

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 16 July 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Royal Calling

Matthew 5:38-42

Back in 1966, a Russian Baptist pastor named **Georgi Vins** was arrested by the KGB for the “crime” of preaching the Gospel; and over the next 13 years, he spent a total of 8 years in the harsh prison camps of the Ural Mountains. However, in 1979, God turned the hearts of the Soviet authorities; and they exiled Vins to America.¹ Years later, Vins wrote a book called *Moscow Express*, in which he told about his own experiences in the prison camps, as well as the experiences of some of his Christian friends. One of these friends was a man named **Ivan Arkhipov**. Vins relates how, during Ivan’s years in prison, he had tried to share the Gospel with a fellow prisoner named **Victor Krasnov**. Victor was an angry atheist, who was serving time for murdering an elderly neighbour, named Maria. (Victor’s mother-in-law had blackmailed Victor into murdering Maria for her.) For eight years, Victor had lived with the guilt of this crime, before it was discovered that *he* was the real murderer; and during those eight years, his heart had become very hard. When he arrived in prison, he cursed and blasphemed God relentlessly.²

Well, one day, while Ivan was alone with Victor in the bunkhouse, Ivan tried to encourage Victor with Scripture. In a rage, Victor sprang from bunk, and said, “Didn’t you hear how I mocked your God on the embankment? He didn’t even bother to strike me with a bolt of lightning! It means He doesn’t exist! Quit your preaching! The officials were right to imprison you. People like you should be shot!”³ He then hurled a boot at Ivan, which hit him in the middle of his back, just as Ivan was kneeling to pray.

About two weeks later, the prisoners were out in the *taiga* cutting down pine trees in order to build a bridge. One prisoner would cut through the trunk with a power saw, while a second prisoner would push against the tree with a long pole, to make it fall in the right direction. On this particular day, a gust of wind caused a tree to fall in the wrong direction; and everyone was alert enough to see the tree, and jump out of the way—everyone, that is, except for Victor, who, for some reason, was oblivious to what was happening. Seeing the danger, Ivan ran over and tackled Victor, just as the tree crashed down on the very spot where Victor had been standing. Trembling, Victor said, “Thank you, Old Man. Forgive me what I said before. It was your God who saved me just now.”⁴ After this incident, Victor began to open up to Ivan. He told Ivan his sad life’s story; and Ivan listened patiently, and shared the Gospel with him.

Now, Victor never did get saved during his prison sentence. However, about thirty years later, after religious freedom had come to Russia, Ivan just “happened” to meet a man named **Vasily Petrov** after a church service one evening. Petrov was the very man whom Victor and his mother-in-law had *framed* for the murder of Maria years earlier! Petrov had spent eight years in prison for a crime he did not commit, before the authorities figured out that he was innocent, and Victor was guilty. Petrov was so filled with bitterness for being wrongly incarcerated, that he ended up in prison again—this time, for assaulting the judge who had sentenced him years earlier. It was during his second prison sentence that Petrov met a Christian friend of Ivan’s, named **Nikolai**. Through Nikolai’s witness, Petrov became a Christian; and his whole life changed. He was now determined to find the man who had framed him—not to get revenge, but to share the Gospel with him. After years of searching, he finally found Victor. By this time, Victor was dying; and he had recently been pleading with his wife to find a Bible for him. He remembered that Christian named Ivan, who had tried to share the Gospel with him; and he knew that he needed what Ivan

had. As Petrov talked with Victor by his bedside, he told him of the mercy of Jesus, and how Jesus had forgiven a murderer on the cross, just before his death. In faith and repentance, Victor asked Jesus to save him; and with joy in his heart, Victor slipped from earth to Heaven, only a few days later! As Ivan heard this story of how his old prison mate had come to Christ, his heart was filled with joy!⁵

Because of the meekness of old Ivan Arkhipov, a hardened murderer became a member of the Kingdom. *That* is the kind of righteousness that Jesus requires of every citizen of the Kingdom. This morning, we will be learning about this aspect of righteousness. The title of this message is ***The Royal Calling***.

