

Fath in the Marketplace: Resisting Evil 1

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[0 : 00] I'm grateful to Chuck Ferguson for having introduced me. I don't know how many of you know Chuck Ferguson. I'm sure probably most of you do, but Chuck works downtown in ministry to business people all day, every day, and I just come down once in a while.

So Chuck is the sort of overseer of what happens here, and I'm grateful to him and hope that you all, if you don't know him, get to know him. Well, there is a story which I was told some time ago, which you probably all heard it, but it suits my purposes today to tell it to you again, and it was told to me with a certain sense that it had really happened, and I can imagine the characters involved if it did really happen, but it seems that the Oak Ridge parking lot was full, absolutely, and there were two cars that arrived trying to find a place to park.

One was a grand lady in a large Cadillac, and the other was a young gentleman in a small tram. And they both were heading to the thing, and the lady was obviously going to be there first, but suddenly the fellow in the little car darted in in front of her and took the parking lot, jumped out and waved at the lady and said, small and quick.

And she proceeded to put her car into low gear and went into the parking lot and crushed the triumph into nothing and turned and smiled at him and said, big and rich.

[1 : 42] Well, it's nice that that lady was moved by a spirit of revenge, one that I think we all recognize.

I have an instinctive reaction that when somebody comes up behind me and honks, I want to pull over to the curb and start fighting immediately.

I don't want to think about it. I don't want to discuss it. I just want to do it. And I don't know why that happens to me, but it does. A car cuts in front of you in traffic, the same reaction.

A neighbor insults you, the same reaction. You can lie awake at night figuring out how to get your revenge for the insult that you've suffered.

A fellow worker cheats you. Your spouse really or apparently humiliates you. And all of these things inspire in us a trigger reaction, which is the desire for revenge immediately.

[2 : 56] Fortunately, we can't always achieve the immediate results we would like, and that gives us pause to think. But when these things happen to us, they happen so quickly, and the adrenaline or whatever it is pours into our veins, and we're ready to go in any way that we can.

Well, I know that happens to me a lot, and I'm sure it must happen to you. So, I'd like to pretend it doesn't. It does. Well, Jesus puts his finger on this point in the passage from the Sermon on the Mount, which we're looking at today, when Jesus said, you have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

And what he's saying, simply, is if you were to go back to the book of Genesis and look at the story of Cain and Abel and how Cain went out from the presence of God and his family began to be established, and within one or two generations, Tubal Cain became a forger of iron and copper, and he was able to make weapons, and soon afterwards, he was able to make artifacts of the iron and copper, and soon he discovered weapons, and you get the proud song of Lamech in the fourth chapter of Genesis, very early on in the Bible, that a child has wounded me, and I have killed the child.

You know, someone attacked me and killed someone who belonged to me, and I killed seven of them. And so you get this revenge which takes place, and of course, the escalating process of revenge which leads to war.

And so Christ says, this is the thing that the Old Testament says, that to quote a famous expression, there should be a level field.

[4 : 59] And on this level field, if someone gouges out your eye, their eye should be gouged out. If someone knocks out your tooth, their tooth should be knocked out.

Probably less elaborate system of law than we have at the moment, but that's where it all began. Now, we assume that an eye is worth \$75,000, a tooth is worth \$15,000, and if the doctor cuts off the wrong leg, then you can probably sue him for, well, you don't have to cut off his leg, he'll probably pay you half a million dollars so that you don't have to do that.

But the idea of this balance is the idea that is suggested here, to preserve people from going beyond. To preserve them from the spirit of revenge which would make them react in a way which was inappropriate.

And Jesus says, you have heard that it was said that that's the way you're to do it. But then he goes on and says, but I say to you, do not resist one who is evil.

And then he gives a series of illustrations. And the illustrations he comes up and says, if someone comes up to you and slaps you on the right cheek, then you turn the other cheek.

[6 : 28] And if someone comes up against you and robs you of your coat, then you give him your cloak as well. If someone comes up to you and you're conscripted to carry the baggage, somebody to do somebody else's job, then if he conscripts you to go a mile, you go with him too.

If someone makes an unwarranted demand upon you for help, you give it to him. If someone borrows money from you, don't refuse him.

Now, generally, this particular teaching is used to show how totally impractical the Christian faith is. That it simply doesn't work.

And people can dismiss it easily by saying, that's just not the kind of world I live in. I admire the principle, I like the teaching, it's warm, and it gives me some feeling of good, but it's totally impractical in the world in which I look, I live.

