

***Question: Jesus taught people to not resist an evil person but turn the other cheek. Isn't this rather impractical? Won't that allow people to run over you and take unfair advantage of you?***

The Sermon on the Mount was a message of good news about how people who belong to God's Kingdom should live (Matthew 4:23). Concerning this life, Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:38-42). Jesus did not have the same expectations from people who do not share the same values as his people.

However, Jesus was not naïve about the implications of his teachings. He warned his Kingdom people of the dangers they could face in the world. Early in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke to those who would be "persecuted because of righteousness" (Matthew 5:10) and then he added: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Matthew 5:11). Although Kingdom people are not "of this world," they must still live "in this world" (John 17:11ff). Jesus said that because they were "not of the world," then "the world has hated them" even as they hated him (John 17:14). Therefore, he prayed that the Father would protect them while they are "in the world" (John 17:11, 15). Being a follower of Jesus is not for the faint of heart.

Although Jesus warned his disciples that they would be persecuted because they followed his way of life, he also promised them help. He said to them: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). On the same evening, Jesus told his disciples that he would soon leave them, but he would not "leave them as orphans." He promised to send another helper, the Holy Spirit, who would be "with them and in them." Because the Holy Spirit would be in and with them, Jesus reassured his disciples, saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid" (John 14:15-27). As the apostle John later wrote: "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Those of us who live more than 2,000 years after Jesus was on earth are blessed by a “kinder and gentler” world in general because even those who do not believe in Jesus have been impacted by his way of life as reproduced in his followers. However, for unbelievers who live in a world often controlled by the principles of revenge, selfishness and might-makes-right, the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount remain impractical and dangerous. But Jesus came to show the world a new, different and holy way to live and relate to one another. Empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, his Kingdom people are able to live out the teachings of Jesus. By doing so, they become a light shining in a world of darkness.

Whether or not we are believers in Jesus, we must live with threats from envy, anger, hatred and lust of power posed by others. We can choose to face these things by our own power alone, or we can trust and obey Jesus with the help of his Holy Spirit and the eternal hope he offers to believers. What will you choose? “Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

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