

There are times when Scripture seems to say one thing until we look closely and see something else
Old Testament wars—yet we looked at multiple examples where no military rules were followed
Time and time again the Israelites were saved by following God’s outlandish Leadings
Another example of this is found in Matthew 5:38-47
Is Jesus really saying that we are to just take it and then ask for more?
Loving enemies is one thing... but turning your cheek and let an attacker hit again
These sound like we are simply to give in to the enemy—give in to the oppressor

It is important to think about the context—about what was happening at the time
Remember that the people were living under Roman occupation
This was a very difficult time when the enemy ruled and they had no recourse
They were powerless against the mighty Roman army
To fight back, meant certain death
So why does Jesus say... turn the other cheek
Give them your cloak too
Walk the second mile
??
Are we really to be passive and just give in to the oppressor?
Is Jesus really saying that love will look like this?
Can it work? Can turning the other cheek do anything more than result in another hit?

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’
But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. Matthew 5:38-39 NRSV*
“Do not resist an evil person”?????
James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
Does Jesus really mean that we don’t resist evil?
Is it because it will go worse for us if we fight the evil being done to us?
Is it only a resisting in the spiritual realm? (Common response if it doesn’t make sense)

The word for resist that is used here—really means to resist violently, to revolt or rebel,
To engage in an armed insurrection
Jesus is not telling us to submit to evil, but to refuse to oppose it on its own terms
Don’t let the opponent dictate the methods of our opposition
Do not repay evil with evil
Find another way—find a third way—one that is assertive and yet nonviolent

...But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also... Matthew 5:39 NRSV
Again, this doesn’t make sense—turn and invite them to hit me again???
If I hit with my right hand—it lands on your left cheek
I could hit with my left hand and land on your right cheek
—but in the Middle East left hands are saved for unclean actions
With my right hand to your right cheek, I have to back hand slap you
Back hand slaps were to insult, humiliate and degrade an inferior person
They were never done to an equal but to slaves and those beneath a superior
The whole point of the blow was to force someone out of line, back in place
People in Jesus’ crowd would have experienced this kind of insult
So Jesus tells them what to do... turn your other cheek
Now to use the right hand against your left cheek—it requires an open handed slap or fist

Only equals fight with fists—so to hit means acknowledging the equality of the subject
Something the master would never want to do to a slave or underling
The master can still have the slave beaten, but he can no longer cow him
In turning the other cheek, you say “I’m a human being, just like you.
I refuse to be humiliated any longer. I am your equal.
I am a child of God. I won’t take it anymore.”

Such behavior may result in a beating—but the point has been made
The powerful begin to lose their ability to make people submit
If lots of people respond this way—it really rocks the privilege of the powerful
In that world of honor and shaming—the superior can no longer shame the subordinate
He can no longer dehumanize his subject

Gandhi said, “The first principle of nonviolent action is that of noncooperation
with everything humiliating.”

Find a new, third way that is neither cowardly submission nor violent retaliation
Don’t fight, which would surely invite death—or flight, which is the expected outcome
Rather stand up straight, look the person in the eye as an equal, hands behind your back
And welcome the threat of a forehanded blow undaunted
Standing unarmed and non-combative
The aggressor’s use of force has failed!

...and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well... Matthew 5:40 NRSV

Again this is confusing—they sue me and I just give it to them plus more than they ask??
This takes place in debtor’s court—where the poor are being sued for debts owed

A major problem in those days

Consequence of Roman tax system and the gouging by tax collectors

Loan sharks loaned money at exorbitant interest rates

Like payday loans of today, people took out the loans in desperation

But come the due day of the loan, they are only farther in debt

If a person had no money to pay the debt, the creditor could take possessions as a pledge to pay

Only the poorest of the poor had nothing, except the clothing they wore

In such cases—the creditor could legally take the outer garment as collateral

But they slept in outer garments so Deuteronomy 24:10-13 said to give it back at night

Jesus is saying to those who have nothing but the clothes on their backs what to do

To people who have been humiliated and stripped of their country, rights, and property

Jesus says they are taking your outer garment as collateral—now give them your undergarment

That would mean that you have nothing left and stand naked in the courtroom

Nakedness was taboo in Judaism

Unlike today—the person causing or viewing the nakedness was shamed the most

By stripping off both the outer and under garments—the debtor brings shame on the creditor

The poor debtor has no hope in court—he has no money to pay the debt he does owe

The creditor has the law on his side and will win

By giving up all clothing, he’s transcended this attempt to humiliate him and risen above shame

He has said, “You want my robe? Then take everything. Now you have it all except my body.

Will you take that next?”

The system of oppression has been publicly unmasked so that the raw injustice is evident

The creditor is not a legitimate money lender but party to reducing people to nothing

Taking their land, money, everything and leaving them with no means of living

In stripping, the powerless expose the system, leaving the economic system and creditors naked

...and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Matthew 5:41 NRSV

????

Roman soldiers could require compulsory service from people, asking them to carry packs a mile
Huge armies had to move frequently

Ranking officers had slaves or donkeys to carry their packs

The rank and file, were allowed to depend on civilians impressed into service

The Roman code was “enlightened” in that it limited this carrying to only one mile

For packs to be carried more than one mile was breaking the military code

While discipline was up to the superior, there was discipline as a result

In the context of Roman military occupation, Jesus doesn’t say revolt and refuse to carry packs

Jesus was aware of the futility of overtaking the Roman military

So Jesus says, when you get to the end of the mile, refuse to give the pack back to the soldier

Tell the soldier you want to keep carrying it for another mile

Now the soldier has a choice—will he be disciplined for letting someone carry his pack 2 miles?

Does he refuse the offer? Or does he accept?

The oppressed have once again seized the initiative and taken back the power of choice

They have thrown the soldier off balance by depriving him of the predictability of the victim

Imagine a Roman soldier pleading with a Jew to give back his pack

Walking the extra mile isn’t about piety

—he is helping an oppressed people find a way to protest

and neutralize an onerous practice despised throughout the empire

Jesus is telling people at the bottom of society how to recover their humanity

We could easily use Jesus’ advice vindictively

That is why it cannot be separated from the command to love your enemies

Jesus is not advocating nonviolence merely as a technique for outwitting the enemy

But as a just means of opposing the enemy in a way that holds the possibility of change

Both sides must win—there is opportunity for the enemy to become just

We are summoned to pray for our enemies’ transformation

We are asked to respond to ill treatment with a love that is not only godly, but from God

Jesus’ examples go beyond inaction and overreaction to a completely new response

A response that promises to liberate the oppressed from evil

And at the same time, it frees the oppressor from sin

Do not react violently to evil, do not counter evil in kind, do not let violence fight back

Times have changed and we face different issues today

But the principles are the same

There is always a third way

Ask Jesus how to respond in any given situation—Listen for way forward

Sermon based on *Following Jesus in the way of Peace*, resources from Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends for use during Peace Month January 2017. Sermon suggestions written by Paul Anderson and Cherice Bock. For this message, the following resources were used...

“*The Powers That Be*” by Walter Wink, chapter 5 “*Jesus’ Third Way*,” page 98

“*Engaging the Powers*” by Walter Wink, chapter 9 “*Jesus’ Third Way*,” page 175