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Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: The Sermon on the Mount
Message: Self-Sacrifice or Revenge

Transcribed Message
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Matthew 5:38-42

You may have heard the story of the weary truck driver who pulled off the highway into a 24-hour truck stop to get a bite to eat. He goes in and finally gets his food. About the time that his food comes, three rough, tough motorcycle guys in leather jackets come into the truck stop and choose to sit down right beside him. They began after a brief period of time to verbally attack and abuse him and try to stir him up. Then it escalates a little bit more and one of them reaches over and grabs some fries. Another one takes a drink out of his coke. This goes on for a little bit of time. Finally, the truck driver has had all he's going to take. He gets up and he walks over to the cash register and pays for his food. He walks out into the night, gets into his truck and drives away. The waitress who had taken his money watched as he drove away and she came back to the three ruffians there at the counter. One of them sneeringly said, "Not much of a man, is he?" "I really don't know anything about that," she said, "but I know he is not much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorcycles on his way out of the parking lot."

Truth be told, a story like that causes us to smile. We want to cheer when we hear a story when the bad guy gets what he deserves. I suppose there are a lot of reasons for that. There's a whole genre of movies that fit into that revenge category. There's hundreds of them and a lot of are pretty familiar to us. I wonder sometimes why it is that we are so taken with that theme and that story of somebody exacting revenge on somebody else and seeing the bad guys get what they deserve. I wonder if in part it isn't because we are quite taken with the idea of our rights. We're pretty consumed with the idea of giving out to somebody what they rightfully deserve. Maybe that's because after all we have our constitutional rights. We have the Bill of Rights that talk about our inalienable rights. We have civil rights and we have state's rights. You can take almost any category of people today and put the word "rights" behind their name and it kind of

fits what's going on in our world and in our culture. So my question for you this morning is: what rights do you have as a fully devoted follower of Christ? What rights do you have as a fully devoted follower of Christ?

We're in the Gospel of Matthew. We're in the fifth chapter. This section is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. We're in verses 38 to 42 this morning. These are some of the most challenging and probably misunderstood verses in the sermon. I don't want to say they're the most because there's probably some other ones coming that will be in that category too, but they're certainly challenging and are often misunderstood. Here's what we want to see this morning. There's a choice that we need to make every day. We take matters into our own hands or trust ourselves to the hand of God. I think we make that choice daily either in going the way He has called us to go or choosing to go the way we want to go.

Let's start up by setting the context again. This is a sermon like no other. In saying that, the first thing we reference is the fact that this is a watered-down word. I say it's a watered-down word because we're in this section in which six different times Jesus talks about the fact that "you have heard that it has been said". We know that He does not say "it is written". He says you have heard that it's been said, so he is indicating to us that something has happened to the Word that has come to them. Maybe being watered-down isn't the most accurate way to depict it. It maybe just being misapplied, mischaracterized, misused. All of those words would certainly be appropriate because the law had been taken by the religious leaders of Jesus's day and had been twisted and turned and made to say something that the law never intended, or that God never intended for that law to say. The world often says make sure that others get what they deserve. Make sure that you do to others before they do it to you. Make sure that you do it to others more than what they do to you. All kinds of things that really reflect pretty much what the religious leaders of Jesus's day were saying as well.

Secondly, we notice that this is kingdom living. This is kingdom living. This is living life the way Jesus wants us to live life. This is rightly putting the focus on internal righteousness. That was the heart of what Jesus is speaking to all the way through this sermon. In a world where it's so easy to get caught up in the externals and to be focused so much on what people see, we can easily lose sight of the fact that God's

greater concern is what's going on in our heart and the righteousness that He wants to be producing from within. This is Jesus's focus. This is His concern. Not so much outside stuff but rather the inside.

Then thirdly, what an impact the church of Jesus Christ would be making if we would be living out these principles every day. If we were living out the principles in this sermon, just think of the impact. We're going to see again this morning that this is radical stuff. We're going to want, as we go through this passage and the ones to follow, to push back against this and say I am not sure. I don't think so. Jesus calls us to radical living. In doing that, He is calling us to be set apart. When you're set apart from the world, you're not fitting into the world. You're standing out from the world. We have a wonderful opportunity to make a great impact on the world. That of course is the heart of our God for us.

