

Sermon on the Mount Part XVIII

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- [0 : 00] The message this morning is the Sermon on the Mount. Today's passage connects with the Sermon on the Mount and serves as a reinforcement to it.
- Never mind that the Sermon on the Mount was given directly to Israel in the dispensation of the law. It is cross-dispensational and its application is one of the many abiding principles we have pointed out in the past.
- And what is this business about heaping coals of fire on someone's head by doing good to them? How does that work?
- We shall see. Please turn to the scripture in Romans chapter 12. And this morning we'll be looking at verses 14 through 21.
- Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.
- [1 : 22] Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.
- Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.
- If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God.
- For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him.
- And if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- [2 : 30] Quite a passage of scripture, is it not? And of course it does tie in with what we are considering.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5, and we will return shortly to the Romans 12 passage, but we do need to go to Romans 5 first. So if you would join me in doing that.
- And I am going to make every effort today to try to allow some time for Q&A; because I imagine this will really generate a number of questions.
- So be prepared to ask them or make comments if you have some light on the passage that we have not shared. So today is the last consideration of the six areas that Christ addressed when he made the startling statement about the insufficient righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 5.20.
- Remember that is a key passage to understanding the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. But I say unto you, Christ said, that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.
- [3 : 47] That is the key text. Christ then proceeded to give six examples wherein they fell short of what was acceptable to God for entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
- And all six of these are vitally connected and are in fact interwoven together. They all deal with how they are to treat one another.

And in each of these six areas, Christ prefaces his remarks by saying, you have heard or it has been said.

And then he invariably follows it with a contradiction. But I say unto you, this was an extremely bold thing that he was doing because he was actually superseding the teaching and the directives that they had been receiving for centuries.

Not from the law of Moses, but from the scribes and Pharisees' interpretation of the law of Moses. Those are two different things. Bear in mind, Christ never came for the purpose of contradicting the law or destroying the law.

[5 : 00] In fact, he was the first one and the only one who ever actually really fulfilled the law in all of its purpose, intent, etc.

In every respect. So, these six areas all deal with some aspect of interactive living.

The value of human life is incorporated in the first one that he gave as regards the law of murder. That's in 521 through 27.

The law of adultery is covered in 527 through verse 30. The law of divorce in 531 and verse 32. The law of oaths or swearing in 533 through 37.

And the law of non-resistance, 538 through 42. And that particular law is married in a really unmistakable way to the law of love in 543 and verse 48.

[6 : 02] Or 43 through 48. These six areas are all bound together and they address the broad area of human relations.

They are capped off with the all-encompassing commandment to love because it, in essence, summarizes all of the five before.

And we're not going to turn to it, but later in Matthew, and I'm thinking of chapter 22 and verse 35, the scribes and Pharisees came to Christ tempting him.

In other words, they were trying to trip him up, trying to make him look bad, trying to get him to misspeak. And they said, Tell us, Master, which is the greatest of all the laws?

And Christ said, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself.

[7 : 02] On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. love is what it's all about.

But it's not working very well because it isn't being applied very well and it isn't understood very well. The essence of the whole thing. What Jesus is saying is, you know the law that Moses gave, including all 633 of the commandments, not just the 10, but all of the law, which actually incorporates Genesis through Deuteronomy.

Christ said, what all of those commandments and directives, what they all boil down to is just two things. Love for God and love for your neighbor.

That's what the law and the prophets are all about. That's what it boils down to. And you know, if everybody did that, you wouldn't even have to worry about the other eight.

Because what they would do is automatically bring into play everything. For instance, if you love your neighbor as yourself, you're not going to murder him. You're not going to steal from him.

[8 : 24] You're not going to lie to him. You're not going to cheat him. You're not going to take his wife. It just answers everything. But we have such a problem with this. And the reason we do is because our fallenness prohibits us from producing the kind of love that is needed to meet these requirements.

