

## Get Real! Your New Bill of Rights

Matthew 5:38-6:4

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Read from Alice in Wonderland. Point: There is another world out there than the one we live in and bump into every day. It's called the Kingdom of God. There is a passageway to it. His name is Jesus. And at times it's as different from our work-a-day world as Wonderland was for Alice.

This is what the Sermon on the Mount is—it is Jesus explaining to earth dwellers how things work in His wonderland. We've seen some of these strange principles already—blessed are the poor in spirit, rejoice when people persecute you, if you hate someone it's as if you've killed them, you can't ogle actresses in movies, marriage is not an experiment but for a lifetime. And as if we were not disoriented enough, in our text today Jesus goes completely upside down on us.

You see, you and I are not only human beings, which means that we are essentially self-centered; we are also the products of 21<sup>st</sup> century America. We have been weaned on the principles of the Declaration of Independence, that "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." And to insure that we retained those rights, our Founding Fathers added to the Constitution of the U.S. a Bill of Rights, a piece of paper that any citizen could hold up and say "You can't do that to me because it says so right here. . ."

Such a Bill of Rights was a long time in coming, in fact for thousands of years people, including, by the way, the people to whom Jesus was preaching this Sermon, lived under the whims and dictates of whichever power happened to be in control at the time. It wasn't until the Magna Carta of 1215 that some official limitations were put on a sovereign ruler. England's Parliament approved the first Bill of Rights in 1689, 100 years before ours, which listed certain rights to which subjects of a constitutional monarchy were thought to be entitled, such as the right to petition the monarch and the right to bear arms. Then we listed 10 things in our Bill of Rights. Now there is an International Bill of Rights, based on the 4 freedoms adopted by the Allies in WW II, freedom of speech and assembly, freedom from want and fear. And do you know what? I'm very glad for our Constitution and our Bill of Rights. They have helped to create the greatest, freest, most prosperous nation in the history of the world. And you and I are incredibly blessed, in the mercy of God, to belong to this nation.

But now along comes Jesus, the rabbit with pink eyes, so to speak, and He disappears down a hole and when we follow Him (Igniting a passion to follow Him!), we find ourselves in a whole nother world. And what Jesus is saying to the crowds in this sermon is, "You can continue to live on the surface of the earth if you want—but if you want to follow me, if you want to be a part of my Wonderland, my Kingdom, then this is what life is going to look like. . ."

Earthly life has a worldview that says this: I have the right to live and I have the freedom to love. In other words, I have the right to “me”, to do whatever I want to as it relates to me. And as far as relating to others, I have the freedom to do whatever I want, I can love whom I want or ignore whomever I want, as long as I don’t harm them.

Now are you ready to jump down the rabbit hole with Jesus?! He says, that may be how things are done up here on the surface, but in my Kingdom it’s different. He said in v. 20, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” In my Kingdom, you don’t have the right to live; you have the requirement to die. And in my Kingdom, you don’t have the freedom to love; you have the responsibility to love. So if you want to follow Jesus, here is your new Bill of Rights.

### **I. THE REQUIREMENT TO DIE, 5:38-42**

Jesus continues the section in the Sermon where He “fulfills” the Law, He “fills it full”, fills it up and goes even a step further to fulfill more than just the letter of the Law but the intent of the Lawgiver that was behind it. Here’s what the Law said. . .but I say, *ego lego*, unfolds the full meaning of the Law. He gives four examples of how we must die to follow Him.

#### **a. Die to your honor**, vv. 38, 39,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” Does it really say that in the Bible?! Absolutely! A little bit shocking, isn’t it? Deut. 19:21, “Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” In fact this was a principle of law even before Moses, it’s in the Code of Hammurabi in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. B.C. Called the *lex talionis*, it was actually a great stride forward in preserving social order, for not only did it act as a deterrent for physical abuse (Deut says it will “purge the evil from your midst”), it also prevented excess in response, the escalation of a blood feud. Wrong was done, it was repaid in kind, everything’s fair, matter over. By NT times, this had evolved into physical penalties being replaced by financial ones, where the offended one was compensated monetarily. Either way, justice was done, everything’s fair and square.

But here’s the thing we don’t understand in the West. The right cheek would indicate a back-handed slap by a right-handed person, the greatest insult you could give another person in the 1<sup>st</sup> century; it actually carried twice the fine of a palm slap! When someone slapped you, dissed you so publicly, your concern was not just to slap him back to punish him but to slap him back to regain your honor. If you just stand there, your honor melts away like a marshmallow in the rain. Like the classic Western saloon confrontation scenario, where your manhood is challenged, everyone’s watching, you can hear a pin drop, and to say or do nothing is, well it’s just inconceivable, for a real man.