Read Matthew 5:38-42.

I. The call to non-retaliation (vv. 38-41)

If you have been sitting under these messages on the Sermon on the Mount, you know that in this sermon, Jesus was addressing His followers—those who had placed their trust in Him as Saviour. What Jesus was describing in this sermon are the spiritual characteristics of those who will inherit the 1,000-year Kingdom that He will establish on earth one day. Christ wasn't giving us a list of things that we must *do* in order to *earn* our way into the Kingdom: He was simply describing the way those who *are* members of the Kingdom should (and *will*) live. There is an *inner transformation* that takes place when a person gets saved; and one of these changes is that the believer now begins to imitate the *meekness* of Christ. The old, fleshly desire for *vengeance* gives way to a *new* desire—the desire to love and forgive others.

Now, on the surface, this might seem to conflict with some of the things that God said in the Old Testament. In fact, Christ Himself pointed out that what He was saying was different from what *Moses* had written in the Law. Jesus said, ***“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”*** Who ***“said”*** these words? *Moses*! Jesus was reminding His followers of what *God* said, through His servant *Moses*, in **Exodus 21**.

Read Exodus 21:22-25.

In this passage, God was giving Israel instructions as to what to do in a situation in which a man does physical violence which causes harm to a pregnant woman, or to the baby in her womb. He says that if a man's physical assault cause a baby to ***“depart”*** (in other words, to depart from the womb, and to be born prematurely), yet ***“no mischief follow”*** (in other words, the baby is not physically harmed), then the man should *pay* for his wrong according to whatever that woman's husband, and the judges, determine. On the other hand, God said that ***“if any mischief follow”*** [in other words, if the child be harmed, or *die*, because of the man's assault], ***then thou shalt give life for life; eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”*** Simply put, if the baby were injured or physically handicapped because of the assault, then the man who caused that handicap was to suffer the *exact same injury* or handicap that he caused to that child; and if the child *die* because of the assault, then that man's own life should be taken from him. (By the way, if you want to know what God thinks of abortion, here it is, right here in **Exodus 21!**)

In the Old Testament, God gave hundreds of civil laws, in which He spelled out exact consequences for various sins. Why did God give Israel all those laws? First of all, to restrain man's sinful passions. God established civil government to prevent violence and anarchy. However, the bigger reason that God gave all these exact laws was **to show us His character**, and **to show us that we cannot measure up to His standard of holiness**. Paul explained it this way: *"Wherefore then serveth the law?"* [In other words, 'What was the law for?'] *"It was added because of transgressions* [in other words, 'To restrain sin'], *until the seed should come* [that is, until the Messiah, Jesus, should come]." Furthermore, Paul explained that since the Law cannot actually give us spiritual life, but can only condemn us, the Law was therefore *"our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."*

Read Galatians 3:19-24.

Do you see what Paul is saying here? He's saying that the Law is God's standard of holiness. The standard of *"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"* is not harsh, or unkind, or bad: it is good, and just, and holy. The standard of *"an eye for an eye"* shows us that God hates cruelty and violence against others; and there is a penalty for it. This *"eye for an eye"* law convicts us of our sin and wrong against others, and drives us to Christ for forgiveness and salvation. We have *all* done injury and hurt against others; and therefore, we need a Saviour. The Law is our *schoolmaster*; to teach us that we *need* that Saviour.

Now, as believers living in the New Testament age, we know that the Saviour has already come. Two thousand years ago, God's incredible love and forgiveness was manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ. We have seen what love is. Therefore, we are now called to an even *higher* standard of righteousness than what was required by the letter of the Law. Because *Christ*, who is the love of God incarnate, has forgiven us of all our sins, we therefore should have an attitude of love and forgiveness, even toward those who do us physical violence.

