

Sermon on the Mount Part XII - Conflict Resolution

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- [0 : 00] This morning, the message is back to the Sermon on the Mount, Part 12, dealing with conflict resolution.
- And if you will turn to me, or turn with me, I guess I am standing up here though, right? But please turn to Matthew chapter 5, and this morning we'll be looking at verses 21 through 26.
- You have heard that the ancients were told, you shall not commit murder. And whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.
- But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court. And whoever says to his brother, you good for nothing, shall be guilty before the supreme court.
- And whoever says, you fool, shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go.
- [1 : 45] First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.
- Truly, I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid the last cent.
- For the past several weeks, we have had a hiatus from the Sermon on the Mount with numerous other things going on, and it's been my intention all the time to return to it as quickly as we could because the continuity of a passage is always disrupted when you do not continue it week by week.
- So we have experienced some discontinuity here, and I'm still going to resist the temptation to repeat and elaborate on the first portion of this verse because it was at our last session that I think we covered it rather thoroughly, and it is available on CD in the rear back there if anyone would like it.
- So we are going to focus our attention primarily on verses 25 and 26 of chapter 5.
- [3 : 23] And I remember having read this quite some time ago. In fact, it was over 50 years ago as a relatively new believer, and it was as puzzling to me as it was as puzzling even just a few months ago because I could not identify or just get my brain around this verse 25.
- Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way. What is that about?
- With your opponent on the way. In order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge and the judge to the officer and you be thrown into prison, truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.
- Well, for certain, the first thing we have to do is completely divorce this passage from any cultural considerations that we are familiar with here in the West because they simply do not apply.

The manner in which jurisprudence or the application of law was carried out in the ancient Mideast was radically, radically different from anything we know today.

[4 : 51] In fact, there are still a number of questions that I do not have answered, even taking into consideration the culture, because not only is this a different culture, but it is a different culture 2,000 years removed.

So it is safe to say that even in the Mideast, where these truths that we are considering here were commonplace at the time Jesus gave them, they are not commonplace today in the Mideast because they too have had 2,000 years of forward movement, so you can be sure that a number of things have changed.

Nonetheless, there are some real insights that can be gained from this passage that gives us a real handle on it, and of course the principles that we want to extract from it are what I call abiding principles or abiding truths.

Now, we are well aware that this is set in a Jewish context and that it was a couple of thousand years ago, and as I mentioned, their culture too has undergone some changes, and yet there is simply no way that we can understand this passage, at least in my thinking.

There is no way I could understand this passage without having some very pertinent and valuable help about how law was administered in the Mideast 2,000 years ago.

[6 : 15] There is no reason to believe at all that what Jesus said here was of any surprise to anybody. They all knew what he was talking about. I'm sure that nobody looked to a person next to them when Jesus said, make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way.

I'm sure that one did not turn to another and say, what's he talking about? He knew full well what he was talking about. Everybody understood that, but we don't.

And not only that, but there's a good possibility that Mideasterners who read this today wouldn't understand it either because, again, of the cultural changes. So there are writings that have been contributing to our understanding, and this is one of them.

I shared with you, I think, in one of our earlier sessions, I came across this little book in a used bookstore. I believe it was in Seattle, Washington, and it was probably in the 1960s.

And I thought, well, that looks interesting. And I was just browsing through this book, and I came to the frontispiece here and discovered that it was printed in 1936.

[7 : 35] And on the page just inside the book, there is an inscription. It says, To Ellen B. Mussens, with sincerest appreciation of your kind interest in my Aramaic work.

And it's dated July 7, 1936. And I noted that because that is one year and one day after I was born.

And I just got to thinking, the author of this, whose name is Dr. George M. Lamza, he is an ethnologist and an Aramaic language expert, and he was a believer.

I assume that he is deceased now because if he wrote this in 1936, assuming that he was probably in his 40s or 50s when he wrote it, he'd probably be 120 or 30 now.

