

No Quid Pro Quo
Matthew 5:38-48

Some years ago, most of us can remember a really popular phrase- *quid pro quo*. At its core, the phrase means you do something nice for me, and I'll do something nice for you. It seemed as if this phrase spent more time in the news cycle than a Kardashian. It came to popularity because of some accusations levied at our then president, and no matter where you may have fallen out on the issue, or politically, I think we can all agree that we got really sick of that phrase.

Creating the Need- The People Problem

While it has become fashionable to levy the blame of quid pro quo on our president, we should all understand that the law of quid pro quo is endemic to humanity. Beneath the surface of all of our hearts is this I'll scratch your back if you scratch my back way of doing life and relationships. It was C.S. Lewis who once said that all great friendships begin on the note of, "Oh, you too." What he meant by that is our friends are people whom we share common affinities with, and yet beyond that, our friends are those who reciprocate in kind. I call you, you call back. I help you when you are in need, and you help me. When I'm wounded and weary, I come to you for solace and counsel, and when you are wounded and weary you come to me. I keep your confidences, and you keep mine. This is how relationships work, right? But the problem comes when people's humanity and sinfulness get in the way, and instead of scratching my back they begin to stab me in the back. And when people don't go the way of quid pro quo, and act as our enemies, this throws us, big time. So what are we to do?

Now I really need you to get this, because if you don't you'll miss the whole thing. Yes our passage is about how Christians are to respond to enemies, but it's way more than Jesus offering tips on how to engage those who mistreat us. We must see Jesus' teaching through the larger lens of Scripture. Here's what I mean: When we look at this through the lens of the gospel, we come to a profound truth. See, the gospel in essence says that at one point you and I were enemies with God. Ephesians 2 actually says that we were objects of God's wrath. Yet, at great cost to himself, God did the unthinkable- He gave his only Son, who gave his only life. Jesus Christ endured persecution and mistreatment. He was scourged, spit upon, had his beard plucked out, jeered and crucified. Why did he endure such mistreatment? So that you and I may be reconciled to God. See, the gospel is not God just doing nice things for we enemies! The gospel is about reconciliation- transforming enemies of God into friends of God. And to be a Christian (literally little Christ's) means that in some way we do the same with those who have acted as enemies towards us!

This was the message of the CRM. If you think the CRM was only about changing laws you're wrong. It was about reconciliation. John Lewis, one of the leaders of the CRM, said that the mission of the movement was to redeem the soul of America. I was once with a pastor who marched with Dr. King, and he said it was all about reconciliation. That's why the method of non-violence was used- to be a tool of transformation that would lead to friendship. King said it this way, "We will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. Do to us what you will and we will still love you."

We will meet your physical force with soul force. You may bomb our homes and spit on our children and we will still love you”- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Now, tough question: Who is in your life that you need to say these words to? It could be that ex-spouse who has wronged you deeply. Yeh, the marriage is over, but your call to love them with agape love is not. It could be that boss who has gone out of their way to make life miserable for you. It could be that child who is really hard to like right now. It could be that friend who has betrayed you. Maybe it’s the stranger who uttered those racially hurtful words at you that has wounded you deeply, and instead of going cancel culture on them, you need to say these words.

See, we all have enemies at various points in our lives. Jesus is going to tell us that we do not win our enemies by going tit for tat or quid pro quo. In other words, we don’t wait to do something nice to them, when they do something nice to us. Instead, Jesus is going to say something really hard: **We win our enemies by losing our rights.**

Losing Our Rights- Matthew 5:38-42

If you’re new to the faith, or maybe you wouldn’t even call yourself a Christian, I would highly recommend reading Matthew 5-7, The Sermon on the Mount. It’s the Blinkiest version of the Christian life. But beware, you are going to read this and feel overwhelmed at the impossibility of it all. And nowhere is this more clear than in our text, as Jesus gets into how we are to engage our enemies.