Now, please do not misunderstand: this standard of non-vengeance was *not* a new thing. Christ's call to meekness and non-retaliation was *not* something that He dreamed up. Christ was simply upholding what God had already said in the Old Testament Law. The *letter* of the Law was *"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"*; but the *spirit* of the Law was a much higher standard. The *spirit* of the Law is to *forgive*. The same God who demanded an *"eye for an eye"* also commanded His people to love and forgive, and not to seek vengeance.

Read Leviticus 19:17-18.

God's standard of *grace and mercy to sinners* can be found throughout the Old Testament. In **Deuteronomy 32:35** the LORD said, *"To me belongeth vengeance and recompence."* King Solomon wrote, *"Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee."* Solomon also wrote, *"Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work."* Folks, *this* is the spirit of the Law; *this* is the more excellent way: and this is what Christ came to earth to empower us to do. Remember what

Jesus said in **Matthew 5:17**? He said, ***“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”*** The whole Old Testament Law pointed to Jesus, and to the forgiveness of sins that He would purchase for us on the cross; and now that He has paid for all our sins, we ought to forgive others, as He has forgiven us.

Old Testament believers *were* very aware of God’s call to forgiveness, and to non-retaliation. God commanded them not to take vengeance into their own hands; and godly saints practiced that command. Yet, they could not understand the full measure of God's love as *we* can, because they never saw God’s love and forgiveness perfectly displayed in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Just as Christ has forgiven us, we should be ready to forgive others, and to show them Christ's love in return for their cruelty. Countless people have repented and turned to Jesus after witnessing the meek and loving spirit of true Christians.

In this New Testament age, Christ has set up a new economy. We are *not* in the Old Testament economy of Israel anymore. God has *not* commanded Christians to set up "Christian governments," where the Christian faith is forced on everyone, and where ***“an eye for an eye”*** is carried out with a rod of iron. Someday, when Christ returns to set up His Kingdom, He *will* rule with a rod of iron; and we will rule and reign with Him. We will literally sit upon thrones, ruling and judging the world. However, the Kingdom has not come yet. Right now, we are in the New Testament age; and in this New Testament age, Christ has commanded us to preach the Gospel to every creature; to establish New Testament churches; and to *put away* the sword.

Read Matthew 26:47-56.

One of the distinctive marks of the old-time Anabaptists, and of the baptistic groups of the Middle Ages, such as the Waldenses and Albigenses, is that they would not take up arms against their enemies, no matter how cruel their enemies were to them. Of course, they weren’t martyrs *on purpose*. They would *flee* from the Catholic or Protestant authorities when they came to slaughter them; and they would do their best to protect their families. However, they would not take up arms, or wreak vengeance on their enemies. The Catholic authorities were absolutely exasperated by the fact that the Anabaptists, who had been driven from their homes, and were literally living in the fields, kept increasing in number daily. In a letter to King Ferdinand in the city of Vienna in 1529, the civil authorities of the Tyrol region of Austria described the Anabaptists in their region. They said, “More than 700 persons have been in part executed, in part expelled, in part have fled into misery, who left their property as well as their children behind....These people not only have no horror of punishment, but even report themselves; rarely is one converted [in other words, “Rarely does anyone go back to the Catholic Church”]; nearly all only wish to die for their faith.”⁶ An Anabaptist preacher named **Jacob Hutter** wrote a letter to the governor, Kuna von Kunstadt, in which he said,

“Now are we camping on the heath, without disadvantage to any man. We do not want to wrong or harm any human being, not even our worst enemy. Our walk of life is to walk in truth and righteousness of God, in peace and unity. We do not hesitate to give an account

of our conduct to anyone. But whoever says that we have camped on a field with so many thousands, as if we wanted war or the like, talks like a liar and a rascal. If all the world were like us, there would be no war, and no injustice. We can go nowhere; may God in heaven show us where we shall go.”⁷

Brethren, this is the standard for believers in this New Testament age; and it will continue to be the standard after the Rapture, as the persecuted saints of the Tribulation period await the return of Christ to set up the Kingdom. This spiritual quality is hard to put to practice; but by God’s grace, we *can* show the meekness of Christ toward our enemies. Let’s read **verses 39-41** again, and break down what Jesus is saying. **(Read verses Matthew 5:39-41 again.)**

First of all, Christ calls us not to retaliate against those who cause us **physical injury**. If an enemy smite you on the cheek, **“turn to him the other also.”** In other words, “Prepare for another blow, if necessary; but do not deny your Lord, nor act in revenge against your enemy.”

