

Pr Mark Turner: The Law & the Prophets (Part 2)

Introduction:

We are part way through our series called 'Revolution on the Mount,' where we are studying our way through Jesus sermon in Matthew 5-7. The first presentation was about what it means to be a citizen of God's Kingdom - firstly in character and then influence. Last week we spoke about the importance of the law of the kingdom - specifically the eternality of the law and the way in which it should effect us. It was discussed in some depth that the law was not merely given as an external reality to be imposed on us, but rather as something that is to take root in our heart and effect us from the inside out.

Borrowing language from the Apostle Paul, the '*spirit*' of the law is not merely about our actions, but also our *attitude*. This is exactly where we pick up the story today with Jesus dwelling on two more areas of spirituality where he feels the standard of *righteousness* needs to be raised.

STORY - Abraham Lincoln & Mr Stanton. Mr Stanton's opinion of Abraham Lincoln was changed (by undeserved kindness) from thinking he was the 'original gorilla' to saying 'there lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen.' (Listen to the sermon for the full story).

Retaliation

In Matthew 5:38-42 Jesus is talking about the idea of retaliation. As with each of the four ways that we spoke of last Sabbath, Jesus draws an Old Testament principle forward into His context (something that they would be very familiar with) and re-frames it.

- Old Testament Principle = "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."
 - If you look at the three main passages where this concept is brought to light (Exodus 21, Leviticus 24, and Deuteronomy 19) you will find that this was a principle specifically put in place for the judges and magistrates.
 - It was about Legal Justice!
 - This principle for making civil decisions was put in place for the purpose of ensuring that punishment could be measured - so that it could be fair, and also comparative to the crime committed.
- Jewish Principle = personal vengeance!
 - This was obviously a perversion of the text.
- Jesus' Perspective = "don't resist an evil person."
 - Does He mean that we should be completely passive and take injustice wholesale? No, that is not the point of the text. What Jesus is advocating for is that we don't cherish a retaliatory spirit!

- There were four illustrations that Jesus used in verses 39-42 to demonstrate that this is what He meant:
 1. Dignity - the slap on the face (ultimate offence for a Jew)
 2. Security - a valid law suit against you (the coat could be taken as a pledge - Exodus 22:26)
 3. Liberty - the pack (an affront to their personal freedom and a reminder of their oppression as a people)
 4. Property - your own possessions (how much closer to home can it come?)
- Jesus seems to be saying 'it's not about your rights... it's about your responsibility as a citizen of the Kingdom of God.'

Love

- Tradition of the Jews = "love your neighbour & hate your enemy."
 - This was probably not something that they openly taught very strongly, but it was *certainly* baked into their culture. Jesus, throughout His ministry, confronted this misunderstanding multiple times. One classic example was in the parable of the good Samaritan.
- Old Testament Principle = "love your neighbour as yourself."
 - What the old Testament actually taught was that we were to love our neighbours as ourselves. The thing that the Jews got wrong was that they made a distinction between *neighbour* and *brother*.
 - When you compare the instruction they were given in Deuteronomy 22:1-6 & Exodus 23:4,5 it is obvious that what the Old Testament had taught all along was that your enemy is your brother, therefore everyone is your neighbour!
- Jesus' Perspective = "love your enemies"
 1. Love the unlovable
 2. Bless those who don't deserve it
 3. Do good to those who hate your guts
 4. Pray for your persecutors
- Do all this, Jesus says, 'so that we can be the children of our heavenly Father.' Those who do not follow this instruction will have their reward, but the motivation for us to be like our Father should be enough.
- We are to reflect the character of our Father - so that others may know that we *are* His children.
- 'If you love your enemies,' Jesus says, 'you manifest your sonship.'
- The challenge from Jesus to us today is this: 'if you're only friendly to the friendly, what's the difference between you and anyone else.' Matthew 5:47

- We are called to the high calling of being 'perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect' - this is the same as when, in the Old Testament, it was said 'be holy as God is holy.'
 - Some take this out of context to mean 'sinless perfection.' But Jesus is making a different point. He is talking about a way of relating to other people.
 - Perfect Love! Love as God loves.
 - He says 'reflect the Father's perfection' (like the moon). Demonstrate the same perfect love to sinners as God deals.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Law & the Prophets section of the sermon on the mount has been adequately re-framed as a call to higher living. The box-checking religion of the Pharisees is petty and brings forth limited fruit. Jesus has something much deeper and higher in mind for us than that!

STORY - Dirk Willems saved the life of a guard in spite of what that would do to him (Listen to the sermon for the full story).

"The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within—when the sunshine of heaven fills the heart and is revealed in the countenance." Ellen White, Christ Object Lessons, pg 384