

“Beyond the Letter”

Matthew 5:38-48

Series: In Not Of Week 3 When You're Wronged

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Happy Sunday! Happy Sunday! I am Nathaniel Brodish and I work with the young adults and youth ministries here at Woodside. When we first got to Woodside and as we were getting to know our group we decided to try all sorts of games. Because some kids are into active games and others aren't.

Now a pool noodle might not be everyone's first choice in a youth ministry game, but I figured why not?! I played a similar game when I was in the youth ministry growing up.

So the game starts off with one less chair than there is person. Everyone is sitting in chairs in a circle. The person in the middle holds the pool noodle and stands next to the small trashcan that is placed in the middle of the circle. The goal is to hit someone with the pool noodle and quickly run put it in the trash can and get to their seat without being hit by the noodle so the other person would get stuck in the middle instead. You do not want to be stuck in the middle when the time runs out. In my eagerness to play with our students I forgot to mention some very important rules and guide lines.

Before you all come to conclusions allow me to paint a picture. The game is going great, so far so good no incidents. Now the game is building; people are getting into it. Now one student- I won't name names here but just know as they stood in the middle; everyone slid to the edge of their seats, not quite sure where or who they were going to target. This student now faces me; I think to myself it's about to go down; I'm locked in their sights. They walked right in front of me- everyone still clinging on to anticipation on the edge of their seats- they swung their arm back and whacked the side of my face so hard my ear rang and time seemed to stand still. The look on my face told everyone there that night that a line had just been crossed. I can say for certainty that this moment marked for me the angriest I have ever been in the presence of our students. Yet in that moment the Holy Spirit held back my tongue and we continued in the game and the rest of the night as normal. I think the look on my face might have said it all; I think part of them might have known that was too far- but we let it stay where it was and moved on.

Now with hindsight being 20/20- I will ALWAYS make sure from this day forward to review the head shot rule. It was easy in the moment to feel angry, feeling as though I was wronged in that moment because all I had done was show this student love. It was hard to not take that personally to feel the physical pain had no warrant.

I'm sure you have also felt the feeling of being wronged. What do you do when you feel things are unfair, that you deserve better and they deserve worse. For some of you it may be that you have felt you were wronged in the comments section on Facebook. Or that the person that cut you off on your way to work wronged you. Maybe for others of you, your spouse has wronged you, maybe you have

been wronged by a friend, a parent a sibling. These are all kinds of things that we face. We will all be wronged. Now the question is “What do we do when we are wronged?”, that is exactly what Jesus answers in this text.

We are going to be in Matthew 5:38-48 so you can open up your bibles there now. We’re in this sermon series right now looking at the sermon on the mount. The greatest sermon ever told. It’s told by Jesus. We’ve called this series “In Not Of” where we are walking through what it looks like to be in the world but not of it. That we are wanting to live with Christian beliefs in a world that doesn’t have the same values as us. And what Jesus is doing throughout this entire message is that He is critiquing the message of the religious leaders of the time. He is saying “They have told you to follow God this way but I am saying to follow God this way.”

Last week pastor Doug gave a fantastic message on anger, lust, and promises. and this morning we are going to be looking at a text to help us live in radical righteousness when we’ve been wronged. If you have notebook or the notes app of your phone you can write down the title of today’s message which is “Beyond the Letter: When You’re Wronged.”, “Beyond the Letter: When You’re Wronged.”

To be transparent with you this is probably the hardest passage I have ever had to teach. And that’s because there are a lot of common phrases like “go the extra mile” and “turn the other cheek” that we hear in our society but not a lot of people actually do them. It’s hard to actually do the things that Jesus tells us to do. Now let’s read starting in Matthew 5:38.

Matthew 5:38–42 NIV 38

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 39 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. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. Right away Jesus is talking about some very intense things. But it can seem like he is saying that we should take the physical pain that we are facing. That no matter what we should just take it. I don’t like that very much. That is not what he is saying. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” wasn’t just something the religious leaders were saying. It was originally from the Old Testament law. Which says in full:

Exodus 21:23–24 NIV 23

But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, at the time this was written the Israelites community had just gotten led out of Egypt by Moses and brought into the wilderness. Where they were starting to figure out how to live among each other while not being under someone else’s rule. This Jewish law was meant to be orchestrated by the Jewish leadership of the time. That these matters would have been taken to court.

Because let’s say that I am a farmer and you take one of my sheep. Because you did that I want to wrong you even more than you wronged me so I’m going to take 5 of your sheep. Then it continues and continues back and forth. This law was meant to put a stop to the endless violence that people found themselves in. This was a Jewish government law that the leaders of the community would have to execute on. But the religious leaders were allowing people to take matters into their own hands and that is what Jesus is speaking to here. Jesus now is bringing in a new line. He says,

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. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

I want to be clear here that this passage is not saying that you should stay and push through physical pain or abuse that you may be facing. If you need help please see one of us here on staff and we can help you through your circumstance.

The pain that it is talking about is reputational pain .not physical pain. In biblical culture your reputation determined your value. It was everything. In this culture they favored honor above all else. But this action of slapping someone in the face was a huge sign of humiliation. This would ruin your reputation. Here he is also saying that you should give up your tunic and cloak. In their community you were not allowed to sue for someone's cloak because it was considered essential as it covered them from the elements. But Jesus here is saying to give it up anyway.

The Romans and Jews hated eat other. But as the Romans ruled any Roman soldier at any point could ask a Jew to carry their bags for at most a mile. This would also be something the Jewish people didn't want to do. Imagine how inconvenient this would be? You have your whole day figured out and then as you're on your way to the market a Roman soldier asks you to carry their bags. This would have also been humiliating. You'd be forced to walk with your enemy. This would have taken a lot of time out of your day.