So that anybody who paid any attention to it would be considered naive, stupid, a wimp, and the stature of a wimp has been enormously enlarged in recent days.

[7 : 47] You're a pushover. That this is the character you would assume if you tried to do what Jesus plainly taught you to do in this story.

Now, the appeal that Jesus is making is to deal with that very powerful and very fast reaction for revenge.

The thing that overtakes all of us. Regularly. I mean, I doubt if you can come in to downtown Vancouver on any ordinary business day without finding a number of occasions that arouse in you the spirit of revenge and you only by long training manage to suppress it.

But what Jesus is saying about this, and this is in the preface to these examples, is do not resist one who is evil. And that is that what he's telling us to do is that this evil thing that has happened to you that ordinarily happens in our kind of world that happens over and over again the kind of experience that you can have a hundred times in a day.

He says you're not to resist that. What you have to do is take the occasion of that evil and turn it into an opportunity.

[9 : 23] Turn that lead into gold. Now you see, he said it's not just a matter of taking an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth.

It's not just a matter of balanced justice. That's what the courts have to do presumably every day. They have to balance justice. There are very often demands that the courts should do more that if you have a theory of justice which is vindictive or retributive or deterrent or morbid when somebody like Olson there's no there's no possibility of conceiving of balanced justice and the cry for retributive or vindictive justice is very loud indeed.

But Jesus says it's not just an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. You've got to tip the balance entirely the other way. And what he's suggesting is this is that when the thing happens whatever it is it starts a downward spiral which you contribute to by reacting with evil against evil.

In other words you get this spiral going down and it ends up ultimately in some kind of a high noon experience where somebody has to die.

That's the process that happens and Jesus says even balanced justice produces this downward spiral. Now what Jesus says is that you've got to take the occasion which is this down here now and you've got to build it into an upward spiral so that it's going upward instead of downward.

[11 : 20] You've got to in some way be able to change the direction of it. And that's why I think he gives this teaching. It's not different I don't think than when on last night's national you read that the

Canadian dollar slipped down below such and such a mark and the Bank of Canada came in and supported it and tried to get it going up again.

Well Jesus is saying when an evil occurrence takes place and starts a necessary downward spiral then you are to move in on the situation and try and change the direction of it so that instead of it going down relationships getting worse and worse hostility increasing violence breaking out and all the process that comes from that shot fired in Sarajevo that kind of thing that you see happening you see something totally different happening now I don't think that you're ever going to get to the point where you can produce the kind of thing that Jesus has talked about in this passage where you're going to be able to reproduce it in society he says that you're he says about killing that not only are you not to pull the trigger you're not even to own a gun don't even leave yourself open to the possibility of that happening and when he starts talking about lust he says it's not the lust that carries you into an illicit relationship with another person he says you're not even to imagine it it's not even to come into your mind and when he talks about divorce and adultery he says adultery isn't really on the agenda it's not divorce can't be on the agenda because it always ends up in this kind of situation and then when he talks about truth in advertising or truth in speaking at all he says that what you've got to do is you've got to work in such a way that you never try to deceive at no point do you give your tongue to saying that which is not as far as you know the truth so Jesus is trying to deal with the hate that kills the lust that destroys the divorce that leads to adultery and the lie that breaks down the whole structure of communication in our society and then he goes on to talk about the one we're looking at today and that is the spirit of revenge now how is this going to change us how can we be changed in this way what can happen to us in order that this kind of thing would happen well that's what that's the problem that we're left with and I think the essential nature of the problem is to say this that particularly with regard to the spirit of revenge because it illustrates it so well you would have to say that

I cannot afford to live that way I cannot sustain the cost that would be involved in behaving that way give to him who begs from you do not refuse him who would borrow from you every one of you could go home this afternoon destitute if you took this thing too seriously what does it mean how is it possible what I think Jesus is talking about is very much marketplace faith and that is the kind of relationships that exist between people who work together people who live together people who are in a community together people who rub up against each other all the time that instead of there being a downward spiral that's you know and I I keep thinking that you can detect it but it may be only that I have serious indigestion but often you can feel a kind of high level of hostility in the city you know you hit it on this block and then this block and then you hit it downtown and you hit it with the parking lot attendant and then you hit it with the elevator and then you hit it with your secretary when you walk in and you begin to feel that this whole thing is percolating throughout the whole of our society how can you change that and Jesus is making us in a sense personally responsible to try and change it because

