

Sermon on the Mount | Conflict Redefined (Matthew 5:21-26)

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We are in the second week of our series, **Summer on the Mount**, in which we take a look at the greatest sermon of all time, the sermon on the mount! Found in Matthew 5-7, delivered by Jesus, it is timeless and powerful. Countless books, studies, sermons, and more have been based on this sermon from Jesus.

While tackling a number of topics, the big picture question Jesus asks through this message is this, **“Will you follow me?”** Who is the king of your heart? Is it Jesus, or is it you?

In Matthew 5:3-11, we read what are called the Beatitudes, the blessed life in the Kingdom. Each of these eight principles – **blessed are the poor in spirit, mourn, are meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, suffer for Christ** - begin with the word **“blessed,”** translated from the Greek **“Makarios,”** which literally means “happy.” Last week, Pastor Nate drove home the point that this happiness is not the American Dream, Finding Yourself, some sort of fleeting feeling – the happiness found through these beatitudes is **“The favor of God experienced when Jesus reigns in your heart.”**

The principles behind these eight beatitudes saturate the sermon on the mount; we will be revisiting them throughout this series. Today, we will consider the beatitude, **“blessed are the peacemakers,”** as we look at **Matthew 5:21-26:**

Matthew 5:21-26 (NIV): ²¹ **“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’** ²² **But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.** ²³ **“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,** ²⁴ **leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.** ²⁵ **“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.** ²⁶ **Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.**

This passage is a powerful challenge to both seek forgiveness, as well as to forgive others.

True happiness, this Makarios blessedness, happens when we are both right with God and love others.

Jesus is doing something amazing in the sermon on the mount. He takes the old commandment, gives a new command, and then gives examples of how to obey.

You know you're not supposed to murder; but Jesus expands that now to say that even anger is subject to the same judgement! Calling someone offensive names and insults is on the same level as murder.

Jesus isn't changing or contradicting scripture; He is rightly interpreting it according to God's true intent behind the law. He is fulfilling it, amplifying it, deepening it, and transcending their understanding of it. God wants us to see others the way He sees them; as His children, created in His image, designed for His purpose!

This word for "anger" here, it is "orgizomenos," which describes a carried anger, a resentment, nursing a grudge. It's not just a momentary flare-up – although scripture does deal with those elsewhere – it is the sinful decision to bear an ongoing resentment, a simmering hatred.

And let's be real: in our world, this is the expected response when someone mistreats you, takes advantage of you, wounds you in some way.

And yet, Jesus is teaching that the attitudes we carry around are in themselves real acts and answerable to God!

Frederick Dale Bruner writes, "Jesus' ethic is not heroic in being geared to unusual situations but in asking for unusual Christians in all the usual situations." (Kindle location 4328, commentary on Matthew, volume 1)

What's interesting is that Jesus is not telling us to never get angry; in fact, in both **Psalm 4:4** and **Ephesians 4:26**, it is written, "In your anger do not sin." Instead, he is challenging the listeners with the question, what will you do with your anger? Prolong it or master it? How do you view the others who surround you?

This is a reoccurring theme in scripture; elsewhere, when asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus said:

Matthew 22:37-39 (NIV) ³⁷"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

We are called to love others the way God loves us. Which gets back to this passage; blessed is the peacemaker. Does love harbor anger?

I can have a right relationship with God when I ASK FOR AND OFFER FORGIVENESS.

Jesus gives an extreme example in the passage; even if you're in the middle of giving a sacrifice in the temple, if you remember that you have done something to offend someone, then you need to drop it and go be reconciled to them! Seriously?

Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV) ²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

77 times? Some translations say seventy times seven, or 490 times. 77 doesn't sound so bad now. Does anyone else think this is a weird moment from Peter? Not so much him asking if he has to forgive someone, but throwing the number 7 out there? The religious practice of the time was that you were only required to forgive someone three times; after that you were allowed to stop forgiving them. Peter was already being shockingly generous – but Jesus throws that out the window! He's not actually giving a number, He's asking the same of us that He gives – unlimited forgiveness.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I DON'T FORGIVE?