Yet this is exactly what Jesus is saying. He says, *ego lego*, v. 39. If someone slaps you—turn the other cheek. Don’t respond, in fact let them do it again. As one wag said, don’t just do something: stand there! He challenges the desire for personal vindication and summons us to neglect our honor.

Notice what He’s not saying. Not saying if someone cuts your hand off, give him your other hand. There’s no intent to physically harm, just to insult. He’s also not saying anything about social order or international relations, about a state police force or an army. Those are separate issues. In fact, in Rom. 13:4 God says that the authorities are put in power by Him to “be an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.” What Jesus is talking about is interpersonal relationships where one individual

has dishonored another, stepped on the ego. Jesus says, "Let them have at it." You could almost hear the gasp from the audience.

**b. Die to your stuff, v. 40**

Here's how they dressed back then. Loincloth=underwear. Tunic=pants/shirt. Cloak=coat/sleeping bag/pillow. This cloak was such an important part of life that the Law made it an inalienable possession, Ex. 22:26, 27, "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep?" So if someone sues you for the shirt off your back, give him your coat as well. This is remarkable! If they take your shirt, you could still wear your coat. But now you're left with nothing, you've chosen to give up not only what you want and need, but what the Law has said could never be taken away from you, and you've done it because you're living in a different world.

The problem is, we're like Stubby. The other day, he was in the neighbor's yard and got a hold of the neighbor's dog's rawhide. . . We had the hardest time pulling it out of his mouth, he wouldn't let go. Just like us. Jesus goes, "Wait a minute, if the things of this world are that important to you, if you can't value the Kingdom that much, then you have no place in it."

**c. Die to your time and energy, v. 41**

This is a reference to Roman soldiers commandeering civilian labor, as in Mt. 27:32, when Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus' cross. This could be for a legitimate reason, where they needed help on a project. But I'm sure sometimes the lines were crossed and they made you work just because they wanted to hassle you and remind you that you were their subject. That happens enough times, you start to get angry. The Jews fiercely resented this imposition from militant nationalists; impressment invokes outrage. In fact, personal retaliation through physical resistance was a burning issue for the Jews, as evidenced by violent liberation groups like the Maccabees. This is why the Jews were looking for a Messiah, one who would deliver them from Roman bondage.

And what does this prospective Messiah offer? Down the rabbit hole, to a whole nother world. Here, in the Kingdom of God, followers of Jesus don't respond like everyone else. When they are forced to do work, they gladly give of their time and their energy to do it, but then, and here's the real kicker, they go over and above to do more, twice what is required.

**d. Die to your money, v. 42**

The genuinely poor were numerous in Judea in Jesus' day. Our knee-jerk reaction is to not to give but to hoard our money. Jesus says that your knee-jerk reaction should be to give, your first response should be "Yes", like Jim Carey in "Yes Man". Your focus should not be on your savings as much as on saving another who is destitute. The primary obligation of the Kingdom is to serve others not self, to not think first of your own harm but the other's good, to have a radically unselfish attitude to one's rights and property.

Some questions might have occurred to you as we went through these four examples. Did Jesus mean these things comprehensively, like are these things all we have to do? This is not "Triteronomy", a 3<sup>rd</sup> Law that spells everything out in specific detail so that we can check them off like things on a list. No, here Jesus is giving us direction, not directions; a compass not a map (Manson). These are merely

examples, suggestive not exhaustive, principles not rules, pointing us in the direction of what Kingdom people are really like.

Or, you might ask, "Did Jesus mean these 4 things literally?" Yes and no! I think He is using hyperbole, for, for instance, no Jew would go home in only his loincloth. Or if we followed v. 42 without some analysis of need, it wouldn't make much sense because we'd end up with a class of saintly paupers and one of prosperous idlers (Morris). But he's using it to strike at the core of human selfishness, to show us how to value others about ourselves in concrete ways.

So how do we apply this teaching? It's easy to fall off the cliff on either side. One wrong way is to take these commandments hyper-literally and say, for instance, if someone slaps me on the cheek I'll have to turn the other cheek, but if they miss my cheek and hit my jaw, for instance, then I'll really let them have it. Or just because no soldier has asked me to carry his load for a mile, v. 41 doesn't relate to me. That's not what Jesus is getting at.