Christian faith does not make sense unless somebody is prepared to bankroll the operation it just isn't expedient now what that forces you to do I think is to take this teaching which our society and our world considers to be totally impractical and ask the question well who is teaching you who is saying this to us and what we are forced to conclude is that there is only one person who could teach this way this doesn't come from a school of philosophy this doesn't come from the ethics department of the University of British Columbia this doesn't come from some little tribe of people that live over on Galliano or Salt Spring Island this can't come from any but one person there is only one person that has the authority to speak like this to us and that person of course is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is the man who when he was before the high priest and the high priest said to him what are you teaching and by what authority and where did you get it and Jesus said to him I have taught in the synagogues I have taught in the temple I have taught in the open I have kept no secrets if you want to know what I'm teaching ask the people I've been teaching and one of the soldiers of the high priest went up to Christ and struck him across the face and said you don't answer the high priest like that Jesus said well if I don't answer the high priest like that tell me whether it's the truth and if it is the truth then why did you strike me he is the man who when in the praetorium under the authority of

[18 : 33] Pontius Pilate and the Roman regiment gathered there and robed him with that purple robe and put on his head the crown of thorns and put in his hand the reed and then went up to him and struck him on the face and said now prophesy who struck you so that he knows what it means

to be struck on the cheek he also knows what it means to be compelled to carry his cross when he left under the sentence of death he was compelled to carry his cross and he carried it to the point where he stumbled he's also the man whose seamless robe was taken by the soldiers and they threw dice for it at the foot of the cross so that he knew what it was to be struck on the cheek to be compelled to carry the cross he knew what it was to have his robe taken from this is the man who teaches with this authority but where does he teach from and I think this is where you really need to consider this because he teaches from the position of one who it's to put it as precisely as I can the position he teaches from is one who has been raised from the dead from beyond death now I don't think that you can enjoy or appreciate the nature of what he's teaching unless you have the perspective from what he's teaching and that is the perspective of death having been conquered and life having been established in a way that it can never be taken away in other words until you are provided with that resource which you have from God in Christ whereby you can afford to turn the other cheek you can afford to give your cloak to him who steals your coat you can afford to go the second mile you can afford to give to him who begs you can afford to lend without interest to him who demands money from you to borrow it from you you can afford to do that because your true riches is with

God in Christ and you are in a position therefore to be someone who changes from this descending spiral to this ascending spiral God now what I think happens and what takes place in our world when we do this is this you see I think that what you are is caught as an individual between a world over here and a world over here and I think this is particularly true of businessmen who go to church on Sunday and they listen to the prayers and they listen to the scriptures and they listen to the preacher and they sing the hymns and they say great but that's not the world I live in that's not the world I work in that's not the world from which I have to get my living that's not the world from which I have to provide for my wife and family and children that just isn't that world and they say that the reality is this world that I live and work in and it doesn't relate to the

Sunday morning reality the Sunday morning reality is a different kind of reality and it's a reality which is marked by the presence of Christ in a way that he is the resource and the difficulty with this is that this process is subject to death and this process is the beginning of new life they are radically and basically different worlds and when you have to read this kind of passage hear what Jesus says it depends which world you belong to whether you belong to that world which in a sense is completely surrounded by the reality of death and that that totally conditions that world and that you're in a struggle of survival against the impact of death which ultimately will overcome you if that's the kind of world you live in then the foolishness of this passage must be very apparent to you and all of us know enough about this world that we can sense the foolishness of this passage but if in fact you live in a world which is based on a life which is stronger than death taught by the one who experienced death for us the one who in a sense when the value of things was dropping and dropping and dropping moved in and changed the whole structure by his death on the cross so that instead of man being in a downward spiral of self destruction he comes into an upward spiral of God's purpose of life towards us in Christ so that you're faced with these two kinds of worlds and I think at the very intimate and personal level of your own intercourse with people on a day to day basis you recognize that either what Christ has to say about hate and lust and adultery and truth and the spirit of revenge that those simply don't belong to this world that they are alien to it and therefore we can afford to hear what Christ teaches and to put ourselves in the place where he might be able in the circumstances of our life to begin the process of life and to stop the inevitable process of death so that I think a simple thing like saying an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth but I say to you

Christ is forcing us to the basic choice of what kind of life we're going to live and on what basis amen if any of you have any questions you want to ask about it I hope that I might be able to answer them and I would be grateful to hear them otherwise the Lord bless you and be with you and have some lunch before you go thank you you