Now, I want you to look at how he describes the enemy. He calls them evil (morally abhorrent). They are physically violent, ruthless- suing and going after everything, even your cloak- forcing people to do what they don’t want to do by going a mile, and they persecute them. Now, notice carefully with me how Jesus says we are to respond. He says that if a person slaps you on the right cheek. Stop right there. In that day, as it is today, most people were right handed, so for a right handed person to slap you on the right cheek means that they have given you a backhanded slap which is deeply insulting. Jesus says, no problem turn to them the other cheek. Then he says if someone sues you and takes your tunic, give him your cloak as well. Back then people had several tunic’s, but only one cloak. The cloak was seen as so essential, there were laws prohibiting people from taking it, and yet Jesus says, give them what’s rightfully yours to keep. He then goes onto say if someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Back then, Jesus is talking to a region that was occupied by Roman guards who at any given moment could tap you with their sword and demand that you carry their pack for a mile. Really humiliating. Jesus says at the end of the mile, don’t say I’ve fulfilled my rights, no, go another mile. And finally he says to give to people when they beg and seek to borrow from you. Sure, you have the right to not give money, but lose your rights and give. See the common denominator to each of these four scenario’s? They all have to do with losing your rights! Scholar D.A. Carson sums it up well when he writes, **“What Jesus is saying in these verses, more than anything else, is that his followers have no rights. They do not have the right to retaliate and wreak their vengeance, they do not have the right to their possessions, nor to their time and money. Even their legal rights may sometimes be abandoned...Personal self-sacrifice displaces personal retaliation, for this is the way the Savior himself went, the way of the cross. And the**

way of the cross, not notions of 'right and wrong,' is the Christians principle of conduct"- D.A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount*. The message is clear, we are to LOSE OUR RIGHTS.

Now, I don't hear any amins at all, only groans and a lot of push back! And the reason why we bristle at this is that we have been discipled by American culture, which is all about individual rights. America was founded on the right to religious liberty. The American revolution was about our rights to be free and independent. The Civil War has been described by many historians as, among other things, states rights. There's AA rights. There's Women's rights. There's LGBTQ rights. And while I am making no moral statements about these individually, what I am saying is that everywhere we look it's about our rights. Couple this with sin and the fallen nature of our hearts and Jesus' words here in our text to lose our rights, means OF COURSE WE PUSH BACK AND BRISTLE at this!

Let me drive this home with two analogies and a much needed disclaimer. Let's go back to the 1960s and look at Malcolm X and MLK. Now we might say Malcolm was all about rights, right? This is the man who gave us the phrase, "by any means necessary". He's pictured with a gun at his bombed home in Queens. He ridiculed MLK and the CRM movement for being sell outs and soft. On the other hand was MLK and the whole idea of non-violent resistance which was all about losing your rights. They didn't fight back when spit on, or had hot coffee thrown on them at sit ins. They didn't retaliate when bitten by dogs, beaten by police or had fire hydrants turned on them. Now sixty years later we would do well to ask, which way was the most redemptive? What brought about the most change? Holding onto rights, or losing rights? You know the answer.

Or let's look at marriage. Okay, she cheated on you and you're devastated as you should be. Now you have the right to divorce, and no one would fault you for that. Completely understandable. But what if you actually said, I'm going to lose my rights here, because marriage is an illustration of what God in Christ has done for me on the cross. Which way is a more compelling illustration and picture of the gospel? Holding onto rights, or losing rights?

Now, I want to be careful here. Jesus, nor I, am advocating abusive relationships. We know this because Jesus' analogies all have limits. We only have two cheeks. We only have one cloak. You're only told to go one more mile. And we only have so much money to give. There's limits. If you are being abused, talk to someone; get some help. *We* want to help.. If you're with a person who refuses to repent, it's time to move on. That's why Paul would say in Romans 12:18, as best as you can be at peace with all people. It takes TWO to have a healthy relationship.

So let me ask you- where do you need to lose your rights?

Loving Your Enemy- Matthew 5:43-44

Jesus is concerned with winning our enemies through the power of the gospel. We do this by losing our rights, and also by loving our enemies. See, if it was just about losing our rights, that's a passive thing, but responding to our enemies is also active. Jesus gets to this when he commands us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. One scholar says that the word *love* means unconquerable benevolence and invincible goodwill. I like that! The idea here is that no matter how bad you treat me, there's nothing you can do to make me stop doing good

to you. Even if the relationship has been toxic to the point where I have to leave because you fail to repent, I can still love you by praying for you.

I remember a season in my life where an individual had betrayed me, I mean really knifed me in the back. I was just hurt. I go on these prayer walks in the morning, and I just sensed the Lord saying to me, “I need you to commit to praying for this person, and I want you to pray prayers of blessing over them.” And I’m like, I’ll pray for them alright! Seriously, I started to pray that God would bless their finances, their kids and marriage, and so on. I prayed the great prayer of blessing over them from Numbers 6. You know what happened to me over time, don’t you? The anger and bitterness began to dissipate, and what started out as forced awkward prayers, ended up with being these intense, authentic, like really do this in their lives kind of prayers. Loving your enemy often begins with prayer!

