have to work to separate ourselves from that way of thinking.

Also I appreciated Ryan's sermon last week. You will see also that it leads right into what I am going to talk about today. His sermon was about not to take offense. Today, I want to talk about how we should handle offenses or how we handle insults. So please turn to Matthew 5, verse 38. Again, no, Ryan and I did not coordinate today for these two sermons.

You know, today, as he was saying, we offend so easily. But not being offended is among one of the hardest challenges of being a Christian. How often are we insulted in life and we face situations where we have to handle things very straightforward? But there will be times that you will be insulted or wronged and you will feel this need to justify yourself. You want to match the hostility that you are receiving. In fact, you will also want to stand your ground. Is that what God wants us to do?

Well, as we go through these scriptures, we will see that it is not. Most of the time, we respond quickly because it is a natural reflex of ours. It is part of our human nature because the pride in us just comes up in us and we want to be vindicated. That is because we are in Satan's world, and it is one of not forgiving, longsuffering, or patience, but it is one of retaliation and revenge.

Today's mottos are "Don't get mad, get even." Even the score, hit back, give back as good you get. As Ryan said, it takes commitment to be humble and devote the time to take these actions to help our relationships and not to hurt. But again, sometimes it is easy to do that.

Now, during the Sermon on the Mount, the disciples listened to Jesus as He described how we are to approach God's law and how we must go beyond the letter of the law. These scriptures provide a clear framework for addressing offenses with a godly attitude and humility and non-retaliation—which does not come natural to us.

Matthew 5:38-41 "You have heard that it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two."

These two phrases, "Turn the other cheek" and "go the extra mile," are terms frequently used today. And I would say that probably most people do not realize that these two expressions originated with Jesus Christ. I believe that these verses, though, capture the essence of the foot washing attitude, where Jesus explicitly instructs His disciples to follow in His humble service when we are handling insults. This means putting aside our pride and choosing to serve rather than retaliate. Christ's humility is always our biggest concern.

Now, applying this to today, God is always testing us and he will also provide opportunities to demonstrate Christ-like character. And metaphorically, by washing the feet of those who insult us through the act of kindness or forgiveness, we embody the servant-leadership of Jesus Christ. This teaching in these verses come directly on how we are to handle personal insults, personal attacks. And again, turning the other cheek is a symbol of that. If you want to develop a foot washing attitude, it requires that you are willing to forgive, to show mercy when provoked. It challenges the natural response of self-defense instead of promoting a response of peace and trusting in God's justice rather than our personal well-being.

In verse 38, it says, "You have heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Now here, Christ is quoting the law from back in Leviticus.

Leviticus 24:19-20 "If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him."

This is also covered in Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 19, so it was Jesus Christ Himself that established this law. And again, we know this common term, "eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." But the question is, did Christ literally mean that we were to go and knock out somebody's eye if they knocked out your eye? Or if someone accidentally knocked out your tooth, were you supposed to go and knock out their tooth as well?

I was thinking about this. What would happen if you knocked out somebody's tooth? "I'm going to get even. I'm gonna take care of their tooth. I'm going to knock out theirs." But when you try to knock out theirs, you knock out two or three. Does that mean the other party now can knock out two or more of yours? Well, by the time this is all over, neither one of them will have any teeth!

No, that is not what this law meant. The purpose of this law was meant to bring fairness and stop the revenge and preventing more violence. There would be put a monetary value for that victim who had suffered that loss, much like our courts today will award a settlement to an injured party involved. And that is the way Christ intended. We must refuse to fight back.

Christ goes on to say, "But I tell you not to resist an evil person." Now the word resist means "to stand up against, rebel, or refusing to fight back." So, Christ is saying, "Don't fight back. Refuse to retaliate."