Secondly, Jesus calls us not to retaliate for an injury done against our **estate or possessions**. Jesus says that if someone wrongfully sue you, and take away your coat, **“let him have thy cloke also.”** By the way, people in the first century didn’t have fifty changes of clothing, as many of us do today. Clothing was valuable; and most people were fortunate to have *two* changes of clothing. Having a coat taken from you was a huge deal! It would be like someone taking away a month’s worth of wages—or a refrigerator, or a washing machine. Yet, Jesus says, “Prepare for him to take away *more* of your possessions, if necessary; but don’t get angry, or quarrel, and mar your witness for me.” If the bully at school take your pizza, offer him a second piece. If someone pressure you into doing a favour for him that is neither inexpensive nor convenient, and that person’s salvation is at stake, do it for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of that person’s soul. Perhaps your kindness will woo him to Christ!

Lastly, Jesus calls us to endure wrongs against **our liberty**. In the Roman world, it was commonplace for a Roman soldier to force someone to walk with him for a certain distance, and to carry heavy equipment for him. Perhaps this was the most degrading injury of all. The Romans bullied the Jews every single day, to remind them that they were a conquered nation. Yet, Jesus called His followers not only to comply to the Romans’ demands, but to do so with *love and humility*, and with the prayer that those Romans might be converted because of their testimony. We are not exempt from government bullying because we are servants of Jesus Christ: rather, we should obey with good will *because* we are servants of Christ!

This is a hard commandment, isn’t it? Yet, there it is before us, in black and white. Can you imagine if a foreign enemy (or our own government, for that matter) were to put troops on the street, and take away our freedoms, and bully us around? Would we have good will in our hearts toward our enemy? Folks, we’d better get used to this idea, because there may come a day when *we* will suffer imprisonment, or confiscation of goods, for our faith in Christ. If and when such a day come, we must remember that we are not above the law of the land. God has

not ordained for *us* to take the sword in hand; but He *has* ordained for *governments* to take the sword in hand, in order to protect life and property, and to avoid chaos and anarchy.

Read Genesis 9:5-6.

Read Romans 13:1-7.

Folks, we must not forget that when Paul wrote these words, the criminally insane tyrant, Nero, was sitting on the imperial throne. Nero delighted in murdering Christians! Yet, Paul says that God has ordained civil rulers to protect life and property, and to be a terror to evildoers. The fact that Roman authorities often *failed* to carry out justice, and were actually a terror to the *righteous*, does not change the fact that they had the *responsibility before God* to uphold righteousness. *God* will deal with unjust rulers one day. One day, wicked rulers will stand before *God's* bar of justice, and give an account to Him. In the meantime, we are not to be their judges: rather, we are to obey them (unless they command us to disobey God). When the Apostles were called before the Sanhedrin to answer for why they were preaching in Jesus' name, Peter respectfully, yet boldly said, "***We ought to obey God rather than men.***"

The call to non-retaliation is not a call for the "defunding of the police," or for the abolishment of government. God's ordinance of human government is still in effect! Rather, Jesus is calling *believers* to endure injustice for His sake, without vengeance. Christ calls us to be "***blameless and harmless, the sons of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.***" Christ also calls us to have our conversation "***honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.***" That "***day of visitation***"—that day when God gets hold of your enemy's heart, and draws him to Himself—just might come one day...*if* you will be blameless and harmless in this world!