So it's pretty safe to say that he's expired. He is with the Lord, and he obviously was a believer, and you could tell that from the things that he said in the book. But I was just thinking about this just this morning in my office, I thought, my guess would be that Dr. Lamza probably had no idea that a preacher would gain such welcome insight into this passage and share a portion of his book with a congregation 78 years after it was published.

[9 : 18] He probably didn't have a clue, but here we are, and here it is, and I'm sure that it is well out of print, but it does shed tremendous light on this passage, and there are numerous books that have been published.

In fact, I have most of them on manners and customs of Bible lands because just about everything they did was different from the way we do it. Their marriages were different.

Their weddings were different. Their funerals were different. Their daily life was different. The food they ate was different. The clothes they wore was different. The way they heated their house was different. All of those things.

So what this constitutes, of course, is a cultural gap. And if you want to get into the mind of the biblical writer, gain a real appreciation and understanding of what is being said, you have to bridge that cultural gap in order to understand.

And that's the way it is here. So he has some wonderfully enlightening comments regarding verse 23 and verse 24. So let me share this with you and see if it lights up your thinking processes the way it did mine.

[10 : 30] The text is based on, therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there remembers that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way.

First be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly. Whilst thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge and the judge deliver thee to the officer and thou be cast into prison.

Well, here is what Dr. Lamza said. And by the way, he was born and reared in Syria, which is just over the border from Israel.

So he is a bona fide Mid-Easterner. And you'll recall that Syria is where Saul of Tarsus was going when he was encountered by the risen Christ on the Damascus road.

Damascus, of course, is in Syria. So Syria and Israel and Lebanon, they all have a very similar culture, particularly among those who were Jews.

[11 : 46] They had their own Jewish culture, but it was still imbibed in that Mid-Eastern mindset with the food and everything that went with it. And the Arabs, of course, they've been adversarial to the Jews for millennia, but they still had a lot of commonality.

They still did things a lot the same way. And Dr. Lamza says, quarrels and disputes are common between brothers because they live in the same house.

Now, he's talking about blood brothers and the fact that they live in the same house. Now, our tradition, of course, is to leave father and mother and be joined to your wife.

And there was, of course, that went on too. But it was not unusual. It was not unusual for multiple families to inhabit one dwelling. It was not unusual for blood brothers to be under the same roof.

The families were kept somewhat separate, but they had a lot of things in common. And largely, it was due to economic necessity and things of that nature that do we know anything at all about people having hard times economically and moving in with someone else?

[13 : 02] Do we know anything about that? Do we know anything about 25- and 30-year-old kids returning home because of what's happening in the economy and laid off from work and so on? Well, everybody has hard times from time to time.

He goes on to say, these disputes and quarrels are often caused by their wives and servants. No.

When they separate and live apart, further troubles arise because of property division. Reconciliation and peace become impossible. At times, two brothers living under the same roof never speak to each other.

The word brother in this instance also means neighbor or a member of the same race or faith as is seen in the book of Deuteronomy.

And our Lord even explains this too when he talks about, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. And remember the cheeky Pharisee came back and said, how do you define brother?

[14 : 10] How do you define neighbor? Who is my neighbor? And that preceded Jesus giving that famous parable of the good Samaritan. And he talked about how this man who was robbed and practically left for dead was ignored by the priest and ignored by the Levite and they passed by and here came this Samaritan.

And what made that so significant was that he was a Samaritan and the Jews and the Samaritans have no dealings. There is an ongoing animosity between Jews and Samaritan, but it was the Samaritan, not the religious priest or Levite who stopped and ministered to this man and poured in oil and wine in his wounds, bandaged him up, took him to an inn, made arrangements for him to stay at the inn overnight and told the innkeeper, please take care of this man.

He was attacked on the road and I'm paying for his lodging and if this isn't enough, I'll square up with you when I come back through this way again.

Jesus gave that story and then he turned to the crowd and said, now let me ask you, who was the real neighbor here? It was the one that you would least suspect.

It was the Samaritan who offered help. And that was exactly his point. And the larger point is this. We are all brothers. We are all sisters.