Let's look at Jesus and what He says on this matter of rights and retaliation. I'm going to go back again and we're going to look at verse 38. Let's read beginning at verse 38: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you." What we're going to need to do to understand what Jesus intends for us here is we're going to have to go back and look at a law that has been misunderstood. That whole idea of watering down the Word is brought front and center in this section. Jesus goes back into the Old Testament and He goes back into the law. He doesn't tell us exactly which of these passages He is referencing, but it doesn't matter because all of them speak to this idea that He brings to the forefront in Matthew 5.

I'm going to read all of these Old Testament passages because I want you to hear and then we're going to look at what these passages are saying in light of the Old Testament context. Exodus chapter 21 and verse 22: "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for

eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” That’s the first reference. The second one is in Leviticus 24 and in Leviticus 24 and verse 19 we read this: “If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injuries he has given a person shall be given to him. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, whoever kills a person shall be put to death.” The last one in Deuteronomy 19 Deuteronomy 19 verse 15: “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall charge be established. If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” There you have the three references in the Old Testament that speak about what Jesus talks about in Matthew 5.

Let me make three observations from those passages that are going to enlighten us going forward and how it is that we want to understand what Jesus is saying to us today. First of all, the law of *lex talionis*. The law of *lex talionis* was fair. It was just and it was effective. The law of *lex talionis* is the law of retaliation. It is Latin. *Lex talionis*. The phrase an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a burn for a burn, a fracture for a fracture. It seems at first reading to be kind of cruel and barbaric. That's the first thing we need to confront because the reality is the law of *lex talionis* is anything but that. It was never intended to be understood as being somehow barbaric or cruel. It is just the exact opposite of that. In a world and in a culture where people would strike back with unlimited retaliation, Jesus and the law, as rightly understood, put specific limits on what that looked like. Instead of reading and thinking how barbaric are these people? An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. No, we should read this and go instead of unlimited punishment, instead of unlimited retaliation, instead of unlimited payback, God said

there's to be a restriction. There's to be a commensurate penalty with what was committed. It is to be just. It's to be fair. It will, if administered that way, become a deterrent so that it does not continue on with one person elevating their response back to another.

We all know how this works. We all have been in situations and probably the most common would be within our families. We see this play out in the lives of our children – preschool children, gradeschool children, junior high children, high school children, college children. We'll stop there, but the reality is this plays out every day. Somebody touches somebody and somebody doesn't like to be touched. So what do they do? They whack their brother or sister. Nobody likes to be whacked by their brother or sister, so after they just touched them and got whacked back, they decide to elevate the response even higher. So they knock him down, jump on him and give him a couple more whacks, and the next thing you know we've got an all-out struggle going on. The law of *lex talionis* says if somebody touched you inadvertently or purposefully, you do not have the right to haul off and slug them. There should be a commensurate response. Okay, touch them back if that's what you feel like you need to do. So this law, while it reads to the modern eye as being kind of cruel and barbaric, was never intended to be that way at all. It is just the opposite. It's to be proportionate to what was committed in terms of effect.

The second thing is the application of the law was not necessarily literal. So it's not required that we read this and say I got poked in the eye so now I'm going to poke you in the eye. That person had a tooth knocked out so he's going to knock your tooth out. Your ox gored my ox and killed my ox, so I'm going to go kill your ox. That's not what the law required. It's likely that that was not the way this was implemented. It's not to be understood as something literal. The idea is simply commensurate. The idea is simply measured by way of response.

Thirdly, the law was designed for public and civil justice. These matters are determined and, as you noted when we read those passages, it referenced the judge. It referenced the priests. It references those who are administering justice. The law of *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation as stated in the Old Testament, took place in a courtroom. It took place and was administered by a judge. It referenced a civil code.

Here's what happened. The Pharisees and the religious leaders by Jesus's day had taken that and they had twisted it and they had brought that into their personal relationships. They were using this law as a means of personal revenge. They were using it as a way of standing up for their rights and making sure that they were able to retaliate and strike back and get even. Into that context steps Jesus, and He rejects that interpretation. He clarifies the principle that God intended and that He brings to us.

Let's look at the principle clarified. If it's not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in our personal relationships, what is it? Are you ready for this? Jesus says in personal relationships, don't resist. Jesus says in those kinds of circumstances, turn the other cheek and don't retaliate. Jesus introduces us to the principle of self-sacrifice rather than the principle of revenge. The principle of self-sacrifice rather than the principle of retaliation. Now that should immediately bring to mind a lot of questions. That should immediately bring to mind how in the world is this supposed to be worked out and lived out in the day in which we live? This seems like a rather troubling principle by which to live life. Is this even realistic? How do I know when to apply this idea of turning the other cheek? What does this mean?

