

**MARCH 10**  
8A & 11AM ET



**NEW LENTEN SERIES**

**PART 2**

**THAT'S WHAT**



**HE SAID**

**MATTHEW 5:38-42**

*A Sermon By*  
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**Date:** March 10, 2024  
**Preacher:** Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley  
**Sermon Title:** That's What **He** Said - Lenten Series Part 2  
**Scripture:** Matthew 5:38-42 (NIV)

*<sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup> If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”*

### **SERMON SUMMARY**

Continuing with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5 - 7) as the scriptural foundation for the sermon series, “That’s What **He** Said,” Pastor Wesley challenges us with a familiar portion of Jesus’ teaching. In Matthew 5, Jesus makes reference to and corrects his audience’s understanding of Exodus 21:22-25 (See additional resources).

Jesus reinterprets this text to say we are not to resist an evil person. The word resist (anthistemi) in this text means that we must not meet another with malevolent force that equals theirs. Said another way, we must not meet the evil, ugly, or violence of others with our own evil, ugly, or violence. Instead we are called to work as hard as we can to prevent the evil from even coming toward us—to prevent the **if**.

However, if we cannot prevent the **if**, and the violence occurs in the form of a real or figurative slap, we who follow Christ are called to turn the other cheek. Pastor explains turning the other cheek in the following way. If someone strikes your right cheek with their right hand (as the text states), it results in a back hand slap. This type of slap is meant to embarrass, not to harm. Jesus urges his followers to take the embarrassment and stand firm. Turning the other cheek indicates the first slap did not cause you to lose your faith, give up your dignity, seek revenge, or act outside of the bounds of Jesus’ teaching. When we endure the first slap, we show the world that we are stronger than our enemies, convict the actions of others by our behaviors, and show the world the beauty and the brilliance of not meeting evil with evil.

Operating in this fashion is not easy. We must pray first that God gives us a desire to accomplish what is difficult. As we endure, just like our elders in the Civil Rights Movement, we show the ignorance, evil, and hate of those who perpetrate violence against us when we do not respond in a like manner. God gives us the strength to not return evil for evil, to turn the other cheek, and to show by our actions we belong to Christ.



## KEY POINTS

1. We must remember, the people of Jesus' time lived under an oppressive, occupying Roman government. This caused them to long for ways to retaliate against their oppressors.
2. In our contemporary world, we who follow Christ also experience oppression under partisan regimes that seem bent on denying us hard won rights.
3. Jesus uses Matthew 5:38-42 to teach four things.
  - a. If someone is in need, even if they are your enemy, give to them.
  - b. If someone compels you to walk a mile, go the extra mile, showing them your grace and kindness.
  - c. If someone asks you for your shirt, do not withhold it, give them your coat too. Trust God in the small things. If God gave you your first shirt, God can surely give you more.
  - d. Turn the other cheek.
4. If God calls you to do something that is difficult, the first prayer we should pray is to ask God to give us a desire to be obedient to the will of God.
5. In Matthew 5:39 Jesus is not teaching that we should allow ourselves to be abused. Instead he is teaching we should try and avoid meeting evil with evil, by doing all we can to avoid the situations that follow **if**.
6. If we cannot avoid **if** situations, there are several things we can do, including not allowing others to dictate our behavior, avoiding seeking revenge, and standing our ground.
7. In the end, our witness is stronger than the action against us.
8. One of our true tests of faith and discipleship is how we handle our desire for revenge.

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. 'What did Jesus Say' underlies the heart of this sermon series. What are your favorite sayings of Jesus and why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In this sermon, Pastor Wesley teaches us how left handed people were ostracized in Jewish and Roman cultures. If you are or know a left handed person, would you say some of those views are still present today? Explain your answer.

## INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Exodus 21 is a chapter that outlines laws concerning slaves, violence and property. Some of its teachings may be responsible for the culture of revenge, both in biblical times and today. However, Romans 12:19 says, *"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.'"* Though Exodus 21 says you can take revenge, Romans 12 says something different. Can Christians ever take revenge? Why or why not?

2. Exodus 21:16 says, “*Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper’s possession.*” This scripture was clearly not privileged by those who kidnapped and enslaved Africans, because it did not benefit them. Can you identify a scripture that you privilege? Can you identify one that does not benefit you that you try to ignore? Please share regarding both sets of scriptures and why you privilege them or not.

### **LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS**

1. For the second week in a row, we have heard that it is possible to use the Bible in a manner that does not align with the teachings of Jesus Christ. What are the ways you have seen or heard the Bible used that do not align with the red-letter words of Jesus? What has this cost the church? What has this cost you? What are some healthy ways to reduce the non-Christ-aligned use of the biblical text?
2. We should avoid the **if** moment when we can. As Pastor Wesley preached this sermon, the **if** moment was described as the moment when we can see evil, ugly, or violence coming toward us. He mentioned ways he works to avoid the **if** moment (i.e., prepare ourselves with education, vote for candidates that support our community, etc.). What are other personal and communal ways we can work to avoid the **if** moment?
3. The Lex Talionis, the Law of Exact Equivalent (regarding retaliation) is mentioned in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. As Pastor Wesley describes it (i.e., eye for eye and tooth for tooth) there is no evidence of grace or mercy. If grace and or mercy were to meet a strict law of exact equivalents, what would be different? In practical terms, what role do grace and mercy play in changing the way Christians react to circumstances?