The other side of the cliff is to say that all this is just hyperbole and what Jesus really wants is for me to be nice to other people, so as long as I'm nice then I'm good with these verses. That's also not what Jesus is saying. You see, we're bound, as Paul said, by the law of Christ, not by the law of Moses, and the difference is that Moses spelled everything out but Jesus didn't. His is the law of love, first to God, then to others. And so in every situation we have to ask, "Am I doing or responding in ways that show that I love God more than myself and that I love others as much as I love myself?" What we have to do is take a hard look at our lives and our reactions to things that people do to us and see if we're responding in selfishness—or in love. And if we will let the Spirit of God search us deeply, I think we will find that many of our rationalizations for our behavior don't stand up to the scrutiny of the law of love. For instance, if a driver cuts me off, I feel disrespected; and like any self-respecting male, I want to get back in front of him—to restore my honor. Jesus says, "Stop it." If my wife asks why I splash around the kitchen sink so much when I wash my hands there, I respond defensively. Jesus says, "Don't do that." What about your boss who has given you an extra project when your colleague spends time Twittering at work? Embrace it, stay overtime, ask for another project, be so counter-revolutionary that people taste the salt and see the light of the Kingdom of Jesus in you. Or if someone has pulled a business move on you and is getting more than their fair share from you, let it go—consider even throwing something in on top of it. When there's a benevolent offering, like today, rather than say, "I can't afford to give to that", go ahead and put something in the plate. Show God you love Him—and needy people—more than, say, going out for lunch today, more than yourself.

Joe taught us *ego lego*. Let me add one, ego zero. You see we need to make our egos zero and our fingers held loosely.

Do you know how hard all this is?! We feel deeply within us that injustice should get its due. Revenge comes easily to human beings. In fact, Nietzsche considered Jesus' ethic "effeminate" and wished to see a morality of "blood and iron." That feels and sounds much better. Jesus stands almost alone with this command and has found few followers, even in the church. And yet, as Bruner says, the virility that checks virility is stronger than all machismo. To ask red-blooded human beings in exploited situations to live like this is to ask them to give up their soul (Bruner). And that's exactly the point.

The only way you can live like this is to give up your soul. Jesus asks for an entirely different breed of human being, which flesh and blood cannot attain. The only way we can become that is by dying. This

is the same teaching Matthew recorded that Jesus gave a little later, in 16:24, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." You can't do these things, respond in these ways, unless you have picked up your cross with Jesus and died to yourself. That's the way to enter the Kingdom—then everything changes because then He gives you the Holy Spirit and changes you inside.

You see, the disciple is not to expect anything other than what the Servant endured. You become like your Master and your Savior. The one who practiced what He preached, the one who had no money, even to pay his taxes, the one who was always ready to go to whomever had need, the one who had no place to lay his head, the one who, in the words of Isa. 50:6, gave his back to those who struck Him, His cheeks to those who pulled out His beard. He said, "I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting." And when He was thus led to the slaughter, He "opened not His mouth." Ego zero! Now He is inviting those who would follow Him to do exactly that, to follow Him in giving up their honor, their stuff, their time/energy, their money, as they put the needs of others before their own and show their exclusive devotion to the Kingdom of God and not the kingdoms of this world.

## **II. THE RESPONSIBILITY TO LOVE, 5:43-48**

Jesus now turns to His final "You have heard. . .but I say", v. 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Was that in the OT? Well, the first part was, although the full quote would have been, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18), but that became too hard so the scribes had reduced it to just love.

But where did they get, "Hate your enemy?" That's nowhere in the Old Testament. Although it could be interpolated from certain passages, such as when the inspired Psalmist, David, said, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies." (Ps. 139:21,22). While there were injunctions in the OT to care for the alien and foreigner, there is also a strong theme of fighting the enemies of God, even to the point of developing an antipathy for them. So this saying in v. 43 is not far from the tone of the OT.

And now Jesus goes completely off the deep end, from surface world perspective. Not only are we not to respond to our enemies in kind, not only are we to give them our stuff and do what they ask us to do and even more—now Jesus demands that we do more, that we love them. The word is *agape*, meaning a costly self-sacrifice for another's good, but even more than that, as D.A. Carson reminds us, it is not devoid of emotion, but involves a generous warm spirit towards them. It forces us to probe our hearts.

