

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: GO THE EXTRA MILE

Today we will discuss the new perspective Jesus gave on *lex talionis* – the law of retaliation.

In Matthew 5:38-42 we can read, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”*

Can you imagine if we all operated under the notion of an eye for an eye today? What would our relationships look like if we did so? Would we have any good relationships? Pondering these questions helps us grasp why Jesus provided clarity on this Old Testament law. The law of retaliation was written for the people of Israel in three of the books of the law – Exodus (21:24), Leviticus (24:20), and Deuteronomy (19:21). This law limited the retribution, or payback, that an offender would have to endure. The law governed all offenses, all the way to a life for a life.

Beginning in verse 39, Jesus teaches a lesson on non-retaliation - the complete opposite of what had been taught for centuries. In order to illustrate the teaching, He used four areas that the audience could relate to: physical attacks, legal suits, government demands, and financial requests. Instead of having an attitude of retribution, Jesus encourages His listeners to have a generous and compassionate attitude towards those who treat them unfairly. He teaches them to respond with forgiveness and love and to go beyond what was normally expected.

For many, it would seem to be a big request to respond in a non-confrontational, understanding manner when they are treated unfairly. But Jesus demands more of His followers, as He made clear with verse 41.

Jesus said *“and whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.”* What did this mean to the immediate audience? The phrase refers to the law of impressment which entitled the Roman government to press anyone into its service to carry a load as far as one mile. A Roman soldier could impress anyone into service at any time. A great example of this can be seen in the Gospels. The Roman soldiers pulled Simon from Cyrene out of the crowd to assist Jesus in carrying the cross. This law of impressment no doubt caused the people anguish and many probably longed for a day when they could

get back at the Romans for these injustices. Jesus uses this example to teach the people that they should demonstrate the love of God in their hearts by not stopping at the required distance but by going another mile.

Simply put, Jesus expects more of us! As those who have been forgiven by His sacrifice and have felt the impact of His grace, we should treat our fellow man, even those who treat us unfairly, with uncommon compassion and mercy. Our reactions should not be like the norms of our time. When someone shouts words of accusation and anger in our direction, let us respond with kindness. When someone does damage to our property, let us respond with compassion, knowing that we are under God's care and have eternal treasures that go well beyond our natural belongings. As followers of Jesus, let us follow His example and His teaching and live in a way that shows Him to our world.