Through all of these examples Jesus is urges us to resist our natural tendency to protect ourselves and stop fighting for honor and reputation. I want to shed some light on what Jesus is really saying. We know that Jesus when he talks to crowds of people can sometimes use parables to explain concepts and for those that have ears to hear they hear it but the rest of them don't. I don't think that is what is happening here. I think the people knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. But in no way is it easy.

Jesus is saying to to a culture that says to live for your reputation, your stuff, and your time. Jesus here is introducing the opposite. He is saying those are not the things you have to live for. He is calling them to more then they have experienced before. As a Jesus follower you are living not for yourself anymore but for something bigger.

The first thing we have to remember in order to live beyond what we're reading and when we're wronged to walk in radical righteousness is

1. **Don't Live for the MINE but for the DIVINE.** The Creator of the universe has seen you and chosen you for more than you could have ever imagined. We have to understand that this life is not about us. It is okay to get humiliated and for our reputation to disappear because that is not the reputation we are living for anymore. Our reputation should be in Jesus. The actions we take should show others who we are living for. It should be a demonstration for those outside the church that we belong to Christ. Jesus continues saying:

Matthew 5:43–48 NIV 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you

may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. With this passage we have to understand that a part of what the religious leaders were saying is from the OT. But there is part of it that is not. We can see that “Love your neighbor” can be found in Leviticus 19:18 which says:

Leviticus 19:18 NIV 18

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

But here we see that Jesus says “and hate your enemy” this is probably just the natural human response to “love your neighbor”. If you love one thing you hate the other. But the important thing is what Jesus is saying. Which is completely mind blowing. Instead of loving your neighbor and hating your enemy you are to love your enemy. The word love that Jesus uses here points to a moral love. A love that points towards the desire for another’s good. The person that ticks you off at work, the family member that you can’t stand to see or even your spouse when they forget the basic things.

Our love as Christians needs to go out towards others and it needs to be a desire for good in their life. This is not easy. Nothing that Jesus has said has been easy. Love is powerful though and it is radical love that Jesus is introducing us to. A love that is far beyond what we have expressed before.

Point number two this morning is:

2. **Love Radically** This radical love is a demonstration of who we belong to. If you have made that step to invite Jesus along with you then you belong to His family. You are a citizen of Heaven. As citizens of heaven we are called to a higher standard. One that was never said to be easy. One that will be uncomfortable and difficult. But when we are citizens of heaven we are to act in our Radical Love and show people that love. The love that comes from the heavenly Father. Displaying this kingdom character will show the world who you really belong to. Which team you’re playing on.

As we were preparing for our youth book study through Mark I got through it the first time and couldn’t help but to notice something. In Mark 14:17-19. This is the scene from the last supper according to Mark and we find something pretty interesting within it.

Mark 14:17–19 NIV

When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me." They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"

None of the disciples knew that it would be Judas that betrayed Jesus. That is an extremely powerful observation. That means that Jesus loved Judas so much that nobody knew Judas was the betrayer. This is a call to us.

We should be loving our enemies so well that nobody knows who they are.

I don't say this so you go out there faking love for your enemies. I say we use the meaning of the love Jesus describes in the scripture. We ought to desire good for one another. That is included in our prayers.

As we have walked through almost 2 whole years here with the youth group. We have seen that we cannot change the minds of teenagers. We have to only point them to Christ who does the ultimate change. We ought not to try and convince our enemies and argue with them to change but we ought to bring them to Christ. We ought to bring all of how we feel about them to Christ.

This example of Jesus who loved his betrayer for 3 years and nobody knew it is one that we ought to duplicate. Some of you may however be thinking about what v48 said:

Matthew 5:48 NIV

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Exported from Logos Bible Study, 8:55 AM October 14, 2024. 8 What kind of standard is this? How can we be perfect like our heavenly Father? The real answer is that we can't. There is no way in our own power and might that we will be perfect. We can never reach that standard and God knows that. That is why he sent His son Jesus to take our punishment and place. It is because of the sacrifice that Jesus made that we are able to seek God for all He is and have a relationship with Him.

In order to love our enemies and be okay with having our reputation be in something greater than ourselves. We need to have Jesus in our lives. He is described as the Rock, a firm foundation that we need in our lives. That no matter what we are going through, no matter the enemies we are facing and the trials we find ourselves in He is our anchor. We cannot do it without Him. He continues to make us more and more like Him. The more time you spend with Jesus the more you start to act like Him. We need to show people God through us. We need to be a mirror and allow Christ image to reflect off of us and towards other people.

I'm going to come back to the story that I started with. Some of you may be wondering what the relationship between me and the student who whacked me now looks like. After that incident our relationship actually grew. We grew closer together and because they couldn't make it to youth group most weeks we agreed to meet outside the walls of the church and grab food. Our relationship still continues to grow as time goes by but I know if I would have acted out and

yelled at them in the moment I was the angriest I would have missed out on how God would have used me to speak into their life. I would have missed the opportunity to speak truth into their life and be there for them when times were tough. None of that would've happened if I did not show them the love that Jesus showed me. The reward for loving them has shown. Loving them has brought about a relationship that I am very grateful for and wouldn't have wished it any other way.

I want to leave you with some final thoughts you can take with you:

1. Let your first response be love
2. Loving others is understanding them
3. Pray for someone who's hurt you
4. Offer to serve someone before you're asked