And when we talk about love, we are talking about biblical love. We're not talking about the syrupy, sentimental love that the world talks about. We are talking about action that is motivated by the human will and the volition.

It may be accompanied by emotions, but it is not directed by emotions. It is directed by volition. And the emotions, if they are there, will follow along later.

Our great difficulty with love is that, and this takes place even in marriage, is that we see love as a feeling, as an emotion. And don't get me wrong, I'm not down on emotions or feelings.

Life would be incredibly boring without them. They are an essential part of our makeup, but we've got to keep them in perspective. Love that is biblical love is love that is capable of being commanded and responded to in obedience.

[9 : 52] Now, that might not sound like hearts and flowers and roses and all of that, but it's what love really is. Love is an act of the will. And we've gone through this definition of love and agape, and I don't want to be too repetitious, but let me remind you that emotions cannot be commanded.

You cannot be ordered to feel a certain way. And the reason you can't be ordered to feel a certain way is because feelings are what they are, and they are dependent to our experiences and what's happening.

They formulate our feelings, and we feel what we feel because of what we are experiencing or what we are knowing. And it is a consequence of that. So, emotions cannot be commanded any more than if someone is grieving over the loss of a loved one at a funeral home, and you're standing there visiting with them as they are there with their dear departed one, and you put your hand on your shoulder and say, just cheer up, will you?

Everything's going to be fine. Well, how is that going to come across? It's going to come across as grossly insensitive and just downright socially stupid.

You don't say things like that to people who are grieving. And even if you are the boss and that person is an employee and they're used to taking orders from you and you say, well, look on the bright side, tomorrow's another day, everything's going to be fine.

[11 : 29] Well, they're used to doing and responding to what you say, but it's not going to work this time because emotions cannot be commanded, but deeds can be commanded.

When we are told, thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul, God isn't saying, hey, love me if you feel like it, okay?

And if you don't feel like it, well, you know, sometimes you do, sometimes you don't, it's okay. One of the things that we hear in marriages that are coming apart is this, I don't love him anymore.

I don't love him anymore. So, doesn't that exempt me from having to stay with him? No, no, it doesn't. Because love is an act of the will.

And when we engage in love, when we apply the love of which the scriptures are speaking, it means that our concern and our motivation and our energy is spent to meet the needs of the object of our love more than they are of myself.

[12 : 50] That's what love really is. When you do and say the right thing on behalf of the object of your love, you do and say the loving thing and sometimes the feelings are not there.

They may even be contradictory to what you are doing by way of loving. Because sometimes your mate can be, what shall we say, unreasonable, demanding.

Now, fortunately, I've never had a mate like that. But some of you have. When we love, we set emotions aside and we ignore the fact that we do not feel loving toward this person.

nonetheless, we are going to exercise our will and say and do the loving thing. That's biblical love.

And let me tell you, there isn't a whole lot of it going on. If we had some way of translating self-love, which, by the way, just comes natural to us all, into real biblical love, the world would be revolutionized overnight.

[14 : 19] When God told the children of Israel that it was a commandment, it's not a suggestion that you love the Lord. It's an order. And we, as creatures under the authority of the Creator, are supposed to respond to Him in obedience.

Let me make one more comment, and then I'll pass this phase of the message, and that is this. It is absolutely amazing. It is just incredible the way this works.

When we make love an action of the will, it is amazing how, a little further on down the line, here come the feelings.

Because doing the loving thing can produce the feelings of love that follow along. we want to turn this process around and put the cart before the horse.

And that's the way we approach just about everything in Scripture. It's the opposite of the way God does. You knew about that. But when we love the way we are supposed to love, it won't be long until the feelings will come along, and they will be positive.

[15 : 33] And it's beautiful the way it works. So, today's address will address explanations necessary to avoid the appearance of Christ contradicting himself on the law of Moses.

And this issue of love is really going to come into play here, and it is a very profound subject. these admonitions, keep this in mind if you will, what Christ is saying here, all the way through this Sermon on the Mount.