[15 : 38] Every one of us. Not just in the blood family where we have those lineal ties of parents and children, but we are all related and we all come from one blood.

We are all brothers and sisters. And as I've often said, some say that's why we fight so much because we're family. So, here are two brothers.

This is a hypothetical situation, but one that was not at all unusual because rifts arise, inequities occur, feelings are hurt, people distance themselves from each other, they're on the outs with each other, they're not on speaking terms and so on.

And our author goes on to say, reconciliation between brothers and neighbors generally takes place during the feasts and holy days.

A few days before the feast, a group of townspeople known as peacemakers. Remember that verse earlier in chapter 5 where Jesus said in the Beatitudes, blessed are the peacemakers, for they, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[16 : 49] These are the people he's talking about. Peacemakers in a village that Jesus is talking about here are those who are dedicated to the task of ending disputes and rifts that occur between people.

And the reason that's important is because when people are on the outs with each other, when there are factions that choose up sides, it radically impacts the peace of the community.

It affects the atmosphere. There is no peace there. There is no real shalom. And that's the word for peace in Israel.

And they place such a tremendous importance upon peace, shalom. It is used as a greeting when people meet. Shalom.

We say, hello. They say, shalom. We say, goodbye. They say, shalom. Shalom is everything. And in Hebrew, shalom means peace.

[17 : 59] And a great deal of importance is placed upon achieving and maintaining the peace. A peaceable life, a peaceable community enhances life and living so much.

And when you have to live in a hostile area where people don't get along, where there's a lot of resentment, a lot of bitterness, it impacts everything in the family.

And the children even get involved because parents talk and the children overhear things. And you don't like those people because they're this or they're that. And it even comes down to the little youngsters who begin to develop prejudices and biases even early in life just because there is no shalom.

A few days before the feast, a group of townspeople known as peacemakers begin making peace between quarreling parties.

How do they know who's quarreling? Oh, they know. They know. Word gets around. The grapevine. Everybody knows who's sore at who, who's on the outs with who, who hasn't been speaking to who for how long.

[19 : 17] And this goes on all the time. This is just typical of humanity. These peacemakers help to settle the differences, divide the properties, and urge them to forgive each other and make peace.

Because when you do, everybody benefits. The whole community is at rest and enjoying things again. When efforts of peacemakers fail, the final hope for peace is placed on the words of the priest, which will be uttered during the services on the holy day.

Now, I'm not real sure of what doctor, of whom Dr. Lamza is speaking here when he uses the word priest. It could have reference to Jewish priests, like the Levites and the priest, or it could be that which was extended from the Jewish priesthood over into the Roman Catholic priesthood, which came into reality probably in the second and third century.

It goes back very, very far. And it may have been involved with that because, and I don't want to get involved into the subject of replacement theology other than to just inject this, if I may.

And I'll be as brief as I can be with this. When it became evident that the Jewish nation, as a nation, had rejected Jesus as their Messiah, a number of Gentiles, that is, non-Jewish people, were exposed to the gospel of Christ, primarily through the efforts of the Apostle Paul, because he was raised up of God specifically to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

[21 : 15] Israel had 12 apostles, those whom the Lord designated in Matthew 10. But there was only one who was raised up to be the apostle to the Gentiles, to the non-Jew.

And as more and more Gentiles came to faith in Christ, and as Israel had demonstrated that they were locked in to a position of rejection, God set Israel aside, and he began expanding the gospel through the Gentiles.

And this gave rise to the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul and his taking the gospel all the way over into Europe. Consequently, tens of thousands of people who were not Jews, but Gentiles, were placing their faith in this Jewish Messiah who was crucified and buried and raised from the dead.

And these Gentiles became believers. They moved out of their paganism and their worship of many idols and many gods, and they embraced Jesus as God's son, and they embraced the God of Israel.

That, happening on such a large scale, convinced many of them that, you know what? God is finished with the Jew.

[22 : 40] He's just written them off. The nation of Israel has rejected Jesus, and God has rejected Israel permanently for good.

And in place of Israel, God has raised up a whole new thing called the church, which is mainly Gentile, non-Jewish.