And by the way, one more thing. When it comes to someone slapping you on one cheek and then turning the other, Christ is not talking about being a punching bag. He is not talking about being willing to just take a physical attack. I mean, if someone takes a ball bat to one side of your head, He is not meaning to turn your head and let him take the ball bat to the other side of

your head. That is not what that meant. You see, in the culture at that time to be slapped with the backhand was meant as a deep insult, not a physical attack. It was a way to dishonor a person. To slap the right cheek, it would have to be done with the backhand. If you are going to hit someone's right cheek, you have to be using the back of your right hand, not the palm of your hand. And as Ryan spoke about societies today, the left hand was often used for unclean tasks. And so the left hand was never used for this type of insult. So if someone is touching another person, especially in the face, a slap, it would always be done with the right hand.

Now, in the verse, it says, turn the other cheek. To turn the other cheek, to be hit on the other side would require that person to hit you with the open palm. Now, that would hurt a whole lot more and be much more painful than the backhanded slap, meaning to stand there and take it the first time and to stand there and then be willing to take it a second time, would be more painful for us personally, mentally. It would be an embarrassment. Christ said, let it happen.

Back in that time, this backhanded slap was commonly used for those of a lower position, meaning those that were servants or slaves. This is commonly done by those in authority. Again, it was a way of showing their superiority and a way of humbling the other person. So to slap a person on the cheek was a deliberate attempt to humiliate and degrade that person, not to hurt them. But again, to take that whack with the open hand, that is a different story altogether. And the aggressor, what Christ is saying, they may pull back a little bit if you open yourself up for another insult. And they may be apt to do it. We must be willing to take insult without retaliation.

So applying this principle today, I would say most here probably have never been slapped in the face with the back of the hand. At least as an adult, you have not been. I was thinking, I have been whacked in the face with the back of the hand by my mother numerous times, but never, never as an adult. But how many of you have been insulted? You might say how many have been insulted this week? It is a very common thing. Being slapped in the face is not.

Jesus is teaching us, do not trade insults with your enemy. Do not open yourself up to a situation where you can dishonor your faith.

Romans 12:17-18 Repay no man evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Choosing not to act goes against our natural impulses to retaliate when we are wrongly treated. We must learn to suffer offense rather than exercising our legal right to defend ourselves. This is showing godly character and that will also show the person that slapped you or offended you your godly character as well.

There is a wonderful example I want to use here. Please turn back to II Samuel 16. This is David. I seem to use David a lot sometimes. And you will see in these verses an example of David turning the other cheek. First of all, the setting is, we find David in a very stressful situation. This chapter centers around the rebellion of Absalom, David's son. Absalom was impatient of becoming the king and he gathered support and formed a rebellion against his father, which forced David to flee Jerusalem. So David's flight from his own city would probably mark one of the lowest points in his reign, I would say. But it gets a little bit worse because David runs into Shimei, a man from the house of Saul.

II Samuel 16:5-8 Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. And he came out, cursing continuously as he came. And he threw stones at David and all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! [This word rogue means evil, it means ungodly, it means wicked. So he was throwing the worst insults at David that was possible.] The Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now, so you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!"

You know, Shimei had a lot of hate. But he believed, he was convinced that it was David that had engineered the overthrow of the house of Saul, which

we all know he was innocent of. David did not remove Saul. God removed Saul. Here we see Shimei's open defiance and his personal attack on David's kingship. Shimei's behavior was fueled by the thought that this is the man that has destroyed his family. He really believed this.

So David's man wanted to go over and take off his head.

II Samuel 16:9-13 Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my Lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" The king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son, who came from my body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him. It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day." And as David and his men went down the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust.

You know, David, probably in all of Israel deserved honor and respect more than anyone else in that whole place. But it was David who had within his rights to send any of his soldiers over there and to take his head. And I am sure that maybe David even thought about it. But instead, David demonstrates remarkable restraint. David's ability to endure false accusations reflects his reliance on God rather than seeking justice and defending his honor. Shimei was more than just throwing insults at David, he was throwing stones. You know, we always talk about sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will never hurt me. Well, in this situation, I think it is both. The words he was throwing was just as much as an insult as the stones that were being thrown. So we can see how David's refusing to retaliate and his willingness to endure humiliation aligns perfectly with the principle of "turn the other cheek" and "go the extra mile."