The admonitions are all personal and individual. They are not national. The Sermon on the Mount is not Christ's advice to nations, including the United States of America.

It was at one time to one nation, and that was the nation of Israel. Exclusively, to nobody else. God never gave the Sermon on the Mount, Christ never gave the Sermon on the Mount to the Egyptians, or anybody else over there in the Mideast.

It was exclusively for the nation of Israel, as was, of course, all of the Old Testament. So the admonitions are all personal and individual, not national.

[16 : 54] They are also all Jewish, not for Gentiles. They were never intended intended, for instance, for the Roman soldiers who were occupying Israel at the time as Gentiles and as pagans.

You would never find Matthew or Thomas or one of the apostles walking up to one of the Roman officers or Roman soldiers as they're occupying their land and say to them, by the way, I know you were there, you were watching over the crowd to make sure that there was no disturbance or anything, and I know you heard what Jesus said when he delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

Obviously, you're going to keep those things and do those things, right? He'd probably look at you and say, are you nuts? I'm not a Jew. Jesus is a Jew, speaking to the Jewish people.

He's not going to tell a Roman soldier what to do. I'm not going to listen to anything. He said, that's exactly where they become, and he would be right because Christ wasn't addressing him anyway. He wasn't addressing anyone but the Commonwealth of Israel.

Just knowing that and understanding that can go a long way to appreciating the text. In this text that we are considering, especially in connection with the law of non-resistance or the law of non-retaliation, where we are told, or Christ is telling them, turn the other cheek.

[18 : 22] If someone smites you on the cheek, turn it. And by the way, that too, that too is an intended, understood, acknowledged, known by everyone, as a hyperbole.

It is not to be taken literally, any more than plucking out your eye or cutting off your hand, not to be taken literally. And nobody took it literally. Nobody who, for instance, if your hand offends you, cut it off.

So here is a thief, and there were people who supported themselves by being thieves, probably in Jesus' audience. Thievery was common, still is in that part of the world. Still is in this part of the world too.

But no thief is going to look at his hand and say, gee, I guess I really ought to cut my hand off if I want to observe what Jesus knew. This is all hyperbole.

It is literary license, and everybody understood it to be that. And if somebody smites you on the cheek, Jesus isn't saying, well, no, what you need to do is turn the other cheek and let him smite you on that one too.

[19 : 27] And maybe he could top it off just by punching you square in the nose. So you just deliver yourself for all this kind of punishment. That's not what he's saying, and that's not what they understood him to mean. But what they did understand was this.

You are not to return evil for evil. It has nothing to do with not defending yourself or not defending your loved ones if they are threatened. He is saying we are to have an attitude of love.

And when you love someone who is injuring you, you do not retaliate tit for tat. That's the flesh, and that's the common way of doing it.

What you do is you return good for evil. The reason for that is the intent is to lower the level of hostility.

You do not defend by tit for tat. Of course you protect yourself. And you know this was played out time and time again in the civil rights movement.

[20 : 37] And I mentioned this earlier. All Martin Luther King Jr. did was follow the directives of non-resistance and of Mahatma Gandhi who succeeded in gaining freedom from Great Britain by peaceful what did they call it?

Peaceful it was a pacifist kind of thing. A peaceful non-resistance. And you know what this resulted in? it resulted in Dr.

King having his hands put behind his back and handcuffed and let off to jail. I don't know how many times that man was arrested probably 40 or 50 times and a lot of people with him. But what he did not do was he didn't carry a club and when the guard dogs or somebody came after him or the local sheriffs down south came after him to arrest him he never resisted.

That's the key. That's what Christ is saying here. Don't offer this kind of resistance. Don't return evil for evil. Return good for evil and we shall see a little later that it can have the effect of pouring coals upon one's head.