And believing that Israel was completely out of the picture, they saw themselves as the replacement for Israel, thinking that God was finished with Israel forever.

We know that God's rejection of Israel is only temporary, and Romans 9, 10, and 11 make that quite clear. That's the best commentary we can find on what happened to Israel.

So, what developed from that is many of these Gentiles started holding their meetings, and they got together, and they came to conclusions like this.

[23 : 42] Well, you know, if Israel is out of the picture, and God isn't doing, in other words, Israel is no longer the chosen people. We are now the chosen people.

Now, I don't believe that for a moment, but there are a lot of people today who do, and they are called replacement theologians. Well, if we as non-Jews, but as Gentiles, are God's replacement for Israel, hmm, we ought to have priests, shouldn't we?

Israel had priests. We're the replacement for Israel. We ought to have priests. And it was this kind of thinking that preceded the adoption of the Roman Catholic priesthood.

And it is not coincidental that they wear the black garb and all that goes with it and the incense and the ritual prayers and all the rest of it.

It is an actual adoption of and carryover from the Jewish priesthood. So, our author may be speaking of early Roman Catholic theology and priesthood, which was being practiced, as far as we know, way back to, like, the second and third century.

[25 : 12] Augustine came along in the fourth century and he is referred to as one of the church fathers and, of course, there are numerous others. But you see historically how these things come together and that gives an explanation to his use of the word priest here.

So, on such occasions, let me repeat this, when efforts of the peacemakers fail, the final hope for peace is placed on the words of the priest, which will be uttered during the services on the holy day.

Now, that could be either the ancient, it could be, you see, this isn't in the scripture text about the priest. This is in Lanza's book.

So, we don't know if he is referring to priests a la Jewish priests and the Jewish priesthood or if he is bringing this up and referring to the Roman Catholic priests as it existed centuries ago.

So, he goes on to say, on such occasions, the priest reads absolution and prays to God asking forgiveness for his people. He then asks the people to forgive each other in order that they may receive forgiveness from God.

[26 : 28] Do you see that as being one of the conditions? And our Lord makes it very clear right here in this Sermon on the Mount that if you are not forgiving of your brother, God will not forgive you.

That is the way it was. That is not the way it is, but that is the way it was because those words were uttered by our Lord to the nation of Israel in a covenant relationship with Jehovah.

That was a one-time situation that existed then, doesn't exist now at all, but it was very much in vogue when Jesus said this because for you to be a Jew and in a covenant relationship with Israel, if you were unforgiving toward someone, God would not be forgiving toward you.

How do you square that with what Paul said in Colossians 3 where he talks about Christ having forgiven us all trespasses? How do you square it with that?

And the answer is you don't. It is not squarable with that because it's talking about two different entities under two different circumstances that since have not existed and do not exist today.

[27 : 45] You can be thankful and so can I that God's forgiveness of us is not dependent upon us forgiving others. I can't even remember all the people that I would have to forgive if I tried.

You probably couldn't either. Things were a lot different then. Our forgiveness from God is dependent upon our being in Christ and if you are in Christ you have a perfect, full, complete forgiveness.

God has already forgiven you for sins you haven't even committed yet. Now I know that sounds like blasphemy almost. It almost sounds presumptuous of God.

I was talking to someone about this very one thing and they said you know that doesn't sound right. That God has already forgiven me for sins I haven't even committed yet.

How can he do that? And I said well keep in mind that all that God has forgiven all your sins before you were ever born.

[28 : 51] That's the way it works. There is a blanket of forgiveness forgiveness and that blanket of forgiveness is related to our being in Christ because in Christ we have his forgiveness his pardon his love his grace his righteousness his everything it is a package deal and we are complete in him.

That doesn't mean we are sinless that doesn't mean that God approves of our sin but it just does it but it does point to the efficacy of the death of Christ and that's really important and keep in mind the fact that that when Christ died on the cross for our sins all your sins were future then weren't they?

Of course they were. So he goes on to say the priest asks the people to forgive each other in order that they may receive forgiveness from God.