Brethren, how often do we have to handle insults and offenses? But you know, they can serve as moments of spiritual testing and allow us to choose between responding in anger or trusting in God's sovereignty. You know, it

is interesting. Later on, in II Samuel 19:18-23, we see how Shimei bows down before David, knowing that he had sinned against the king by cursing him. Again, David's men still wanted to go over and take his life, but David said, he swore to him that he would not do it. It is quite an example for us.

Now, I want to go back to Matthew. There is a second example of having a foot washing attitude, and that is in verse 40.

Matthew 5:40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also."

I always thought this was a little bit more difficult verse to understand, but what Christ intends is the principle of non-retaliation beyond physical insults to a level of legal and material disputes. This instruction challenges our instinct to defend ourselves and our possessions. In this teaching, Jesus advises that if someone sues you for your tunic (and by the way, the tunic was an undergarment, like a shirt or t-shirt, something like that, and which is not of great value), but if you are willing to give up your cloak—this is your outer garment—this is worth far more. And in fact, the cloak for many would be used as a blanket when they slept at night. So you can see how this would be a great loss to give up that as well, and that is what God wants us to do. This is mentioned in Exodus 22:26-27 and Deuteronomy 24:12-13. By this law, this outer garment was a possession that could be withheld, but not overnight.

But here again, Christ is saying, make the sacrifice. Go the extra mile, which I am going to talk about in a moment. Jesus is emphasizing peace over personal rights or possessions. The principle is to avoid escalating conflict through retaliation. If you are being sued over something petty, do not countersue. Let it go. All it is going to do is cause more hostility.

This made me think of "Judge Judy," which Jackie and I like to watch. I watch it during my lunch hour, lunchtime at home. And it sometimes it amazes me how many times a brother is suing his own brother or a mother suing their child, or vice versa. And it is over the most petty things, and it might be only over \$50, \$100, \$300, and they are willing to sacrifice that relationship. And you find out when you watch these shows, you learn as she interviews these folks that at some point, they were insulted one way or

another. And yes, it is our natural inclination to fight back. But we have to learn to respond with kindness and patience.

Now, the third example that Christ uses here, which is again one of the most well-known:

Matthew 5:41 "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two."

Again, the common phrase that we use today is "going the extra mile." We hear this all the time. It is about giving that extra effort, go, give it all you got. In my research for this, I came across something I thought was very interesting, and I thought Bill Onisick might really appreciate it. In 2005, all the runners (there were 529 runners who competed in the Chicago Lake Shore Marathon), and that day, they set a new record for the marathon. You see, traditionally a marathon is 26.2 miles, but the folks that organized the race made a big mistake in calculating the track and it ended up being 27.2 miles. So all these runners that competed ran an extra mile. I can only imagine the uproar. I am sure there were lawsuits, complaints, legal challenges, threats, protests. I understand. Hey, no one wants to run the marathon. I cannot even run a mile. I do not want to run the first mile. But that was interesting.

By the way, this is not what Christ is talking about here. You see, these folks who ran that extra mile, they did not know they were running the extra mile. Here, they did know, they knew exactly what was going on. In the first century world there, they were living under Roman rule and at any time a Roman soldier could force someone to carry their luggage, their loads, their armor, whatever, up to a Roman mile. A Roman mile was just about 1,000 paces, maybe a little bit more but right about that.

In essence, though, this practice reduced a person to an object, forced labor, because they were caught under the thumb of Roman rule. And this was a legal requirement for the subjects in conquered territories. I mean, you could be walking down the road one direction and a Roman soldier stops you and says, "I want you to carry this load for me." He could be going another way. You had to drop your stuff and go in the other direction. This practice, by the way, is called impressment, and it was not uncommon. I read that even the

citizens would mark the roads to avoid having to carry the burden an extra distance.