II. The call to selfless giving (v. 42)

(Read verse 42 again.) Once again, Christ is calling the citizens of His Kingdom to do a hard thing. He calls us to *give* to others without hesitation. Jesus didn't say, "Give to those who are your friends," or "Give to those who are worthy": He simply said, "***Give to him that asketh thee.***" This includes those who *cannot pay you back*; those who will probably never return your kindness in any way; those who are *unloving, and unlovable*; those who *do not thank you* for your kindness; and those who will probably not use your money wisely. Let's look at what Jesus said on another occasion, when He preached this same basic sermon.

Read Luke 6:30-38.

Folks, I must admit that I struggle with this. When I am accosted by someone who *demand*s that I give him money—and who, I am certain, will use my money for drink or drugs—I must remind myself that my money is not really *my* money, anyway. It is *God's* money, which He has entrusted to me, so that I may use it in His service. Now, God does often lead me to buy *food* for people, so that they cannot use the money for drugs. Sometimes I go ahead and give someone money, even though I am skeptical of how he will use it. However, whether I give a person money, or food, or blankets, I *always* give that person a tract, and a Gospel witness.

Folks, what we are talking about is what **Andrew van der Bijl** used to call “**The Royal Way.**” In the King’s economy, the way up is down. In other words, you must *give* to win! The world teaches us to “Look out for old number one” in order to win in the “game of life”; but Jesus commands us to do just the opposite. In God's economy, we must *die* to self in order to live; we must *love God and others* first, and put self dead-last, in order to have true joy; and we must *give away* our earthly treasures in order to receive true, everlasting treasure.

Perhaps, in your mind, you are protesting, “But how will *my* needs be met if I’m always giving things away?” To that I answer: “Look again at what Jesus promised!” (**Read Luke 6:38.**) Folks, we who are saved are serving *the King*; and He owns the cattle on a thousand hills!” He doesn’t promise to give you an abundance of earthly wealth; but He *does* promise to meet your needs. Back in 1875, the blind hymn writer **Fanny Crosby** had an experience that countless other Christians have had. She was desperately in need of five dollars (which, back then, was easily the equivalent of a month's rent). However, rather than fret and worry about it, or ask “Why me?”, she began to pray about it. A few minutes later, a total stranger knocked at her door; and, for a reason he himself couldn't explain, he gave her five dollars. Fanny wrote, “I have no way of accounting for this, except to believe that God put it into the heart of this good man to bring the money. My first thought was that it is so wonderful the way the Lord leads me. I immediately wrote the poem, and Dr. Lowry set it to music.” The hymn that she wrote in gratefulness for this provision is one that we still sing today:

"All the way my Saviour leads me; what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my Guide?
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well."

I can personally testify that similar experiences have happened to me many times in my Christian life. Sometimes the Lord has provided the exact amount for which I had asked; and other times, He has provided *much more* than the amount for which I had asked. Sometimes He uses strangers to provide the need; sometimes He uses friends and loved ones; and sometimes He provides from an impersonal, and unexpected, source. Furthermore, in almost every instance, He provided the need *right at the last possible minute*--and without my telling anyone (except the Lord) about the need. I know many other Christians who have testified to such experiences in their own lives, as well. God really does provide for His own!

However, we need to remember the *condition* for Jesus' promise. The condition is: “**Give.**” This giving includes, first and foremost, our tithes. Tithing is not a matter that we need to “pray about,” because it is a requirement for every believer. There are also freewill offerings

beyond our tithes—such as missions giving. However, it doesn't stop there. Throughout Scripture, God commands us to give freely to those in need. Jesus commands us to ***"love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great."*** Frankly, I don't struggle with giving my tithes, or to missions, because I have learned that God *always* provides my needs when I obey Him in this area. I do often struggle, though, with giving to individuals. This kind of giving is not a definite, "black-and-white" matter, such as tithing, in which you know exactly what God expects. Giving to others requires faith and sensitivity to God's voice, both in regard to *whether* to give, and *how much* to give; but it is worth the struggle! Every time I start to feel stingy, the Lord reminds me of the times when He has used others to meet *my* needs. Every time I step out on faith and give, He always takes care of me and my family. Our God is a faithful God!