This is done before giving the Holy Communion. Now he is obviously speaking in terms of the Roman Catholic priesthood and administering communion because under the Jewish priesthood and the system of worship they didn't do that and they didn't do it that way.

But he goes on to say communicants who have not been on good terms rush to kiss each other. If the priest discovers that certain brothers or neighbors have not agreed he refuses to give them communion.

[30 : 26] They can't take communion. He will not serve it to them. Now keep in mind that when they are at this service and communion is about to be served and remember that passage in 2 Corinthians 11 where Paul says but let a man examine himself.

this means you are to search your heart and mind and through introspection you are to ask yourself is there someone that I need to forgive?

Is there someone that I need to make things right with? And if there is then the idea and the thinking was then you excuse yourself and you go from that service and by the way these services lasted for 2-3 hours and everything was very local then so it isn't as though they were crossed down 5 miles away or anything like that.

You could go out and when it says that the brothers and sisters rushed to kiss each other that's the mid-eastern holy kiss where they kiss on this side and then they kiss on this side and it goes back and forth.

You see the big shots and the ambassadors and what not do that when they step down off the plane in a foreign country and they go through the ritual and Putin does it with our own president and that's something that it's just protocol.

[31 : 57] It goes on all the time and it goes on between the mid-easterners. That's what they refer to as the holy kiss and scripture talks about that too. If the priest discovers that certain brothers or neighbors have not agreed he refuses to give them communion.

Now if you are in this religious system and you are practicing a sacerdotal relationship or religion whereby grace is administered to you through the sacraments and communion is looked upon as a sacrament your soul is in jeopardy.

It is very important that you receive communion. communion. When we receive communion here as is the case with most Protestant churches we believe that the cup and the bread represent the body and blood of Christ.

But in Roman Catholic theology they believe that the cup is the blood of Christ and the bread is the body of Christ. Christ and when they hold out the little wafer to the communicant the priest says receive the body of Christ and they put out their tongue and he puts the wafer on their tongue and to them that is what it means to receive Christ.

Christ. That is a sacramental aspect of their salvation. They believe that we are saved by grace but grace is administered through the sacraments.

[33 : 36] That's the only way you can get grace in Roman Catholic theology is by receiving the sacraments. One of which is communion. Another is baptism.

Another is well there are seven all together. I can't recall all of them but marriage is one of them and so we view salvation as personal rather than institutional because God has given us a personal volition, a personal will.

So while these with whom we disagree I'm sure mean very well and they have the best of intentions, we are justified, we receive Christ by faith.

We do not receive him by mouth. But in this setting, your soul was in jeopardy if you were not able to take communion.

And if things were really bad, then you could actually be excommunicated from the church and if you're excommunicated, you are persona non grata, you are not welcome in the services, you are dismissed from the Catholic church and there is therefore no salvation for you.

[34 : 53] You were doomed. And that's precisely the way they looked upon it. So you can see why in this context being able to take communion was so important. And you better get things straightened out or you could be paying an eternal price.

Some men before the conclusion of the service got out of the church to find their adversaries to make peace and kiss them so they may return and participate in the communion. Our Lord commands that one should leave even his most sacred gift on the altar and go in search of his enemy and make peace with him.

Love and peace are greater than all temples and sacrifices because God is love and no love can be realized without peace. Man cannot be reconciled with God unless he first makes peace with his brother and neighbors.

And that's the context against which Matthew 5 is written. And here is the part that I found absolutely fascinating. I find it all fascinating but this is based on Matthew 5 25.

Agree with your adversary quickly. In other words, when you have a dispute with an adversary, don't be real bullheaded and difficult about coming to terms.

[36 : 12] Be willing to cut each other some slack and reach a happy medium and get this thing behind you. That's what it means when it says, agree with your adversary quickly while you are in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge and the judge deliver you to the officer and thou be cast into prison.

And I remember reading that the first time and I thought, well, what in the world is that all about? Because I was thinking in terms of as a new believer, naive Christian, not hardly knowing up from down, not even knowing the order of the books of the Bible yet, I looked at that and I thought, how am I going to do that?

