



Sermon on the Mount: Oaths, Retaliation, and Enemy Love

Script References

Wisdom for Conflict and Repair of Relationships

0:00-0:48

Jon: Conflict in relationships is unavoidable. Even with your friends and family, maintaining peace is a struggle.

Tim: And it's even more difficult with our enemies, people who are out to get us.

Jon: Right, this is true of any time at any place in human history. Where there are people, there is strife and violence.

Tim: And this was definitely true in the time of Jesus, when Roman forces occupied the lands of Israel. So in his teachings, Jesus gives a radical vision for how his followers can seek peace in the midst of this conflict and work to repair even the most difficult relationships.

Jon: Jesus is an Israelite, and he believes that God's wisdom for relationships is found in the covenant laws given to ancient Israel.

Tim: And so in these teachings, Jesus will quote from one of those laws and then show the wisdom that's underneath.

Oaths and Honesty

0:49-2:16

Jon: So Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.'" ¹

1. Matthew 5:33

Tim: Now, in Israel, an oath was a type of promise where you swear by God that you will do what you say.

Jon: Like if you want to borrow some money, you could swear by God to repay me.

Tim: Exactly. And you can trust me because in Israel's covenant laws, God requires me to keep my oaths.²

2. Leviticus 19:11-12;
Numbers 30:1-2;
Deuteronomy 23:21-23

Jon: So oaths are a great way to avoid disputes.

Tim: You would think so, but even oaths can be twisted to take advantage of people. For example, what if I swear by God's temple that I will repay you?

Jon: Well, I know the law requires you to honor your oath, so it's a deal.

Tim: Ah, but I didn't exactly swear by God, just by his temple. So I'm not really bound to the oath.³

3. Matthew 23:16-22

Jon: So you're tricking me into trusting you.

Tim: Exactly. So Jesus cuts through all of this and says, "Just don't make oaths at all, by God or by anything else in God's world."⁴

4. Matthew 5:34-36

Jon: Never make a promise to anyone?

Tim: Not quite. His point is that when you do make a promise, don't use God's reputation as a tool to manipulate people.

Jon: Right. Jesus says, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no."⁵

5. Matthew 5:37

Tim: Being a peacemaker starts with a radical commitment to honesty and integrity.

Jon: Now, I can see how this works if I started the conflict, but what if someone else starts a conflict with me?

Tim: Well, the next case study actually gets into exactly that.

Retaliation and Creative Nonviolence

2:17-5:16

Jon: Jesus quotes from the Torah. "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'"⁶

6. Matthew 5:38

Tim: This is a famous line known as the law of retaliation.⁷

7. Exodus 21:23-25;
Leviticus 24:19-20;
Deuteronomy 19:21

Jon: Yeah, you harm me, I can harm you back. This kind of sounds like a license for revenge that can get out of hand.

Tim: Well, actually, this law was designed to limit the amount of retribution you can demand. It should be equal to the amount of harm done and not more.

Jon: Oh, so this law keeps peace by restraining our urge to hurt back those who hurt us.

Tim: Yes. And Jesus takes the wisdom of this law to a new level, telling his followers, "Don't even pay back an evil person."⁸

8. Matthew 5:39

Jon: Don't retaliate at all?

Tim: Yes. Become people who value peace more than getting even.

Jon: But letting people get away with evil won't bring peace. You just can't stand by and do nothing.

Tim: Hold on. Jesus doesn't say do nothing. Rather, he advocates a really bold and creative response to evil that is nonviolent, so it can open the door for peace.

Jon: What does that look like?

Tim: Well, Jesus gives three examples from his own time and place.

Jon: First, he says, "Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to them as well."⁹

9. Matthew 5:39

Tim: In the ancient Roman world, a right cheek slap with the back of the right hand was a symbolic way of dominating someone.

Jon: And humiliating them.

Tim: But Jesus says, don't retaliate. Rather, stand your ground and offer them the left cheek. This will force your attacker to strike with an open right hand, in other words, to strike you like an equal.

3:37-6:21

Jon: Ah, and it forces them to treat you as a fellow human being.

Tim: Yes. Even if it costs you.

Jon: Well, next Jesus says, "If anyone sues you and takes your shirt, let them have your coat also."¹⁰

10. Matthew 5:40

Tim: Yeah. In ancient Israel, taking a poor person's coat was against the law because it's also their blanket to keep warm at night.¹¹

11. Exodus 22:25-27;
Deuteronomy 24:10-13

Jon: Ah. But a really uncaring person could find a way around this by demanding their shirt as payment.

Tim: Right. And so Jesus offers a creative response. Give them your shirt and also give them your coat.

Jon: Why would you do that? Wouldn't that leave you exposed?

Tim: Exactly. Jesus is being provocative. The goal is to shock everyone around by exposing this injustice through costly generosity.

Jon: The third example is: "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with them two."¹²

12. Matthew 5:41

Tim: In Jesus' day, a Roman soldier could force any subject to carry their packs for them up to a mile.

Jon: How humiliating—and dangerous.

Tim: And so Jesus says, “carry that load not just one mile but two.” The first mile, he might treat you like a pack animal. But by going that second mile, you assert your humanity as you choose to treat him like a friend.

Jon: Wait, treat an enemy oppressor like a friend?

Tim: Yeah, it sounds crazy. But Jesus is saying that bold generosity can subvert the power games of our world and even turn enemies into friends. And that leads to the last law that Jesus quotes.

Love Your Enemies

5:17-6:56

Jon: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”¹³

13. Matthew 5:43

Tim: Jesus is quoting an ancient biblical law when he says, “Love your neighbor.”¹⁴ But then he quotes a popular line that many Israelites added to the law, “but you can hate your enemy.” Jesus counters this by telling his followers, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who mistreat you.”¹⁵

14. Leviticus 19:18

15. Matthew 5:44

Jon: Now, isn’t this going a bit far? Peace with my enemies is one thing, but loving them?

Tim: Yes. Jesus seems to think that true peace is only possible when we treat every human as if they have ultimate value, which means that even my enemy is a fellow image of God.¹⁶

16. Genesis 1:26-28

Jon: But how am I supposed to love someone who hates me? It’s hard enough to love the people that love me.

Tim: And our love for our friends and our family is a good thing. But for Jesus, that is just the starting point. He challenges his followers to share that same love outside our circles of comfort, and he holds up God’s indiscriminate, generous love as the model.

Jon: Jesus says, “God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”¹⁷

17. Matthew 5:45

Tim: The call is to become peacemakers who are inviting others in, working to mend broken relationships at every level in our communities.

Jon: It really is a radical way to live.

Tim: Yes, Jesus calls it becoming complete when he says, “Be complete, just as your heavenly Father is complete.”¹⁸ It means imitating God’s generosity to both friends and enemies. Because for Jesus, creative love is the only pathway to real peace.

18. Matthew 5:48

Looking Ahead to the Next Video**7:29-7:42**

Jon: We just finished the teachings of Jesus on how to do right by others in our most difficult relationships.

Tim: Next, Jesus will explore the problem of religious hypocrisy and how it can ruin even our best attempts to honor God.