Brethren, the bottom line is this: God wants us to give of *ourselves*. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ***"And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you."*** Paul didn't merely give *monetarily* to people: he gave *himself*. He continually offered himself up as a living sacrifice to God, and in service to others. Sadly, the Corinthian believers were not very grateful for all that Paul did for them; but he loved them anyway. This is the way the Lord wants us to live our lives. Jesus said, ***"Freely ye have received; freely give."***

In closing, I would like to tell you a story from the life of **Andrew van der Bijl** (whom I mentioned earlier). Andrew (who was known as "Brother Andrew") smuggled Bibles into the Soviet bloc countries for many years; and God miraculously opened the doors for him to do this. However, it took a while for the Lord to develop in Andrew the kind of faith that he would need for this task. In 1954, while he was at Bible college in Scotland, he had a real need: he had to renew his visa with the British government before December 31, or else return to Holland. It cost a shilling to pay for the stamp to send the visa renewal form to London; but he didn't have a shilling. Several times, he thought about borrowing the money; yet, somehow he knew that this was not the "Royal Way" of the King. He even considered walking around outside and looking for coins in the mud; but he knew that this was not the Royal Way, either. Finally, December 30 came. He had to purchase a stamp *that day*, and put that form in the mail, or else he would have to return to Holland. Well, that morning, someone shouted up the stairs that Andrew had a visitor. He excitedly ran downstairs, with the hope that God had sent a mysterious benefactor to give him a shilling. Instead, he found that the visitor was Richard—a drunk with whom he had shared the Gospel several times before. Ironically, Richard was there to ask *Andrew* for a shilling, so that he could get some food. However, even *more* ironically, Richard just happened to look down on the ground as he was approaching Richard: and what did he see? A shilling! At first, he covered the shilling with the toe of his shoe, to conceal it from Richard. Then, he knelt down, picked up a handful of pebbles (with the shilling hidden in the middle of the pebbles), and threw the pebbles away one by one, as though he were merely thinking about something. He kept the shilling hidden in his palm, with the hope of using it to buy his stamp. He reasoned that "Surely this is God's answer to my prayers!" Besides, Richard would simply use the shilling to buy drink. Furthermore, how could it be God's will for him not to finish Bible college? Yet, he knew that hiding the shilling from Richard was not the Royal Way. Jesus said, ***"Give to him that asketh thee"***; and Richard had asked. So, he gave the shilling to Richard, and went back into the dormitory. However, before he reached the door, the postman turned down the walkway, and handed him a letter;

and there, in the package, was a pound and a half (30 shillings), which a prayer group back in Holland had sent to him!⁸ *This, brethren, is the Royal Way! This is the Royal Calling!*

Conclusion: The Royal Calling is not the easy way; but it is the *blessed* way. Jesus said, ***“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”*** Turning the other cheek to an enemy who assaults you is as meek as it gets! This kind of righteousness does not come naturally to us. It requires a divine love and forgiveness. Christian, do you need help in this matter of non-retaliation? How about in the matter of giving? I have my hand up to acknowledge that *I* need help. We all do! Christian, ask the Lord to fill your heart with His love and forgiveness! Now, perhaps you are not saved. If so, I urge you to place your faith in Jesus this morning. He has purchased the greatest gift of all for you—the gift of salvation. However, *you must receive it*, by faith and repentance of heart. Repent, and ask Jesus to save you today!

¹ Georgi Vins, *Moscow Express and Other Stories from Russia* (Roseburg, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2007), p. 9.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ William E. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), p. 93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁸ Andrew van der Bijl, *God's Smuggler* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1967), pp. 70-71.