**a) Whom are we supposed to love?** Our enemies. Those who dislike us, who have hurt us. You see, it's easy to love our friends. That's what vv. 46,47 are about. Even the tax collectors, the worst people in society do that. It's easy to smile when you greet your brothers. Even the Gentiles, the unreligious, do that. So how does doing that make you different? There's nothing special about doing what everyone else does, no reward for doing what comes naturally. But there is something special about doing what comes only supernaturally. These are the upside down values in the Wonderland of the Kingdom of God.

**b) So how do we love our enemies?** Jesus doesn't specify here. But love has to act, and so we can start by doing good for them. While we still trust in God's divine retribution (remember, God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." ([Rom 12:19]), we need to let our hearts warm to the needs of our

enemy, we need to feed him if he is hungry, as Romans 12 goes on to say, to give him something to drink if he's thirsty, to heap burning coals on his head. Now we need to not just stand there but do something! Lk. 6:27, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. . . and lend (v. 35), expecting nothing in return."

Loving may have to begin with forgiving, as Jesus will get to in the Lord's prayer. Corrie Ten Boom: "Let me tell you a story," I said. And then I told him of my experience when my former guard from the concentration camp asked me to forgive him. "That moment I felt great bitterness swelling in my heart," I said. "I remembered the sufferings of my dying sister. But I knew that unforgiveness would do more harm to me than the guard's whip. So I cried out to the Lord, "Lord, thank you for Romans 5:5, "...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Thank you, Lord, that your love in me can do that which I cannot do. ..I could not do it. I was not able. Jesus in me was able to do it. You see, you never touch so much the of ocean of God's love as when you love your enemies."

Loving will certainly involve praying for one's enemies. And this is not imprecatory praying, by the way! As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "This is the supreme demand. Through prayer, we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God." It is a genuine seeking of his welfare from the mercy of God. As John Stott said, "If the cruel torture of crucifixion could not silence our Lord's prayer for His enemies, what pain, pride, prejudice, or sloth could justify the silencing of ours."

**c) Finally, why are we to love them?** Well, we need to understand the character of God, the fact that He cares about them; He loves them, v. 45b. He makes His sun shine and His rain fall on them too. Now God is not going to excuse their sin; one day He will make all wrongs right. But it's not that God is just sitting in heaven tapping his fingers like Mr. Burns just waiting to destroy them. He cares for them. He wants them to repent and find life. In fact, you and I were His enemies once, and do you know how much He loved us? "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . .For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life." (Rom. 5:8, 10).

So here's the point: if that is how the Father is, should not the son be the same? Love your enemies. . . v. 45a, "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." This love is not a means of becoming a child of God but a proof of it; it will mark us out as sons of the Father, that we share His character, His DNA. And it also means that, while we are sons, we need to continue to grow into our sonship, to become what we are not yet, but to pursue a sonship patterned after our Father. To be God's child means to love—even our enemies.

Who are your enemies? Some personal ones, I'm sure, for most of us. But let me ask this morning how you feel about Muslims? Since 9/11, war on terror, body bags, etc., it's easy for us to respond in kind. We, as citizens of another Kingdom, mustn't. Rather, we must love and pray for them.

Summary, v. 48: Now for the pinnacle of Jesus' teaching. The requirement of the Kingdom is that we be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. It is a restatement of Lev. 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." The word means more than just sinless or flawless, which is too cold a translation. It is wider than that. It means completeness, wholeness, mature, full grown, wide whole-heartedness, where there is no limit to our goodness, as there is none to God's. It means growing up to the stature of the fullness of Christ, as Paul describes in Eph. 4, or to have Christ formed in us. This is

what that will look like. This is the greater righteousness, v. 20, required for entering the Kingdom of heaven. And it will always leave room for growth, for there's always something to aim at. The Psalmist said, "To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless." (Ps. 119:96)

### **III. THE MOTIVES OF GIVING, 6:1-4**

Here we come to quite a new section of the Sermon. Jesus has now concluded the "You have heard... but I say" section and turns his attention from conduct between individuals to conduct between individuals and God, called here "doing righteousness"—and particularly the heart motives behind practicing such religion. 6:1 is the intro, really a summary of 6:1-18. You do need to practice your righteousness, "do", as he's been describing throughout ch. 5—but what is equally as important as the doing is the reason for the doing. We can do the right things for the wrong reasons, and it matters greatly why we do what we do. His point is essentially this: religious observance is to be directed to God and not to man, for their approval.