So some well-meaning pacifists and I respect these people. I don't agree with them but I respect them and we saw a resurgence of pacifism with World War II when it broke out and a number of these who refused to take up arms and go against an enemy because they might be put in the position of killing someone.

[22 : 23] They opted for an alternate kind of service and they did other things to fulfill their obligation of giving time to their country through their service and they worked in hospitals and places like that.

And many of them took a lot of abuse for doing so. Many of them were called cowards. Anybody here see the movie Sergeant York?

It came out probably back in the 40s. Sergeant Alvin York. He took a pacifist position until some of the ramifications of it were explained to him.

He ended up being the most decorated soldier of World War I, kind of like the Audie Murphy of World War I. But he began as a pacifist. And it is a huge mistake and grossly unjust to say that people opt for conscientious objection because they're cowards and they are afraid to go into combat.

And more often than not that has not proved to be the case at all. Some of these people have performed some pretty heroic things that a coward would never be capable of doing.

[23 : 33] So I admire them for their convictions. I admire them for their courage. But I just don't agree with some of their reasoning as regards their interpretation of the pacifism.

Now, quickly, we need to go back to the Old Testament because we've got some really hairy stuff back here. And I want you to see how this plays out and the differences that I think are pretty obvious once we see what's involved.

I'm going to Joshua chapter 10. Joshua chapter 10 and verse 6. And I'll be reading through verse 10.

Listen to this. Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, Do not abandon your servants. Come up quickly and save us and help us.

For all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us. So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the valiant warriors.

[24 : 47] And the Lord said to Joshua, Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not one of them shall stand before you.

So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. And the Lord, note this language, the Lord confounded them before Israel, and he slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them as far as Azekah and Mekadah.

You realize that God was behind this? How do you square that? some read passages like this and they say, this deity here in the Old Testament, he is one vicious, unkind bully.

You see what he's doing to people? Look at verse 29, same chapter. Then Joshua and all Israel with him passed on from Mekadah to Libna and fought against Libna.

And the Lord gave it also with its kings into the hands of Israel, and he struck it, and every person who was in it with the edge of the sword, he left no survivor in it.

[26 : 23] That sounds like genocide, doesn't it? Thus he did to its king just as he had done to the king of Jericho.

Hmm. Look at verse 32. And the Lord gave Lachish into the hands of Israel. What's that mean? Does it mean that the Lord did the fighting?

No. He didn't do the fighting. Who did the fighting? Israel. But who was the commander-in-chief? It was the Lord. He set them up for this, and he set the enemy up for this, and he used his people to decimate those people.

Who were those people? Well, they were the Amorites. Well, that tells me a lot. Who were the Amorites? Interesting that you should ask.

All the way back in Genesis, I don't know, it says Genesis 15, 16, or 17. My memory isn't what it used to be, but it's there in the teens. The Lord told Abraham that your people, your descendants, are going to live in a captive land as slaves for 400 years.

[27 : 45] years. And after 400 years, they will come out and come back to this land where you are now, Abraham.

And he's giving Abraham a 400-year projection into the future of his descendants. And he says, they're going to be gone.

they're going to be gone in this strange land for 400 years because, now listen, because the cup of the Amorites is not yet full.

what that is saying is, these people, in the time of Abraham, neighbors around him, Amorites, were so depraved, and so debauched, and so fallen in their behavior, and their attitudes, and their violence, and everything.

They were no doubt a carbon copy of the way people were when God finally decided to destroy the earth, under Noah. And when God said, the cup of the Amorites is not yet full, what he meant was, their evil ways are going to continue and intensify.

[29 : 08] They are going to become more debauched and more depraved than they are now. And after 400 years, the limit is going to be up on them, and I'm not going to bear with them anymore.

And what God is going to do is use these people to destroy these people. And I mean destroy, decimate, wipe out, eliminate.