Now this is so hard for me, and for you, because when people wound us, our natural reaction is to treat them in less than humane ways. Sometimes we lash out, but most of us are too sophisticated and prideful for that, so we delete their name and number, block or mute them on social media, avoid and ignore, and act as if they don’t exist. You know, the whole cancel culture thing. But this is not what Jesus means when he says to love our enemies.

Loving our enemies requires that we pray for them, but it also means that we acknowledge what Bishop Desmond Tutu calls ubuntu. In the 1990s when SA was emerging from apartheid, the nations leaders said we need more than changed laws, we need reconciliation among people of color and whites. So they started something you’ve heard of called the TRC. Now, Tutu in his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, says that the impetus for reconciliation was ubuntu. At its core ubuntu means my humanity is caught up with your humanity- that we need each other, that we are incomplete without each other. In other words, a failure to forgive and reconcile dehumanizes both the offended and the offender. One person, during apartheid, said that while they were being beaten by their enemy, he thought the person was acting like an animal, and that they needed to forgive this person in order to give them back their humanity! This is ubuntu.

Who’s humanity do you need to give back to? Who’s acted like an animal towards you, that your unconquerable and invincible love is needed to give them back their humanity. What beast do you need to “kiss” with your forgiveness? We can’t control reconciliation (that takes two), but we can extend the olive branch by forgiving.

Looking Like God- Matthew 5:44

So Bryan, do you really know my boss or co-workers and how often they’ve been to me? If you spent a week with my ex, you would understand that what you’ve been talking about is just impossible. Or do you know the racial trauma I’ve experienced? I mean why should I even consider engaging my enemies in such a way that they become friends? Jesus tells us in verse 44. You know what we call this? Common grace. Common grace says that God loves everyone, and by everyone we mean everyone. Daily, everyone is a recipient of God’s common grace. That’s right: Trump and Obama; MSNBC and Fox News watchers; Duke and UNC fans; people in Manhattan AND people on Staten Island!

No, seriously. This idea of God's impartial active love called common grace is so important for us, because we do really act as if God should love us more than the person who hurt us. Theologian James Cone got to this in many of his books. Widely regarded as one of the pioneers of Black liberation theology, Cone said some deeply problematic things, things like the God we serve is *only* the God of the oppressed. It was Cone who popularized the oppressed/oppressor binary, with more virtue being assigned to the oppressed and multiple categories of oppression. And while this may make me feel good as a Black man, when I hold this thinking up to the lens of the gospel there are some significant problems. See, if I really get the gospel, and that it is for everyone, I come to the uncomfortable conclusion that Christ died for the lynched and the lynch mob, for BLM and the Proud Boys, for the spouse who didn't cheat, and the spouse who did, for the persecuted and the persecutor! And when we show this kind of love towards those who have wronged us, we look like God!

And it's here where Jesus ends by saying something so easily misunderstood: He calls us to be perfect in verse 48. Now he's not talking about a life that is mistake free, oh no. The word *perfect* means completion or desired goal or end. Here it means a person who is living up to their full purpose. Don't you see? In context, Jesus is saying that when we are wronged and refused to go quid pro quo, and instead choose to lose our rights, actively love and look like God in the midst of all the wrong, God slaps high five with Jesus and says, That's exactly why I created them. You're living up to your purpose- displaying the gospel!

Civil right's leader John Lewis did this almost daily during the sixties. In 1961, he was a freedom rider, working to end segregation in bus terminals and other places. One day his bus stopped at Rock Hill, SC. He was met by a white man named Elwin Wilson who immediately began to beat him. In that moment, John Lewis thought to himself that it was not good enough to not hit back. It was not good enough to not hate. He needed to love the person even as they beat him. And that's what he did. Over the years, Elwin could not get Lewis out of his mind, and the fact that he didn't go quid pro quo. Finally, Elwin turned to Jesus, and in 2009 (48 years later) he turned to John Lewis and asked for forgiveness. John, being a Christian man freely forgave, and they reconciled and would speak together at events. **PICTURE OF JOHN LEWIS AND ELWIN WILSON**. Writing of this episode, Jon Meacham said that to know John Lewis was to clearly encounter a man whose kingdom was not of this world, but was of a different world!

Well, there was another man whose kingdom was not of this world, but was from another world. For 33 years he took on flesh and lived among us. When beaten he willingly gave up his rights. When attacked by an angry mob, he healed a man's ear. When jeered, he refused to return evil for evil! The result is that you and I have gone from being enemies with God to being friends and sons and daughters of God. May we live the same way! Salvation call.