

Devotions with Matt

May 21, 2020

A SACRIFICE OF LOVE

Why does revenge feel so good? Maybe it's a sense of justice or maybe it's just pride, but getting even with someone for what they did to us brings a sense of satisfaction. It could be the pettiest of things, but whatever is done to us, we so often must do unto the offender. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That sounds so fair to all the ones who have been wronged. Just a little payback will feel so good. Just a little revenge will make the scorecard even. We don't like to be on the losing end of anything.

Revenge, we feel, evens the score.

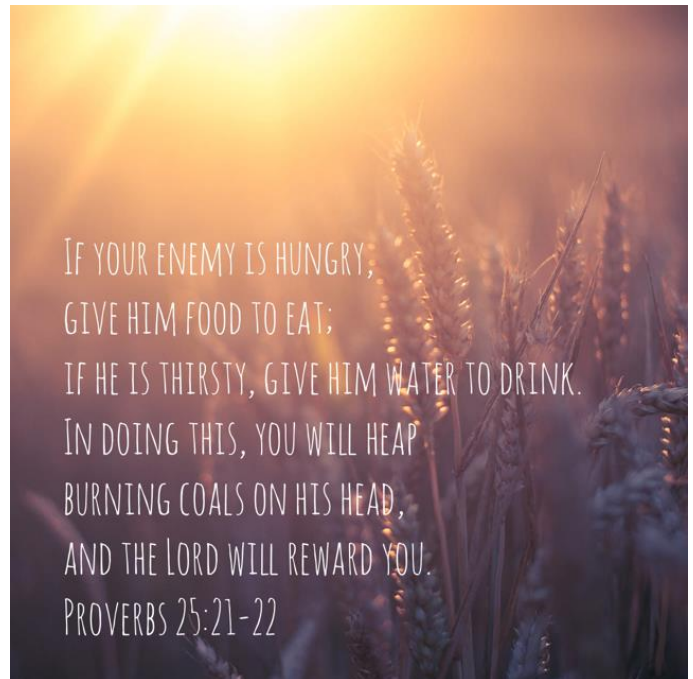
But does it really? If we take what the Bible says literally in regards to an eye for an eye, how exactly does revenge make it right? If someone caused us injury, and we did lose an eye, and yet somehow were able to take the offenders eye, where would our eye still be? Revenge doesn't bring our eye back. Besides, what may have been done in accident to us, and we exact revenge on them, they might feel like it's their turn for revenge and the whole thing begins to escalate.

That's how wars get started.

So when Jesus says in Matthew 5, "You have heard it said, eye for eye and tooth for tooth", He is referring to the Mosaic Law of retaliation and justice. While it is certainly true that God allowed a certain degree of "revenge" for the injured party, but mainly what the Law was speaking about was keeping the injured party from exacting an unfair reprisal. Then, just like now, when we are hurt or taken advantage of, our hearts want revenge. But in our anger we often take it too far. The Mosaic Law of "eye for eye" was to keep people from going too far with what they saw as a sense of justice through the lens of their own hurt.

But Jesus takes the Mosaic Law into the deep end of the pool as well. He begins to tell His hearers that if they are struck on the cheek, stolen from or taken advantage of in some way, they are not to take revenge, but comply. This is a hard pill to swallow. First of all it is important to note that He is not talking about dangerous offenses like murder, rape or deep injury. He is talking about the circumstances of daily life that are insulting, bothersome or mildly injurious. There is a law for the bigger things and a system of justice in place for punishment and restitution. But when an inconvenience or pride insulting or slightly painful injustice comes our way, we should turn the other cheek. Still, this is a hard pill to swallow.

Each situation will be different and the response we give to each one will be different as well, but the principal that Jesus is talking about here is that there is a higher calling for us. This world is not our home. The possessions we have do not save us or even bring us true joy. Only Jesus can. Sometimes not seeking revenge for a loss or an insult is a sacrifice. It is a response of thankfulness to God's love for us. He was innocent, yet led like a lamb to the slaughter. What revenge is there from Jesus for this great injustice? Love. He loved the ones who perpetrated the greatest evil the world has ever known; they beat, mocked and killed the Son of God. What was their punishment? Where is God's revenge?



We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of our sins are a slap in the face of the God who created us. Praise God there is grace, mercy forgiveness and love. If not, His deserved revenge on us would be too powerful to bear. And yet, it is His love for us that draws us to Him. It is His forgiveness that softens our hardened hearts and souls. Maybe there is something about giving up our "right" to revenge that is also powerful. To not take revenge on someone is hard, but to offer our forgiveness and love instead is maybe the most Christ-like thing we can do.

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you. - Proverbs 25:21-22

In Christ,

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