Look again with me. verse 38: "You have heard that it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth." That's what was said. It's being misconstrued. It's being misinterpreted. It's being misapplied and misused. Jesus says but I say to you do not resist the one who is evil. What does that mean?

Let's start off and deal with what I think it does not mean. What does it not mean when Jesus says don't resist the evil one? What does He mean by that? This can't possibly be an absolute, unqualified prohibition to never resist or stand against evil. He can't possibly mean that, can He? Remember last week if you were with us when we looked at the matter of oaths and vows? Jesus said it would be better if you didn't take a vow. It would be better if you didn't take an oath. We said that's a little bit difficult to put together with all of the rest of Scripture that seems filled with examples in the Old and New Testament positive ones in which people were taking vows, including His own disciples.

Remember what we said? We said when we're handling Scripture one thing we have to do is we have to have certain rules that we follow in terms of interpretation. One

of those rules is called the analogy of faith, or taking Scripture with Scripture, making sure that we bring all of the Scripture on that area to bear on that discussion, not just taking one verse out of context and making it say this or that. The other thing we talked about was keeping it in the context. So let's do the same this week. Both of those apply it seems to me. There are so many examples of people resisting evil in the Bible that we can't cover them all, but let me give you a flavor of what we do see. For instance, Paul Peter and James all tell us to resist the evil one and to resist evil. They don't just tell us, but they command us to. So that needs to factor into what Jesus is saying here. We looked last week at Peter when Ananias and Sapphira in the very first sin of the early church decided they would lie to the Holy Spirit, that they would lie to the church leaders, and they would lie to everybody about the selling of property. Remember Peter resisted them and confronted them in their sin and he dealt with it. He took it on. Galatians chapter 2. Paul resisted Peter. It's the exact same word by the way. Galatians 2 is the exact same word that Jesus uses here. When Jesus says don't resist evil, we read in Galatians 2 that Paul resisted Peter when he slid off into sin and into legalism. We could go farther and say Matthew 18 and the whole matter of church discipline. God commissions the church to resist evil, to confront sin. He doesn't say just turn away from it. Pay no attention to it. When Jesus cleared out the Temple, what do you think that looked like? That looked a lot like resisting evil. It looked a lot like coming in and saying this is not right. You guys are making a mess of this. This is what never was what God intended.

So we look at all of those and we have to say Jesus is not calling for unqualified pacifism in this verse. He is not calling for an unqualified response of turning the other cheek in any and every circumstance. Jesus himself stands before Caiaphas the high priest and the high priest has a soldier reach out and slap Jesus. What does Jesus do? He doesn't punch anybody out, but He doesn't turn the other cheek either. Do you know why He didn't? Because He is in the court of law and under Jewish law, the accused was not allowed to be struck. Jesus in that instance didn't turn the other cheek.

So here we have in this circumstance something that we need to understand, because if I leave here this morning and two really big guys who did not like what I talked about this morning decide that they want to beat me up, I don't want you walking

by and saying isn't that pastor amazing? He is applying the lesson today and he's turning the other cheek back and forth and back and forth. I'm getting the snot beat out of me! Come and help me. That's not what's going on here. That's not what Jesus is referencing.

Let's look at what this means. What does this mean? In cases of personal retaliation and personal revenge, we are to adopt a policy, a principle of self-sacrifice and non-retaliation. Jesus says don't take matters into your own hands in personal relationships where you are simply seeking to protect your own personal rights. You in that instance need not protect your reputation. You don't need to protect your pride. You don't need to stand up for your rights as they are being violated by somebody else. You are to entrust yourself to Me.

Now, so we don't miss it, what does Jesus do? He gives us four illustrations of this principle. Let's look at this. The principle illustrated. Jesus brings four principles together. I like the way somebody characterized this passage and I think this is helpful to keep this in mind. What Jesus does in this section of verses is He doesn't give us a map that's all marked off and telling us where to turn at every point, but rather He gives us a compass that is going to guide us in this process. I think for me that's helpful to understand that we don't have some specific point that we are going to apply to every circumstance. We're going to use it in the way that God intended and that is to give us guidance as we go through these situations.