So Christ is saying, if a Roman soldier forces you to carry his load one mile, carry it two. Even though you are being forced into labor, public humiliation, He is asking us to sacrifice again. And by the way, I cannot imagine what the reaction of the disciples were at that time as He was saying these things because the Jews hated the Romans. They hated them for putting them in these situations. And so Christ was telling His disciples, "Don't feel bitter. Don't feel resentment, but offer to go another mile for them, cheerfully and with a good attitude." And it shows that as a Christian, we need to do more than is expected of us. It is not easy to do.

What Christ is saying is do not always be thinking of your own liberty. Do not always be thinking about what is only your duty to do. But think about what your privilege may be to serve others. Today, going the extra mile generally refers to just going beyond expectations and making a special effort. By the way, this is a very good principle to live by. But that was not what Christ was saying here in these verses. Turn the other cheek, go the extra mile: The question here is, can you endure wrongs? Can you endure insults? Can you handle humiliation?—emphasizing that the sons of God should not retaliate for injustices, but rather respond in love and generosity.

In essence, going the extra mile in this context is about demonstrating love, grace, non-resistance, even when we are faced with difficult and unfair situations.

I want to add just a few verses here on the subject. Please turn to Proverbs 12.

Proverbs 12:6 The words of the wicked are, "Lie in wait for blood," but the mouth of the upright will deliver them.

This verse contrasts the reaction of an evil person with a thoughtful response of a prudent person who chooses to overlook the insults.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

You see, this is turn the other cheek. All you will to do is make things worse if you respond in kind. And Christ is saying, He encourages us to be thoughtful in our response when faced with provocation.

Proverbs 18:19 A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Here we are warned against dwelling on insults because all they are going to do is just build up resentment from us, and it will just grow and grow and grow. And I will tell you something, that is exactly what Satan wants in us. He wants us to be dwelling on the negative. He wants us to hate, and it does come easily sometimes. It does not take work for us. Again, this is the world that we live in.

And then one more.

I Peter 3:9 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.

Here, Peter is echoing what Christ said there in the Sermon on the Mount. We are to bless those that harm rather than retaliate. This aligns totally, perfectly with turning the other cheek and being willing to face an insult. And it is important for us to understand that we will encounter adversities. The question is: how are you going to respond? Will it be kind or with the same type of evil that they have given you? We must learn every day in our lives to be patient, to be longsuffering, because we do not know what is going to happen. We do not know what situation is going to come before us. It needs to become a reaction for us to respond in kindness. That is how we know. That is how we know that we are growing in God's Holy Spirit is how we react to things naturally.

As we become closer and closer to God we will react as He reacts. And all through the Scriptures with Christ, we saw how He treated people. Even in bad situations He was loving and kind and patient.

When we are willing to go the extra mile it also strengthens our marriages. How many marriages are destroyed by insults, by fights? But if you are

willing to take an insult, how much better our marriages would be strengthened.

And one thought here I am just going to throw in. Martin and I have talked about this many times. He and I know each other. If I was to say something that might be insulting, he knows my character, he knows me. He knows that I would not do that intentionally. He knows that I would not do that on purpose, and so it is easy. He just lets it go.

We need to let these things go. We need to let these things go in our marriages and when raising our children. We know our children and sometimes they will push back. We have to handle these things the way God would handle these things. Also, it will strengthen our relationships with our brethren and it will also strengthen our interaction with those outside the church.

Being willing to turn the cheek and go the extra mile is something that we need to have a part of our daily lives. And we must remember that we are called. I mean, these are hard things, but we are called to fight and work *against* our human nature. When we do, we will reflect the standards of our God, God's law, and by doing so, we will reflect the character of Jesus Christ and our heavenly Father.

Remember back what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 20.

Ecclesiastes 7:20-21 For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.

You know, it is a challenge but we will say the wrong things. And so remember that we need to be patient and take an insult because we do the same thing.

I will finish and continue on here in Matthew 5, verse 43.

Matthew 5:43-45 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemy, bless those who curse you, do good to those that hate you,

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and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:48 "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."