4. Pastor Wesley notes, the true test of our discipleship is not how we behave on Sunday morning in the sanctuary, but how we behave during the week in the streets. Where is the place you are most likely to be tested to love your enemies, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, or share what God has given you? What are two things you learned from this sermon that might help you in that situation? How might you apply that learning?
  
5. We have included in this week's guide (**see additional resources**) the image of 15 year old Walter Lee Fowlkes being attacked by dogs in Birmingham, Alabama. Pastor referenced this moment as an awakening for the world and a turning point in the fight for civil rights in America. This picture exposes the inhumanity of racism. What images do you think could communicate contemporary instances of humanity in today's world? Please name them. Where would you like to display these images?
  
6. Pastor Wesley says, "When you walk in excellence, you expose the ignorance in others." Michelle Obama says, "When they go low, we go high." But does the high road always pay off?
  - a. Please share a moment when you walked in excellence, taking the high road and it paid off. How did you feel?
  - b. Now, share a time when you took the high road and it did not pay off. Would you do anything differently, if you could relive the second scenario? Why or why not?
  
7. Today's sermon included a testimony shared between Dr. Helene Wesley and an 8 year old Howard-John Wesley. Anticipating a routine spanking, a young Howard-John decided not to cry, no matter how much it hurt. Dr. Wesley then changed her behavior in response to her son's ability to endure. Have you ever changed a particular behavior because you learned how to endure? Was it difficult to make this adjustment? How did the adjustment impact you?

### **“CAN I PUSH IT?” QUESTIONS**

1. Pastor Wesley provides a warning about getting even with one offender and thinking our actions are getting even with all that are characterized with that offense. Where do you see those thoughts being applied in today’s society? How can we as followers of what Jesus says help combat these kinds of thoughts in our homes, community and country?
  
2. Imagine U.S. foreign policy followed Jesus’ command not to respond to evil attacks with the same kind of attacks. If Jesus’ ethic of turning the other cheek were the basis of US Foreign Policy, what would constitute a proper response to the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack of Hamas on Israel and the extended Israeli attacks on Palestine?

### ***FOR INDIVIDUAL OR VILLAGE STUDY***

Question 5 in the **Life Application** section of this guide asks you to name an image that exposes humanity’s inhumane treatment of people and the planet. Find an image that supports this. Print it out and write both a caption and a prayer responding to this image. Place the image, prayer, and caption where you can see it and pray your prayer for the duration of the season of Lent as a spiritual discipline. At the end, determine if there is a next step you might take.

### **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

1. Our appetite for revenge is evident throughout culture, including the arts. Can you identify a movie on your favorites list that has an undercurrent of revenge? Can you articulate and share with your village what it is about one of these movies that resonates with you? How do you feel about those types of movies after this sermon?

2. Pastor uses Matthew 5:41 to support how excellence can expose ignorance when we are willing to walk an extra mile. What are some historical moments or personal triumphs that have shown this to be true?
  
3. Pastor says if God requires of us something that feels like a hard challenge, we must first pray that God gives us a desire to do that very thing. Share the commandment of Jesus for which you need a *'prayer of desire'* from your village?
  
4. When people are oppressed, their thoughts about retaliation increase. Yet during the Civil Rights Movement, the foundational thinking was to meet violence and hate with love. Given the rise in oppression of marginalized groups in our nation, is the ethic of love still the right response? The only response? Why or why not?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### 1. SERMON ON THE MOUNT BIBLE PROJECT

 What Jesus Was Communicating in the Beatitudes • Sermon on the Mount (E2)

2. **EXODUS 21: 22-25** The text from Exodus 21 reads as follows, *“When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman’s husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine. If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”*

### 3. LEX TALIONIS

Exodus 21 is taken from a section of scripture called the Lex Talionis, which is understood to be a series of laws that describe how retaliation is to be meted out. In the Lex Talionis the punishment must resemble the kind and degree of the originating act.

#### 4. THE PHOTOGRAPH THAT HELPED SHAPE THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In May 1963, police in Birmingham, Alabama, used clubs, fire hoses, and dogs to attack crowds of Black people demonstrating against racial segregation. The images of canines mauling protesters, ripping their clothes and biting their bodies, are some of the most disturbing visuals of the entire civil rights movement. A [photograph](#) of a police officer, Dick Middleton, setting a dog upon 15-year-old, Walter Gadsden, appeared on the front page of the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Washington Post on May 4.

Newspapers in Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America followed suit, prominently featuring pictures of Birmingham's K-9s attacking protesters. Concerned about damage to the country's reputation, the United States Information Agency conducted a study of global coverage of the events in Birmingham, concluding that "pictures of police brutality, particularly the use of police dogs, has militated strongly against the U.S. image." The outcry was compounded by the fact that many of the protesters were school-age, as Martin Luther King Jr.'s lieutenant James Bevel had organized thousands of students to march in the "Children's Crusade" against Jim Crow.

