

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR SUNDAY – OCTOBER 8, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Matthew 5:33-48

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION
UPDATED EDITION

[Jesus continued teaching saying,]

¹⁷ “Again, *you have heard that it was said* to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the $\vee \oplus \omega \varsigma$ you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴ *But I say to you*: Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ **Let your word be** ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

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 neighbor 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,

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew is one of four gospels – telling the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. Matthew is the only one of the four to include the larger sermon on the mount (Chapters 5 to 7) with which we’re wrestling this fall. The context of the Sermon on the Mount is radically important, without it the teachings can seem like disparate moral teachings, as opposed to a radical reinterpretation and recreation of the world.

Jesus has invited everyone to “repent. Change the Way they live. Because the kingdom of heaven is here.” Those that respond in chapter 4 are fisherman, the sick, the broken, the marginalized - those who are overlooked and unimportant in the Roman Empire and the way of the World – but blessed and included in the Kingdom of Heaven.

$\vee \oplus \omega \varsigma$:: or oaths. “These were pervasive in swearing loyalty to a city or public appointments; to the judicial system and business contracts; to memberships in clubs, associations, or guilds; for religious activities, and so. Jesus counters this extensive practice and tradition which encouraged oaths.” An extensive tradition in Hebrew Scripture warned against false oaths and exhorted honoring those made such as in Exodus 20:7 & 16 | ⁷ “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name....”¹⁶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And also in Leviticus 19:12 “And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord.” Oath taking was widely practiced to express commitment to God or to a person. Jesus says not to take any oath, or swear on anything at all. Oaths are diabolical in the presumption that they might compel God or someone else to behave in a particular way.

by the earth:: scripture declares “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it, also” (Psalm 24:1). So this again is an oath, swearing against God trying to control God, or usurp God’s power.

by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King:: this is the third example of this argument, with Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God (Psalm 48:3, 135:21).

Let your word be:: The alternative praxis for the community of disciples is straightforward, sincere, and trustworthy speech, which builds honest and trusting relationships, and which derives from a person’s integrity. Roman domination intact. He’s saying that oaths come from the evil one. They presume to invade God’s realm, attempt to bind God to a course of action, and oversteps human limits. They create mistrust and broken relationships through unreliable communication. Honest communication with God and other disciples is part of the exceeding righteousness (5:20) of God’s empire.

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.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Jesus teaches a radical way to break the cycle of violence: Active nonviolent love. How is this shocking in our world? How have we maybe become used to it?
- Jesus talks of loving your enemies. In the Bible it's not just national enemies, but even those in your own household, or neighbors, who are personal foes. How have you experienced this radical teaching in your own life?
- What does Jesus mean by perfect?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – *or to us, as a church* – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth:: This is the 5th example of life in God's kingdom, and envisions active nonviolent resistance to the oppressive, imperial context of domination and violence. Jesus summarizes the *lex talionis*, the law of equal retribution which limited revenge in proportion to the offender's offense. Jesus quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures including: Exodus 21:23-24 "23 If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." And Leviticus 24:19-21 "19 Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered."

to rid himself, without any ethical qualm, of his wife whenever he feels like it, so long as he fills out the proper papers? Or is it on the side of the protection for the woman and the valuing of her person reflected in the requirement to provide a certificate?

Do not resist an evildoer:: many scholars believe a preferable translation is "Do not violently resist and evildoer" – as Jesus is not saying to accept evil, but rather *not* to resist it with violence and vengeance. Jesus is talking about breaking a cycle of violence.

if anyone strikes you on the right cheek:: This refers not to a direct blow with a fist but to a blow with an open hand (a slap). This was an insulting gesture (as we see in Job 16:10; Psalm 3:7; Isaiah 50:6). It expresses the power differential of a superior who disdains an inferior: a master with a slave, a wealthy landowner with a poor farmer, a Roman with a provincial. This action dishonors and humiliates the inferior. No response except submission is expected. Rather than be subdued into nonresponsiveness, and rather than lashing out in violence and continuing the cycle. Jesus teaches a third response: a nonviolent response to a system designed to humiliation. The chosen action refuses submission, asserts dignity, and humanness, and challenges what is supposed to demean. It refuses the superior the power to humiliate.

TAKE YOUR SHIRT, GIVE YOUR COAT:: In a loan is to be guaranteed by a pledge (collateral). A poor person may have to pledge his cloak/coat, in which case the lending party is to return it by nightfall so that the poor person can keep warm. (Deuteronomy 24:10-13 & Exodus 22:25-27) The scenario assumes the common experience of indebtedness. Jesus' response is striking, give both your outer and under garment. By standing naked before one's creditor who has both garments in his hand, one shames and dishonors the creditor. Nakedness exposes, among other things, the greed and cruel effect of the creditor's action and the unjust system the creditor represents.

IF ANYONE FORCES YOU TO GO ONE MILE, GO ALSO THE SECOND MILE:: a soldier could compel the first mile, but Jesus teaches to take what is meant to humiliate by refusing to be humiliated.