How can I make this work in my life? And little did I know that I wasn't expected to, but I was trying the best I could to be obedient and responsive to scripture and I don't know what this is all about, but here our author does, I think.

In most parts of the Orient, and he's using the Orient as a synonym for the East, of course, or the Mideast, there are few courts and judges. Now, this immediately prompted a question to me.

We know where our courts and judges come from. The courts are established by legislative body and it's either on the state level or the federal level, and we know that very often judges are in some cases appointed and in some cases judges are elected, but in either case we know where they come from.

[37 : 46] I don't know where these judges come from. In the Bible, I don't know how one got to be a judge. We are not given any formula in the New Testament or the Old Testament as to how one went about becoming a judge.

In the Old Testament, we've got a whole book that is called the book of Judges. Israel, after Joshua died, Moses provided the leadership and then passed the reins to Joshua, and after Joshua died, there was no real successor to Joshua who served in that capacity, but Israel, young Israel, morphed from a leadership under Joshua and Moses to a period of the judges, and that went on for some four or five hundred years until finally Israel became dissatisfied with judges and said, we want a king.

Samuel was the judge at the time, and the people came to Samuel and said, Samuel, we want a king. Why can't we have a king? All the nations around us, they all have kings.

We're the only nation without a king. We're embarrassed. This does not look good on the international scene. We want a king. And Samuel says, you don't know what you're asking for. You don't want a king. A king will exact taxes, and a king will conscript your young men into military service and make all kinds of demands on you.

You're better. No, no, no, no. They had a hissy fit. And Samuel went to the Lord and said, I don't know what I'm going to do with these people. They're demanding a king. They don't want me to be a judge over them anymore.

[39 : 22] I've done the best I can. I'm only human. And God said, Samuel, don't worry about it. It isn't you that they've rejected.

They've rejected me because Israel was actually under a kind of a theocracy. So, the judges period ended.

And the text says, there are few courts and judges. One reason for this is that by most Orientals prefer to settle their differences by arbitration or through peacemakers who are chiefly bishops and priests.

Now, they had their peacemakers. You see, this was a real family, a real close-knit neighborhood type thing in which these function.

They had peacemakers and they had matchmakers, too. And the matchmakers were the ones who aided in arranging marriages between these people. So, peacemakers were chiefly bishops and priests.

[40 : 27] And when such efforts fail, they turn to government officials and justices of peace who are stationed at the capitals of provinces or at some distant points.

And we aren't given a clue as to how they become judges or how they became magistrates. But we do know one thing. Most of them were as crooked as a dog's hind leg.

They always had their hand out. They were always taking money under the table. You see, bribery is a real corruption problem that has always been with mankind.

every nation on earth, including the U.S. of A, is up to its eyeballs in corruption. And of our own criminal justice system here in the U.S.A., the statement has been made that in this country you get the best justice that money can buy.

And we've seen that demonstrated time and time again. if you can shell out the bucks to pay for a high profile, high powered lawyer who can sway juries and all the rest of it, you've got the money, you'd be surprised what you can get away with.

[41 : 46] We've seen that happen time and time again. If there's anything that is in more basic need of an overhaul of the system, it's the criminal justice system and the penal system and the school system and, well, I'll stop right there.

in olden times, prophets and men of God were the arbitrators, peacemakers, and judges who looked after the political and spiritual welfare of the people.

Samuel was one of these judges to whom all Israel came. 1 Samuel 7 verse 15. Even today, now he's talking about 1936 when he wrote this book, Even today, in most countries of the East, the disputants journey for two, three, or more days in search of a justice.

In many instances, the parties concerned travel together, stop at the same end, eat and converse during the journey. They have fought or perhaps wounded each other, but on the long journey to the place of justice, they have to be friendly, have to get along.

And guess what they're doing while they are walking together on the way? They're talking. It is wonderful what can come of people when they're just willing to talk.

[43 : 17] Lots of value is placed in talk, in just conversing, because as people open up and talk, many times, new perspectives come to light.