The Jews, in contrast to us 21<sup>st</sup> century evangelicals, but in line with most religious people of all faiths in the world, were very concerned with what they were supposed to "do" as a Jew (same for Muslims). There were 3 main religious activities: almsgiving, prayer, fasting. Jesus deals with all 3 in this section. We'll just look briefly at the first today and then Mark will finish this section next week.

There's a pattern to all 3. First, a **warning**; second, **teaching**; third, **assurance**.

The Jews took giving to the poor very seriously in a society where there was no Social Security or welfare. It was a religious duty not a philanthropic option. In each community they had officials who made weekly collections of goods or money. Imagine! Gifts were obligatory. Once you had lived in a town for 30 days, you were liable to contribute to the soup kitchen, and at 3 months, for the charity box. But more money was needed, so almsgiving was commended (Morris).

But there was a problem, one summarized by the character Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, (p. 164), "If you do something good, then, after a while, if you don't watch it, you start showing off. And then you're not as good anymore." That's what the hypocrites were doing, literally "actors", those who were playing a role, concerned more with appearance and impression than with substance. They, if not literally blowing trumpets as they dropped their coins in the box, would certainly be tooting their own horn as they made sure everyone noticed their generosity.

First the warning. "Beware", v. 1, be on your guard, be diligent, this could happen to you, it's not just those phony hypocrites out there. Vainglory insinuates itself into what we do before we are aware of it. If your motive for giving becomes ostentation, showing off to get the approval of man, then just know this, that while you may get that reward, that's all you'll get, v. 2. You will be paid in full, a business term meaning that no more is coming.

Then the teaching, v. 3, hyperbole, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give it secretly. Fold the check over.

Finally, the reward. What is done in secret is not, in fact, unseen. It is noted by the Father in heaven. Isn't that a great thing?! The boss sees it! And He will reward you. The word means to pay back, different than the word used in v. 2 which means "paid in full." It's not necessarily proportionate, and

knowing our Father it may be far more than what we put into it! The Father will pay us back, in some way, for what we give to His Kingdom. Jesus does not shy away from mentioning rewards as a means of motivating proper behavior. But He also doesn't specify what the reward is, because then we might still do it for the wrong reason, to get the reward. If you give because a TV preacher said you'll get double your money back, that's not real almsgiving, it's only in effect giving to yourself. If the deed is done for the reward, then it is no longer good (Morris). Christian giving, says John Stott, "is to be marked by self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness, not self-congratulation." But in God's great economy, He will give a reward. It may include a good conscience; increased holiness; a more intimate relationship with God Himself as we pry ourselves away from the sticky things of this world that do not last.

### CONCLUSION

As a child, I never finished Alice in Wonderland. In fact, I've still never read the whole thing. I couldn't get past the first few chapters, it was just so weird and unrelated to life as I knew it. Maybe that's what Jesus' words sound like to you this morning. It's just too bizarre, too different, you just want to put the book down and get back to life as you know it. I pray not. I pray that the Spirit who searches the mind of God will reveal these things to you as not just the wild imaginings of a human author, which might be fun but ultimately meaningless, but the revelation of a different world, a kingdom that is not only true and real but the only one that is worth living for, the only one that will last, and that you will want to follow Jesus down that rabbit hole. I would invite you to do that, come talk to one of the people at the front.

But for those of you who claim to be followers of Christ, to be a part of the Kingdom, let me ask, "Has the Kingdom come in your life?" This Kingdom?! My Kingdom, Jesus said, is not of this world. Here is your new Bill of Rights: All that you have the right to is to die and to love.

Have you died to self? How can you tell? How can you tell if a body is dead? You poke it with a needle. That's how you can tell if you've died to yourself—by how you respond to life's pokes and prods. "The only part of me that can be hurt is the part of me that has not died." If you find yourself hurt, wanting to retaliate, grudgingly giving of your time and money, then you're not breathing Kingdom air, you're stuck in the surface world. And Jesus' call to you is "Come and Die." George Mueller said, "There was a day when I died, utterly, to George Mueller and his opinions, his preferences, and his tastes and his will. I died to the world and its approval and its censure. I died to the approval or the blame of even my brethren and friends."

My friends, all we're doing is following Jesus in these matters. Rather than claim His right to life, He accepted the requirement to die. And rather than remaining free to love or hate, He committed Himself to love His enemies—you and me and everyone else who has shaken their fist in His face. And He did it all the way to the cross, which is what we want to remember today.

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