It will be carnage. And I am not prepared because I don't know all of the ins and outs to know what these kind of people were, except they were very vile and depraved.

people. And I think I've told you in times past that some of the excavating crews that have gone in, archaeologists have gone in and have unearthed some of these ancient dwellings of the Amorites.

And the ancient pornography that was scratched onto the walls of these places was so vile and so filthy that they couldn't even get local servants, the archaeologists couldn't get local servants to work in that area until they covered up the scenes with sheets.

[30 : 19] And we do not know, we don't have any way of knowing, but there is every possibility that these people in their sexual aberrations were so depraved, who knows what kind of diseases were rampant through them at this time and would have affected and infected others who came in contact with them.

Perhaps this too was involved in their being destroyed. I don't know and I don't want to read something into it, but I'm just saying I would not be surprised if that were not involved, because where sexual profligacy abounds, where there are no holds barred, where everything is open and anything and everything you want to do, whether with beasts or people or men with men or women with women, all of this stuff, this is taking place in the Old Testament and it is referred to as under the green trees and on the high hills.

These were all temples of prostitution and debauchery and depravity that is unspeakable. I think it would probably be too vile for some of our pornographic magazines that are flourishing today.

They probably wouldn't even print some of this stuff. And it's interesting to note that the further men get from God, the more depraved they become sexually.

It just seems to go hand in hand with all of this. It's all tied together. Look at a few other verses. Verse 35. They captured it on that day and struck it with the edge of the sword and he utterly destroyed that day every person who was in it according to all that he had done to Lachish.

[32 : 04] And verse 37. And they captured it and struck it and its king and all the cities and all the persons who were in it with the edge of the sword. He left no survivor according to all that he had done to Eglon and he utterly destroyed it and every person who was in it.

And verse 39. He captured it and its king and so on. He left no survivor just as he had done to Hebron so he did to Deber and its king as he had done to Libna and its king.

And verse 40. He left no survivor he utterly destroyed all. You know if a mere man were writing the Bible and wanted to win and influence people this is not the kind of stuff you would include.

This would be a turn off. You know that? Somebody reading it say and I'm supposed to serve a God like that? Vicious like that? But you've got to understand the whole setting and we've just got a part of the picture here.

Yes, God was absolutely totally within his right commanding Joshua to do all this. No doubt about it.

[33 : 21] I don't see any need to defend God's wisdom or to question it. He knows what he's doing and he was well within his right to do what he did. In chapter 11, verses 6 through 8, Then the Lord said to Joshua, Do not be afraid because of them.

Tomorrow at this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire. So Joshua and all the people of war with him came upon him suddenly by the waters of Merom and attacked them and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel.

How could God do that? I'm sure he didn't have any pangs of conscience at all. God was doing the just thing by these people.

Even though in our concept we find that very difficult to believe. Well, that's just part of the distance that separates us from God. And there are other references.

And verses 6 through 8 and verse 11 and 14 and 23. Now the point I want to make is this. When Jesus said, do not return evil for evil, love your neighbor as yourself, do you think he didn't know this stuff was written back here in Joshua?

[34 : 46] Don't you think Christ was well familiar with Israel's doings with the Amorites? So is he contradicting this?

Is Jesus in fact saying, well now, this is what my father did back in the Old Testament. And frankly, I think he got carried away and was too extreme and I wouldn't have done that.

My way is much more loving. That is so much bunkum. And yet, that is precisely the way some interpret the difference between the Testaments.

And they see the God of the Old Testament is vengeful, vicious, a bully. He's demanding. He's bloodthirsty. Has to have his pound of flesh. But, the God in the New Testament is nice and gentle and sweet and forgiving and loving.

That's nothing but the machinations of man's mind trying to justify these things. It is what it is. And it is completely within the framework of divine justice.

[36 : 01] Not outside of it one whit. And Christ is not condemning this and he is not overriding it and he isn't contradicting it. This was what God ordered for his specific people in this specific land at that time.

land. And where Christ is bringing this content in the Sermon on the Mount, it is a radically different time even though it's basically the same place. It's still in that land.