New understandings come to light. Misunderstandings are sometimes cleared up. Preconceived ideas are sometimes revealed to be unjust.

Sometimes there is a lot of fence-mending that can go on when people are just willing to talk to each other. And when they would take these trips and travel, here are two adversaries.

These guys don't get along. But they are going together to seek justice, and it may be a two or three-day journey. Why wouldn't they travel separately?

Why would they travel together? Well, in the first place, they were encouraged to do so. In the second place, travel in biblical days was very dangerous.

[44 : 22] And if you had to go any amount of distance, especially if you had anything of value on you, you were best served if you traveled in a group or even in a caravan. Because there were always highwaymen, people just like the parable of the good Samaritan, the guy who was beaten and left for dead.

So there was a certain element of protection in going together with somebody else. And not only that, but you didn't want your adversary to get to the judge and prejudice him by telling his story before you could tell your story.

So out of an interest of self preservation, you would go together and you would stay with each other and usually sleep in the same inn and have your little campfire at the same place and all kinds of good things could come out of that.

Otherwise, he says, they may meet bandits on the road who could rob and kill them. They have to protect and fight for each other. Often, on the weary and tiresome journey, their troubles and differences are forgotten or minimized.

And as I've said many times, misunderstandings can be cleared up. Oh, well, I didn't know that. Well, I thought, oh, no, no, that wasn't the way it was at all. He said, she said, oh, really?

[45 : 37] Well, yeah, well, boy, that changes things, doesn't it? It's amazing what can happen when people just sit down and talk?

Friendly conversations take the place of hatred. Gracious words are spoken instead of cursing. Love and sympathy dominate. Thus, while on the road to the judge, men who have been enemies for months may suddenly become friends.

They talk over their differences and suggest remedies. such attempts and discussions would have been impossible if the men were at home.

Why? Because friends and enemies would have interfered and prevented a reconciliation. You know what happens when people get on the outs like that and there's bad blood between a couple of people?

You know what happens very often? Others get pulled into it. People take sides. People align with this one. People align with that one. The next thing you know, you've got the Hatfields and the McCoys.

[46 : 46] Going at it big time. On the tedious journey, they have time to think things over and are free to make agreements and settlements without outside interference.

Questions which were difficult to settle at home, especially when others are putting their two cents in and stoking the fire, now seem to be easy. Each man makes apologies to the other, admitting his ignorance of facts or blaming others for the quarrel.

So while they talk together on the road, they enter into friendly relations and differences are finally settled to the advantage of both. In addition, they avoid the loss of time and expense necessary to present the cases before the officials of justice.

In other words, what we're talking about is an old-fashioned settlement out of court. court. That's all this is. And you know, there's no lawyers involved.

No lawyers involved. Just two people who didn't get along, settling their differences. Two men may start on a five-day journey to the judge and unexpectedly return home on the first or second day.

[48 : 05] now, you know, it just occurred to me, while they make these new agreements and new arrangements among themselves, they may zero in on so-and-so in the village where they live, and he is the real problem here.

He's the guy that caused all this. He's the guy that fed bad information, and they may zero in on a third party who really contributed to the whole misunderstanding and the brouhaha in the first place. So, everything's Jake.

on their arrival back home in the town, one would kill a sheep and give a banquet in honor of the other, inviting friends to share in the joy of reconciliation without having to go before the judge.

It's a big party. Everybody's happy. These guys have gotten their act together. The wound is healed. Let's celebrate. Kill an animal, have a big feast. And that's what they did, and the whole community rejoiced, and everybody was better off for it.

But, that's a best-case scenario. Sometimes that wouldn't be realized, because the offending parties may still not be able to reconcile.

[49 : 15] The grudge and the hurt and the wound may be so deep that they're not willing to reconcile. Then, both would have to face the judge and experience many discomforts.

oriental judges generally have few cases during the year, and as their support is derived from complainants, now, our judges derive their support from the taxpayers.

