

Bible study resources

Sunday 19 February 2023

Matthew 5: 38-48

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also, ⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give your coat as well, ⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴² Give to the one who asks of you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

And so we wonder ...

- Jesus says 6 times in this section of 'the sermon on the mount' "You have heard it said ... but I say to you ..."

In our time, what things might Jesus be thinking of if he were to say to us: "You have heard it said ... but I say to you ..."

- In the Old Testament, God's law was about revelation of who God is and of God's will for God's people – a gift, and a way of responding to Creator God who entered into a covenant relationship with the people of Israel.
How do these "You have heard it said ... but I say to you ..." passages help to fulfil God's law?

- *'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* ³⁹ *But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also ...*

This verse is about non-retaliation, and curbing escalation of violence in a conflict.

How can we authentically respond with goodness rather than hostility in a conflict?

- ⁴³ *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'* ⁴⁴ *But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ...*

This saying urges Jesus' followers to love in a way that includes even enemies since God's love and care extend to everyone.

The NT word translated 'enemy' closely aligns with the OT word that means 'one being hostile'.

Loving someone who has wronged us or is hostile towards us can be a complicated business.

What are the challenges this presents for us?

How do you respond to hostility?

How do you respond in your body? Your emotions? Your mind? Your soul?

How can we face and overcome these challenges?

How do they become opportunities to show God's love?

And to become a more mature person?

- It's important to acknowledge that loving our enemies does not negate the need for justice and calling wrongdoing and evil to account.
How might love give you the courage to take action and address wrong or evil behaviour?
How might love give you strength to see a person differently?

- There is a saying 'he or she is their own worst enemy'. In what ways can you be your own worst enemy?
How do you deal with your own hostility towards yourself?
How can you be more open to receiving grace, compassion and forgiveness from God and from others?

- 'Love your neighbour as yourself' is another of Jesus' sayings.
Loving ourselves frees us to love others.

Brene Brown's research lands on a great summary of love:

We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honour the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness and affection.

Love is not something we give or get; it is something that we nurture and grow, a connection that can be cultivated between two people only when it exists within each one of them – we can love others only as much as we love ourselves.

Shame, blame, disrespect and betrayal, and the withholding of affection damage the roots from which love grows. Love can survive these injuries only if they're acknowledged, healed and rare.

From Atlas of the Heart

How does loving yourself free you to love your enemy?

Collect

O God,
before whose face we are not made righteous
even by being right:
free us from the need to justify ourselves
by our own anxious striving,
that we may be abandoned to faith in you alone;
through Jesus Christ. Amen