But when Christ gave the Sermon on the Mount, he was giving it to his contemporaries. He was giving it to people who were sitting there in front of him listening to him. And he was talking about day-to-day activities and things that they were very familiar with.

And let me give you another example here. From the pen of Dr.

Lamza, Dr. George Lamza, that I've referred to before, and his comments regarding this passage of Scripture, the Sermon on the Mount. Here it is.

[37 : 12] Well, I thought it was. Here's the non-resistance. All right. This is based on Matthew 5 39, and this is his commentary on it.

And remember, he is speaking as a native of Syria. And, of course, we know how much Syria is in the news today, but he was writing this in the early 1900s, and speaking from the culture of that day regarding the Sermon on the Mount.

And Dr. Lamza said, the term evil here means injustice. In the East, people are forced to do hard labor. Those in power generally oppress the poor.

Property is confiscated unjustly. Resistance in such cases generally results in heavier burdens, violence, and even murder. And the idea, of course, behind all of this, is that non-resistance, peaceful non-resistance, tends to de-escalate the hostility.

When you do not respond in kind, and when you just take it, then it tends to result in a lessening of hostilities, not more.

[38 : 34] I'm sure there are exceptions to that. He says, non-resistance is the only weapon with which the poor can defend themselves. Politicians, government officials, and rich men are always friendly and kind toward those who willingly carry their burdens without complaining.

On the other hand, those who offer resistance are treated as rebels and made to pay heavy penalties. The reference here is probably to government officials and soldiers who misuse their authority, but against whom resistance is futile.

this council did not refer to resisting attacks made by bandits and murderers. And of course, it wouldn't resist to somebody who was just going to do you bodily harm and you're supposed to stand there and be a punching bag.

That's not what he's talking about either. That's the extreme that some have read into this. You can be sure that's not what Christ intended. And listen to this explanation on 540. If any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

Now, I have told you how important it is to understand the distinction between the culture in which this was written and our culture today. Here is a sterling example. Petty bandits and robbers generally take by force the victim's garments and shoes.

[39 : 56] I was going to say nobody today holds up anybody to steal their clothing. But I guess I would be wrong there too, wouldn't I? I have heard about teenagers committing mayhem to get another person's Air Jordan tennis shoes.

Clothes are also stolen from homes and the fields. Now, this is really remarkable, culturally very enlightening.

And of course, keep in mind, this isn't speaking of this area today so much as it was in the day that Christ delivered the sermon. So don't try to bring it up to where we are and make the culture fit.

Even in their culture, it's changed. When a man is taken to court under suspicion, his good upper garments are taken from him as a bond. They didn't post bond.

They posted their clothes. And this was one reason that the robe that the soldiers took from Jesus was such a big deal because these things were expensive.

[41 : 09] They were coveted and the robe was no exception. Innocent men are often mistaken for bandits and taken before government officials. If found guilty and they have no money, they are stripped of their clothes.

Clothes are also accepted as security for loans. Now we look at some of the clothes today and we say, good grief, who'd want somebody else's clothes? But you've got to remember that the kind of clothing that they wore in that day was very easily adaptable from one person to another.

They didn't worry about a shirt size being 15 and a half by 32. They didn't worry about fashion, about style, about colors, about the quality of the garment.

They just knew a garment was a garment and it was valuable just because it was a garment because they didn't turn these things out in a textile factory like we do today. They were all handmade and they were very involved and very expensive.

When people fail to pay their loans, the creditors are willing to accept the garments in lieu of payment. You could hock your coat. If a man should resist giving his robe, he will be forced not only to give it, but his other clothing will also be confiscated and in addition he will be punished.

[42 : 30] But a man will not be naked if he gives his shirt and robe because, ladies, listen up, Easterners wear many shirts and robes, one upon another, in summer and winter alike.