They are paid out of the public till. That's not the case here. These judges are paid on the basis of what they can extract from the complainants.

that gives them almost carte blanche to do any kind of scheming that they want to do, because they are the position in the position of authority.

As I mentioned, I don't know how they were appointed, I don't know how they were removed, I don't know how one could determine he wanted to be a judge, or how others recognized him to be a judge, but this is the way it was.

[50 : 23] These two, who cannot agree, are like spiders spiders. The judge is like a spider patiently waiting for victims to fall in their web.

A trifling affair is made into a big case, requiring months or even years to settle. Well, now, our courts operate a similar fashion, don't we?

We know of things that drag on for months after months after months before there is a settlement. That's not that unusual. But in the East, justice is often executed not according to guilt, but according to wealth.

In other words, the judge is saying, how much can I milk this thing for? So we've got an unscrupulous judge, and that's not at all unusual in the East, because bribery was the name of the game.

Remember, in Matthew, not Matthew, Mark, Luke, it's in Luke 18, unless it moved, where the Lord gave a parable about the unjust judge.

[51 : 36] Remember that? That was not uncommon. A lot of the judges were unjust. A lot of them were just out for whatever they could get out of the complainants. So he says, if both the disputants are poor, the case is promptly dismissed with a few rebukes.

But if they happen to have money or other wealth, the case may never be settled until the last cent is gone and the property sold. Some judges are so cruel and unjust that in order to get money more quickly from disputing parties, they immediately put them in prison.

Both of them. Relatives and friends are instructed to sell their properties to pay enormous bribes and meet other expenses, hoping to gain the liberty of the imprisoned.

Now, in a case like this, so-called jurisprudence, you've got the judge who is a criminal right along with the people who are the disputants.

And we would consider that an intolerable situation. But you know what this is all about? This is all about power and entrenchment and influence and being in a position to take advantage of people and having so few scruples that you were able to do it.

[52 : 55] That's what made unjust judges. And they always have their hand out for a bribe under the table. Freedom only comes when the judge is assured there is nothing left to be sold and the prison cell has to be occupied by another unfortunate man.

Jesus had seen many men lose their property and receive severe punishment for little differences which could have easily been settled by the men themselves or by a friend in the village.

He referred to the earthly judgment to illustrate the final judgment. He urged men and women to repent while on the road of this life so as not to be brought before the bar of final judgment and suffer eternal punishment.

Now, returning to Matthew 5, let's just read the text again. Verse 25, Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge and the judge to the officer and you be thrown into prison.

Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. Until that judge has milked the situation for everything it's worth and you're flat broke.

[54 : 21] Jesus is saying, don't do that. Don't submit yourself to that. Settle your differences with your adversary quickly.

Get them resolved. As I said earlier, life is too short. Would you pray with me? Father, we believe that the principle that is lurking behind this is that men and women should settle accounts with you.

We are, while we are living in this world, we are as those who are on the way. And we ought to see the wisdom of agreeing with you.

You are depicted as an adversary. How can we think of you as an adversary when you've done so much and given so much to make reconciliation possible?

It is because you are righteous and we are not. It is because you are one who has a full and complete perspective and we do not.

[55 : 34] it is because man who is not right with you is in a state of war against you. We are at enmity with you, whether we realize it or not.

But peace, shalom, is administered through our Lord Jesus Christ who has become our new and living way.

Our prayer today is that for anyone here who may not have come to grips with who you are and who we are, that they may be willing to come to terms with you because the consequences for refusing to do so will be unbearable.

And yet, despite the adversarial role you have, you have demonstrated incredible love and grace by providing for us, a substitute who could take upon himself all that we deserve to bear.

We want that shalom. We want the peace of God that comes from knowing the Lord Jesus, from being removed from an adversarial role to being one of incredible friendship.

[56 : 54] Thank you for making it all possible. people. And if there is one here today who has never made that decision to put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, we trust the Spirit of God will enlighten them to the fact that he is the only way.

May they abandon all self-help efforts and all other things upon which they may be depending and cast themselves entirely upon you, knowing that you will eagerly receive them.

for it all. We thank you in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.