- **I disobey God's INSTRUCTIONS**

If you're a follower of Jesus, forgiveness is not an option. It's a command. Unforgiveness is disobedience. Now, let me clarify this a bit – forgiveness does not mean letting someone abusive or dangerous back into your life. Forgiveness does not mean someone does not still face consequences if they have broken laws. But it does mean releasing that carrying of resentment.

- **My anger is INTENSIFIED**

If I refuse to forgive, my anger grows over time. I become a walking minefield; what do I mean? One wrong step and I explode! I see it all the time; someone yelling at a cashier over a small thing, drivers raging in their cars over tiny inconveniences, blowing up over small offenses from our children or loved ones. Are we really that angry that someone cut us off? No; bottled up anger grows, it becomes intense, it masters us.

- **I relive painful EXPERIENCES**

When we don't forgive, we find ourselves stuck in that moment of hurt. I've shared before how I attended a boarding school years ago and the abuse that happened there to myself and many of my friends. For years after I was gone from that place, the tiniest reminder would send me back, full of seething anger. There were times I was shaking with rage because something triggered a memory. A few weeks ago, I returned to that school, now a camp ministry with a different mission, for the first time since I left it 26 years ago. It was a good trip; so many good memories came back to me. How? Two decades ago I spent

countless hours processing my anger and hurt with a counselor to get to a place where through God, I am no longer stuck in that hurt.

I couldn't find the original source; but there's a quote that seems to have originated in Alcoholics Anonymous: **"Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."**

Anger doesn't fix the problem, it doesn't bring justice to the person who wronged us, it just brings pain to the one who is angry.

In Matthew 18, where Peter asks how many times he has to forgive those who wrong him, Jesus answers him with the parable of the unmerciful servant. A servant owed his master a debt equal to 20 years worth of wages. The servant begged for patience since he and his family were about to be sold into slavery to settle the debt; the master felt merciful, forgave the debt entirely and released him. The servant immediately went after a fellow servant who owed him the equivalent of one day's wages and began choking him, demanding the money. The other servant begged for more time, but the first servant had him thrown into prison until he paid it – a very real consequence at the time. The master found out and was furious, telling the servant after receiving such tremendous mercy he should have shown mercy to others, and had him thrown into prison to be tortured. Jesus ended the parable by saying, **"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."**

What? Does anyone else find that terrifying?

Jesus is deepening our understanding of the seriousness of anger and the gift of forgiveness. If we truly grasp the level of offense God has forgiven us, anything that has happened to us pales by comparison in the same way that a debt of one day's wages compares to a debt of 20 years' wages being forgiven. There is no comparison. If we even begin to appreciate the forgiveness we have been given, then forgiving others becomes more and more natural.

HOW DO I FORGIVE?

Doug Fields, one of the pastors at Saddleback Church for many years, wrote down a suggested path for forgiveness that I've found helpful.

1. Identify the people who have HURT YOU

Make a list. Seriously. Don't pretend the hurt hasn't happened; bring it to light. A family member that hurt you. A friend who betrayed your trust. A boss that humiliated you. A coach that berated you. A teacher that played favorites.

Why make a list? It reveals the truth. It brings to light to you those moments that are getting in the way of your experiencing the "Makarios," the blessedness, the happiness you are intended to live.

Now, just to clarify, this is a private list for you. Don't put it on Facebook. This isn't an Instagram challenge; day one, my dad never said he loved me, #30daysofhurt.

2. Determine what they OWE YOU

What do you want from them? Is it an apology? An explanation? Do they owe you respect? Your sister owes you \$100? A childhood that was robbed by an absent parent? Maybe they owe you their life because of the life they stole driving drunk?

What do you want from them? Name it.

3. Cancel their DEBT

Debt is when something is owed. Cancel it. Forgiveness means letting go of your right to hurt them back, letting go of the desire to see them suffer, letting go of the plan to get them back, letting go of the hatred.

It means acknowledging that it may never be resolved the way you want it to be, but releasing its hold on you nonetheless.

Maybe burn the paper, symbolizing the debt has been released. It doesn't matter whether they are sorry; you have canceled the debt's hold on you. You might need help with this; sometimes canceling the debt is an ongoing decision. In some scenarios, it may mean creating boundaries or protections against being hurt again – but in that, anger is no longer mastering you.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV) Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Don't focus on the one who has hurt you. Rather, focus on the one who paid such a high price to FORGIVE YOU.