Now, fashion ladies today call that layering. A man generally wears, a man generally wears all the garments he has because in the East his social standing is determined by the number of clothes he wears.

Now, that isn't even true in the East today. way. But it was then. So even if you're living in the Middle East, you've got to take into consideration even though the culture is the same, the historical gap and the way of doing things was radically different.

Obedying orders. In most Eastern countries, railroads and other modern forms of transportation are still unknown. he's writing this as of 1913.

Merchandise, food supplies, and building materials are carried on the backs of animals and men. In some isolated regions of the country, roads are so narrow and difficult the entire transportation is accomplished by men.

[43 : 54] Where animals of burden are scarce, men and women carry wheat on their backs for 20, 30 miles or more. During the cold winter months, in some sections, the backs of men is the only method of transportation.

Have you ever seen pictures of women or men carrying a large, heavy water pot on their head? Why would they do that?

Because that was the only way they had of doing it. And you carry it on your head, you kind of balanced the weight throughout your whole body and it made it easier to carry, so they put it on their head. in times of war or peace.

Now bear in mind, Roman soldiers occupying Jerusalem and all of Israel, probably several thousand of them, they're for several years assigned to duty there.

In times of war or peace, when companies or regiments of the army are transferred from one place to another, both men and animals are drafted into service for the transportation of military supplies.

[45 : 04] That's Roman military supplies. If roads are inaccessible for animals, men do it all. This work is evenly divided by the army officers among the people of the various towns on the route to destination.

That is to say, the people of one town carry the burden as far as the next town. They are notified in advance to be ready. On some occasions, the journey is not more than one or two miles.

Those who gladly respond to the summons and willingly take up the burdens are released as soon as the next town is reached, and new men are drafted into service. But those who fail to report in due time, or those who resist, are compelled by the officers as punishment to go a journey of two or three days instead of a mile.

That's their punishment. Gentle and humble men approached by harsh officers and asked to go one mile, generally reply, I shall be glad to go two miles, my lord.

The officer's heart softens due to the man's obedience and willingness. His heart softens. Probably not always. Some officers might have an extremely hard heart, but some would be touched by the guy's willingness to help them.

[46 : 23] and he would be assigned lighter burdens or released as soon as possible, simply because he appreciated his cooperation. This is where the expression came from, going the extra mile.

It was a voluntary thing. If you're compelled to go a mile with someone, it's no problem. I'll carry this for you for a mile. In fact, I'll carry it for two miles. You will? Without bellyaching or griping or complaining or whatever, you know.

Rough men who resist the performance are sometimes severely beaten and then given heavy burdens to carry. Jesus had watched Roman army officers recruiting men to carry food and military supplies during the revolutions and the wars in Syria, Palestine, and Persia.

He'd seen that with his own eyes. All of these people had. They were all familiar with it. He was extracting an everyday kind of situation that they were all familiar with and pressing it into service to make his point.

And it's a beautiful point. And you know what else is behind this, really? Love. Love. Not manipulation, but honest to goodness, real love.

[47 : 39] A real willingness to help. A real willingness to cooperate. A real willingness to treat others like you would have them treat you. Wow.

It's all connected. It says, It is quite probable that he had submissively obeyed the law of the princes of this world, and because of his readiness and willingness, he was doubtless given the lighter burden and shorter mileage.

And remember, in connection with this, one of the things that Jesus said was, My burden is light. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light. And he simply meant, I will not make unreasonable demands of you.

My yoke is easy. My burden is light. In the eyes of Jesus, non-resistance was the only weapon with which to combat the forces of this world.

Meekness and gentleness were ultimately to bring happiness and peace. And I can't let you go without just sharing this with you regarding the your enemy hungers, feed him, if he thirsts, give him to drink, and for in doing so, you shall heap coals of fire upon his head.

[48 : 56] Some actually interpret that to mean a heaping of coals of fire upon his head is punitive, and that the idea is to make the man suffer, or make him uncomfortable, or make him the coals of fire upon his head would be a payback.

