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SERMON TITLE: *The Power of Your Attitude*
SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:38-48
DATE: February 28, 2021
View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Before you begin, read 1 Samuel 25:2-33, or listen to the story online in the service, as told by Jim and Janet Stahl.

You are in charge of creating, or developing, your character. What kind of character do you want to be? Some people might say, "What a character!" But I am not talking about creating that kind of character. Jesus teaches us how to develop spiritual character. He describes it. READ Matthew 5:38-48

Before we examine this reading, we must remember that this is a piece of a larger narrative. It is a piece of a sermon—we call it The Sermon on the Mount. The whole sermon gives the whole picture. Think of it like this. You are trying to describe someone. So you tell a story about that person. Is that the whole picture of that person? No! So we consider these verses in the context of the bigger picture.

Jesus did this when he said, "You've heard the law that says" or "You have heard it was said to those in ancient times, but I say to you." There's a big picture that goes back a long time.

He said in this very sermon, "I have not come to abolish the law or the prophets. In fact, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." (Mt 5:17-18) This is key to understanding Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus is, in fact, connecting what he has to say with the Old Testament teachings.

You must not isolate what has just been read as if it stands alone. If you do, you will get a skewed picture of the truth.

Thus, in reading this passage, we read it as a "massa." The tradition already exists, but God brings new light or expansion of the original. Think of it as the unveiling of a mystery. There are times that God chooses to reveal the truth.

God did this on Mount Sinai. God continued through the Old Testament prophets. Now, Jesus has the authority to interpret, unveil, and expand the meaning. Jesus does not throw away the law. Jesus opens up the unfolding meaning.

"You have heard the law say 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' but I say **no to retaliation**. Retaliation includes: vengeance, revenge, retribution, reprisal, punishment, payback, settling of scores, avenging

Then he gives illustrations of non-retaliation.

The examples Jesus gives relate to life in a world where the Jews are dominated by a tolerant but hostile nation. Rome recognized the Jews as a people, but the Jews had to be wary of the Romans. Resistance could result in punishment or death.

Jesus teaches the people—"replace your attitude of retaliation with service, generosity, and even love." He used words like:

- ✓ Turn the other cheek
- ✓ Instead of begrudgingly giving your shirt, give your coat also
- ✓ If forced to carry a soldier's gear, carry it twice as far as he demands
- ✓ Instead of ignoring requests for help, give to those who ask

This was shocking.

A man told a story at Dick Bergman's memorial service about how Dick managed his used car business. If someone came back to him with a problem with a car, he would either fix it or buy the car back or make it right. One rather bold lady went to Dick insisting he had sold her a car and that something wrong with it. Even though he hadn't sold her the car, he fixed it anyway, to make it right.

That's the kind of character Jesus is trying to form in us believers.

Jesus is saying have an attitude of generosity with your possessions and with your response to others. Replace the idea of tit-for-tat.

This will develop greater character in you—and dissuade vengeance directed toward you!

This teaching affirms an Old Testament principle found in the story of David and Nabal. You heard the story. David and his men had protected Nabal's shepherders numerous times without Nabal even being aware of it. They naturally expected to share in the harvest. It's what "neighbors" do.

But Nabal's resistant attitude set him up for retaliation. David was ready to settle the score, "an eye for an eye."

But instinctively, Nabal's wife Abigail anticipated that response "an eye for an eye." That's how things were done. She saw the coming "war." So she quickly set about righting her husband's wrongs.

Her powerful attitude of generosity saved many lives. She went the extra mile. When asked for a shirt, she gave her coat also. She turned the other cheek in the face of potential violence.

So you see the attitude of generosity was buried in the Old Testament, even though the law said “an eye for an eye.” Now Jesus calls for a new and deeper character, the same way God led Abigail to live by God’s ways. “That’s how God operates,” Jesus says.

Abigail’s attitude of generosity blessed her. When David resisted vengeance, it blessed him and lifted his reputation because he listened to Abigail’s plea.

Why did he listen? Because David’s attitude was to seek God in all his ways, David knew instinctively that vengeance was not the best avenue.

How are you at walking daily in God’s ways? Do you think when someone comes against you, *it’s payback time*, I will be generous some other time! But this story teaches, even when we are taken advantage of, or harassed by a hateful person, **we are safe in the care of the Lord.**

We come together in worship each week to learn to have right attitudes. The Bible tells us how much power is in helping each other create good character. **Do you have friends who are honest enough to help you develop godly character?**

But Nabal listened to no one and made a mockery of good will and generosity. As a result, the Lord struck Nabal and he died of a heart attack.

Jesus drives his point of good character further. “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love you neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say, love your enemies!” (v. 43)

Why? Just to be nice? No, **to be blessed and honored by God.**

Marian Anderson was the world’s best opera singer. As a child growing up in Philadelphia her church and school recognized her talent and they funded her musical education. She returned to the States in 1933 renowned all over Europe.

But she lived in a time of segregation. In 1939 she was scheduled to sing on Easter Day in Washington D.C. but The Daughters of the American Revolution, who owned the largest 4000 seat concert hall, refused to let her sing there. She had sung at the White House, but place after place turned her organizers down. Why? Because of segregation.

This so disturbed Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the President, that she resigned from the DAR. She stated the truth as to why, but with an attitude of character:

“I am afraid that I have never been a very useful member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, so I know it will make very little difference to you whether I resign. ... You had an opportunity to lead in an enlightened way, and it seems to me that your organization has failed.”

She took up the cause on behalf of Marian Anderson which so many had shut down. Working behind the scenes to right this wrong, she engaged Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior who

arranged for Ms. Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial. God made a way for her to sing not just before 4,000 but 75,000+ because of an attitude of generosity and going the second mile.

Do you see the purpose in those opportunities? It may look like loss to you. You may feel justified to retaliate. But God can flip the bad for more good than you can imagine.

Marian could have said no; she could have retreated due to having to sing outside or because of the unfair, prejudicial treatment she received. She could have reviled her enemies.

She did none of that. She was not an activist. She also did not shrink back. She trusted God and used every bit of the talent God gave her to bless rather than curse. So God took her great talent, stood her up in front of the Lincoln Memorial, a symbol of our nation’s breaking the bonds of slavery. And before that audience of 75,000 she closed her eyes, looked toward heaven, and sang this¹:

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, *to thee we sing.*
Land where my fathers died, Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From ev'ry mountainside, Let freedom ring!

Written on the monument behind her were these words:

“We here highly resolve . . . that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom ~ and that government of the people by the people for the people shall not perish from the earth.” ~ Abraham Lincoln

How is going the extra mile working for you? What kind of character do you want? How is your character growing? Be different. You’ll stand out. Be generous. The world will take note, and God will reward you.

AMEN

¹ Read the full story at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/04/09/she-sang-with-her-eyes-closed-concert-lincoln-memorial-that-changed-america/>, accessed February 26, 2021.