First of all, what do you do when you are personally insulted? Look at verse 39. so we have an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, "But I say to you do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." What you have here, my friends, is personal insult. This is not a personal assault. When somebody seeks to rob you, most likely, hopefully they don't know you. When somebody wants to rob you, it's not like they're trying to personally insult you. They just want your money. They're not worried about insulting you. Whether you're insulted or not doesn't make any difference to them. They're assaulting you and they want your money. Those are two different things. Jesus isn't saying if somebody is going to physically assault you, just stand there and turn from side to side to let them hit you as many times as they want to.

Let me tell you why I believe that's the case. As you read that verse, carefully notice that he says but if anyone slaps you on the right cheek. The vast majority of you are right handed. I happen to be a part of the chosen few and I'm left-handed, but most of you are right handed. So for me to hit you on the right cheek would be very easy. I would just reach out and whack you on the right cheek. The majority of people are right-handed so for something that hits you on the right cheek means they're doing what? They're giving you the back of their hand. It's like in the movies when somebody wants to insult somebody, when they want to throw down on their reputation. They may take their gloves and they smack somebody across the face. What was that? That wasn't an assault. They weren't trying to physically disable that person. They were trying to insult them. That's what Jesus is talking about. He's saying when that happens, when there is a slap to your face, when somebody gives you the back of their hand, the whole point is to demean. The whole point is to humiliate. The whole point is to insult you.

What do you do when that happens? Jesus says don't retaliate. Don't retaliate. Don't defend yourself. Don't strike back. Instead turn the other cheek. Send a totally different message than they would've ever expected. What is this an application of? It takes us way back to the beginning of the Beatitudes. The beatitude of meekness. What is meekness? It's strength under control. Who is it that can be insulted? Who is it that can have somebody say something snarky and sarcastic and mean and hurtful and not find themselves just firing it right back? It's somebody who is meek. It is somebody who has got great strength of character and that is under the control of the Holy Spirit. You don't have to think of this is simply physical. Probably the vast majority of the time what Jesus is actually illustrating here happens verbally. It happens in other more subtle ways than a physical insult. I think what Jesus says to us here is don't respond in kind. Don't counter. Remain silent and turn the other cheek. That was easy enough. Let's go to the next one. No, it wasn't really that easy.

Number two. Second illustration. Verse 40 says: "And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well." Now again, to understand what's going on, you've got to know the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the cloak, the outer garment was so important. It was literally not just their outer garment and outer coat, but it was almost like their bedroll. In the Old Testament, the provision was made

in the law that if you borrowed money from somebody, they could take your cloak as equity, but they had to give it back to you every night. They could keep it for the day but you had to get it back every night. He's speaking to something that they understood very well. The vital interest that everybody had for that cloak because that was more than just a garment of clothes. In this story, Jesus, I think just like in the first one, is simply saying as a disciple of Christ to live as Jesus lived. Be willing to give up your personal rights, which is in this case illustrated with the cloak. You make a sacrifice that is compatible to the demands of love that are being made upon you. You go a little bit farther than what anybody expected. You don't have to win every battle. You don't have to be right every time. You can say you want my tunic? You can have it and you can have my cloak too. Figuratively. Because what you do in that case is you're saying I'm not retaliating. I'm not seeking revenge. I'm operating under the principle of self-sacrifice.

Jesus is not saying here that you have no right in a court of law. He is not saying if somebody sues you frivolously that you should just say take that and by the way take everything else I have too because you want it. This is a compass, remember? That's not the point that Jesus is making. The point Jesus is making is there are going to be circumstances in which you are going to say to somebody I'm willing to do more than what you even asked. I'm willing to go beyond what you thought. I'm willing even to be defrauded. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul does talk about believers and their relationships to each other. He does say there that one believer should never take another believer to court. You don't need to do that. What he says is the principle of self-sacrifice. Following in the words and example of our Lord, Paul actually said, what's better than taking your brother or sister to court is being willing to suffer loss for the name of Christ. You're willing to just be defrauded in the name of Christ. You are willing to suffer loss in the name of Christ. He is not speaking of legal issues and ramifications with the world and with those who are not believers. In that passage, he specifically talks about believers. So it's just a matter of not being bitter and resentful in the face of loss.