And when you are kind to your enemy, and when you return good for evil, what that does is it has the effect of really getting even with him.

But do you not see that that misses the whole point of the narrative? It isn't to get even with anybody. It is to honestly do good in return for evil.

And the heaping coals of fire upon his head is designed to be a plus, a benefit, a help to the man. How so? I'll be as brief as I can, but I need to explain this.

In this day and age, fire was a wonderful commodity, but it wasn't always easily obtained. Because a woman in a mid-eastern home back in the first century didn't have a box of diamond matches standing there above the stove that she was going to light.

[50 : 22] And she didn't have one of those little things that you click and start a fire with and all of that. So the name of the game was to keep the coals hot, to keep some coals so that you could readily start a fire for cooking the food for that day.

And it was not at all unusual to go from house to house. Anybody got any coals? And they would go and borrow coals from each other like people used to go and borrow a cup of sugar or a cup of flour or something like that.

And this would go around the neighborhood. And most of these neighborhoods and communities were very small, but they had a coordinated way of trying to make sure that somebody always had some coals.

Because if somebody had coals, everybody could have coals. And you just find out when you got up in the morning who had coals left over from the night. And they would go and from the neighbor they would scoop up and shovel and put hot coals into this earthen pot.

This was a large clay pot about the size of a gallon or a two-gallon vessel. And they would just heap that thing full of coals, if they had a lot of coals, and the person would put the pot on their head and head home.

[51 : 37] Sometimes they would send a son or daughter to get the coals. Sometimes whoever was available would go to get the coals. And sometimes they would be giving out coals instead of getting coals. And they would put these clay pots on their head and carry them whatever the distance was from where they got the coals back to the home they were going.

And what do you think the coals in that clay pot did? Well, they not only stayed coals and stayed hot, at least for a while, but the warmth and the heat from the coals would permeate the clay in the pot.

And it would warm the head. And the warmth, depending on how far you were walking and carrying it, the warmth would just gradually come right down over the whole head in a physical way.

And that was a good thing. The name of the game was, you will warm the heart of your adversary in the same way as pouring hot coals upon his head, not to torture him or set him on fire, but to win him over.

And that's an illustration that the Lord used. just one of so many instances that shows the value of understanding something about the culture.

[53 : 01] Now tell me this, when was the last time you ever took a clay pot and went to a neighbor to get some hot coals? You see what I mean? All of this has to come into play in interpreting the scripture.

And for me, it is just fascinating, absolutely fascinating. Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. You can forget about any Q&A; today.

I'm already five minutes over. But we've only got one verse of substance left in this chapter, and I'm going to deal with that next week. And it is a complicated idea to think of it, because Christ is saying to the people there at the Sermon on the Mount, be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Well, what in the world is that all about? None of us, including me, is anywhere close to perfection. So we'll look at that and we'll also define it in light of the culture. And I'm just going to deal with that one verse next week, and then we'll open it up for Q&A.;

So we ought to have plenty of time. If you've got questions about the law of reciprocity or non-resistance, non-retaliation, or any of the other things, any of the other six that we've talked about, it would be helpful and you'd get a better answer if you'd write your question out and you don't have to sign your name, just write your question out, leave it in the offering box, and I'll do my best to treat it next Sunday morning.

[54 : 27] So, if you'll stand with me, I'll dismiss this with prayer. Father, we are so appreciative of the way you put the scriptures together and how it requires our searching and studying and comparing scripture with scripture, and when we do, we see these wonderful truths of yours just blossom and open up and our understanding increases and things begin to make sense that before were just a complete puzzle.

Thank you for the manner in which the spirit of God has orchestrated this word and put it together because all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable.

And thank you for these here today who are so gracious to willingly receive the truth that you have provided for us. Thank you for the day ahead and your sufficiency for it in Christ's name.

Amen.