Thirdly, what do you do when you're personally imposed on? Verse 41: "And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him 2 miles." Again, we don't read that verse and totally understand. The reality is they lived under Roman occupation. This literally

happened to these Jewish listeners probably quite regularly and they didn't like it at all. They kicked against Roman occupation. They kicked against the idea that some Roman soldier or some Roman official could just at any point in their day interrupt what they were doing and say hey I need you. Come over here and do this and treat you like a servant. It was just kind of a degrading experience both in terms of time and energy and everything else. But you know what? This does happen to us. It happens probably more regularly than we might realize at times. It might happen to you at work. It might be that there are people at work that do seem at times to treat you like you are their servant. and when they do, what do you do? Jesus says when that happens, receive that. Acknowledge that and do as they asked. In fact, do even more than they asked. Go beyond what they asked. What a powerful witness that would be. No problem. I'll handle that. Sure, I'll do that. Someone might look at that and wonder if you were crazy. No, you're not crazy, but you are a Christ follower. Jesus instructed that this is the way we're to respond. It's a compass. This doesn't mean that when people at work find out you're a Christ follower, they can all bring you their work and then you just say you'll do it while they're watching March madness on their computer. That's not what he's saying. That's not the application here. There are points at which you would say that's probably not right. But He's speaking to those circumstances in personal relationships when someone seeks on those occasions to impose upon us or to take advantage of us.

The last one. What you do when asked for help? He says in verse 42: "Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you." Again, this can't possibly be an unqualified statement that just says if anybody asks you for anything, then you're obligated to give it to them. If you do want to understand it that way, I'm going to be in the parking lot later looking at the different vehicles that are out there, and if you've got an especially nice one, I may want to talk about your keys. That can't be what He's saying. He is not telling us that anybody who walks up to us and says I need 10 bucks and then you hand them 20. There could be a circumstance in which you do that, but He's not saying that if somebody comes up to us this is simply an unqualified offer to give. He is saying to us in general as we go through our day to have a generous heart. Have an open hand. Have an open heart. Put people before your stuff. Put others before yourself. Now in wisdom, you have to decide whether that

person who's asking for something needs you to respond in the way that they've asked. Sometimes you are going to give to that person. Other times, there may be legitimate reasons that you say that's not going to help. If I do that for you, that's not going to help you. Maybe I can do this for you and maybe that would help you in another way that you're not even asking for. So what Jesus does here in these four illustrations is to lift up the principle of self-sacrifice.

If we asked why does He do that, I think the purpose is realized not in this passage but I think the purpose is realized in the writings of Paul and in the writing of Peter. Let me show you what I mean. In Romans chapter 12 verse 14 Paul says this: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

In 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 19 Peter says something that's very similar: "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For it is to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you." See what those passages are saying. Do you see what Paul and Peter are saying? It seems to me it fits in perfectly with what Jesus said back in Matthew 5:13 to 16. We're to be the salt of the earth. We're to be the light of the world. People are to look at our life and they're to give glory to God because they see our good works. They see our implementing the principle of self-sacrifice right before them when their response might very well be different than that, when they're operating under the principles of the flesh. When you're operating under the principle of the Spirit and somebody else looks at your life, how do you know that one encounter in which you exercise the principle of self-

sacrifice rather than striking out in revenge or retaliation, how do you know that the Holy Spirit of God isn't going to use that to bring conviction to their heart, to bring them to the point of repentance, to bring them even to an understanding of the gospel? Because they saw in you the very likeness of Jesus Himself.

There's a choice that we're to make every day. Take matters into our own hands. Respond just the way everybody thinks we should. Do unto others before they do it to us. Do more to others before they do it to us, or do what God has called us to do and trust ourselves to the hand of God.

What do we take away? This is a basic principle of the spiritual life. When you boil this all down, what Jesus just does here is one of the most basic principles of the Christian life. It is simply this. The call to discipleship is the call to die to self every day. That's it. Jesus said take up your cross daily and follow Me. You die to self every day, many times a day as a fully devoted follower of Christ. The reality is nothing is harder than that. Nothing is more counterintuitive than that, but nothing is more like Jesus than that.

Let's pray. Father God, it would be our heart's desire this morning that we would continually be the people of God who pursue You with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Father, may we give up our rights every day so that we can rightly demonstrate to people in our life and the people in this world that we operate by a totally different principle and that principle is that of self-sacrifice. Lord, we do that only because of what Jesus did for us in showing us a perfect example of that on the cross. It is that gospel that we proclaim and that we lift up today. It is that gospel that we would ask that You would open the eyes of anybody here this morning who may be trying to work their way to heaven. That they would realize that Jesus did everything that needed to be done and what we are called upon to do is to entrust ourselves to You and to put our trust and our hope and our faith in what Christ did for us. So to that end we pray. Father, we ask that You would bless us by Your power and by Your Spirit. In Jesus's name, amen.