

**(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 43 Sunday 28 October\_2018.**

**Marks of a human: REVENGE**

Text Matthew 5: 1, 38 – 48. READ.

Some weeks ago, we returned to JESUS talking to his Disciples – his Followers about: -

**Supreme blessedness: Matthew 5: 1. Jesus climbed the mountain, separated himself from the crowds and gave his attention to teaching his followers – disciples.** He spoke about what it really meant to follow him and please him by the way we live our lives in community and in the world.

Without a doubt this condition or experience of blessedness (human happiness or well-being – which is coveted by others) is not simply achieved through aspiration and effort. God's grace is needed – to enter and experience this depth of blessedness (other faiths talk of baraka (Islam – Arabic word for blessing) or even the karma spoken of in Hinduism and Buddhism. Karma is to do with cause and effect – a Sanskrit word).

Each of the 8 or 9 beatitudes is like a proclaimed proverb: ***Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully. (v6)***

JESUS in his teaching is surely correcting many of the false understandings that have arisen in many cultures and over many generations about the God and Human relationship. Hence his use of the phrase: ***You have heard it said BUT I say to you... (5:21)*** Religious systems and philosophies (like the Jewish Mosaic Law) because of human nature become corrupted over a period of time – there is a constant need to go back to discovering what is really pleasing to God to keep what is pure – so that we might move forward as people. What is Jesus really saying in his claims to be the Way, the Truth and the Light?

**Call of JESUS: to live prophetically 5: 13, 14** Jesus calls upon his followers to be like SALT for the human race and LIGHT for the whole world. Something that should make us aware of our weakness and cry out for grace and help from God. Jesus calls his followers to prophetically – speak the truth about God and people and live the truth.

This is the reason why many have chosen to follow Jesus – seeking to live genuinely counter-cultural lives. **Jesus spoke about living prophetically in the world (5: 11 & 12) – as he himself did.** This counter-cultural living will challenge the people of the world but would (as in his case) result in opposition: insults, persecutions and evil lies being spoken against those who live this way (live righteously). He said that there would be later reward but without a doubt he was not and is not offering an easy way of life or an opt out of the world.

JESUS in what he said and how he behaved exhibited and demonstrated what it is to be truly human – ***Blessed are the peacemakers – they are the true children of God (v9).*** (Truly human).

To his disciples (followers) Jesus spoke about living a blessed life – a life of fullness and wellbeing based on a deep inner conviction and set of values – with an outer way of behaving in the world.

**Jesus is describing a way of being and living in community.**

This is a call to follow, a call to lifestyle, and a way of being individually and in community. Jesus' call is to be God's people – living among all the peoples of the world but distinctive and holy (set apart for God's use).

**Matthew 6: 8 “Do not be like them”.** Be different from the Pagans but also the Scribes and the Pharisees.

**Here in Matthew 5: 38 - 48 Jesus talks about revenge and enemies.**

As Jesus talks to his followers he talks about many of the strong emotions and actions that mark us out as humans – flawed humans but still bearing the image of God in our being. 2 weeks ago, we consider ANGER and AGGRESSION - what we do with anger. Jesus in these key chapters speaks also about other things that mark us out as humans: love and lust, faithfulness and unfaithfulness in relationships, spirituality and true wealth. Jesus talks about judging: comparing and contrasting ourselves with others, and the value systems on which we build our lives.

**So, what does Jesus have to say about those who wrong us and become our enemies?** Now surely Jesus knew a bit about this from personal experience in his own life!

**In 5: 10 *Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of God belongs to them.***

**Vv11, 12 *Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. Be happy and glad...***

Indeed, we know that this was how historically they treated those who spoke prophetically, exposed injustice and immoral behaviour – the Prophets, for example John the Baptist and Jesus himself was to experience all of this antagonism – undeserved and untruthful accusations.

**To his disciples Jesus addressed the issues of how his disciples would feel when this happened to them...surely, they would want revenge and the false accusers to suffer at least as much as they had?** After all that would be the “human” response. But again, Jesus calls for a different response from his disciples.

**V38 READ. The OT Law of Lex talionis (see footnote).** These Jewish men were used to the teaching of the Mosaic Law: *Exodus 21: 24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21* which dealt with both Civil and Moral law. **JESUS called for a response of righteousness which insisted on a NON-REVENGE retaliation and an active LOVE including PRAYER for enemies who wrong us.**

JESUS calls his Disciples to behave differently when we are wronged and encounter evil against us.

“Lex talionis” **defined justice but it also RESTRAINED REVENGED** and was designed to limit vengeance and ongoing family feuds. (*Last week Romans 12: 19-21 Do not seek revenge...An unforgiving heart will destroy us in the end. Let God implement justice*).

**Even the Mosaic Law forbade revenge:** *Leviticus 19: 18 Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him but love your neighbour as you love yourself. I am the LORD. BUT the Pharisees tried to justify personal revenge.* JESUS does not refute the need for the Law Courts (on occasion 5:25) but calls us as his followers not to seek revenge against those who have done us wrong/ evil. JESUS challenged injustice, but he did not retaliate out of a desire for revenge. (When falsely accused and even when on the Cross).

Jesus gives 4 examples of every day examples of every day not retaliating in order to seek revenge:

- *V39 slapped on right cheek turn left ...(ie back of the hand insult)*
- *V40 someone takes you to court for your shirt...(not allowed to in Law)*
- *V41 one of occupying forces makes you carry his pack for a mile...*
- *V42 someone asks for something or even to borrow let them have it...(if you give don't ask for it back)*

**JESUS calls us to an active love (that may well change to person who has done us wrong** *Romans 12: 20 ancient Egyptian custom in which a person showing contrition carried a pan of burning coals on their head*). **But even if there is no change we will have been merciful on a personal level – upright as God is upright.**

**Jesus** did challenge evil and injustice and rebuked the Pharisees who had the authority and responsibility for not “doing their job” but he did not teach as the Pharisees did that revenge was called for.

**Love for enemy and prayer for those who persecute us as Followers of Jesus.**

**WHY should I not seek revenge? WHY should I love and pray for my enemy?**

- Disproportionate revenge. I am fallen and less merciful than God (God has shown me mercy)
- Not good for my soul (psychology – wellbeing)
- Power of prayer rather than fist.

**Hate Crimes in UK Law?** Blasphemy is hard to prove – since it is an offence against God who says, *Revenge is mine – I will repay*. God needs no one to stand up for him.

### **What are hate incidents? (Citizens Advice website).**

*The police and Crown Prosecution Service have agreed a common definition of hate incidents.*

*They say something is a hate incident if the victim or anyone else think it was motivated by hostility or prejudice based on one of the following things:*

- *disability*
- *race*
- *religion*
- *transgender identity*
- *sexual orientation.*

*This means that if **you** believe something is a hate incident it should be recorded as such by the person you are reporting it to. All police forces record hate incidents based on these five personal characteristics. (NB Not all hate incidents are crimes but the more extreme are).*

Should I report hate incidents? Very possibly. I would not rush to the police or courts quickly, but the State is there to protect all citizens in a free society like ours. It may depend how serious the incident is, and I may need to take advice on whether to report it. (e.g. of domestic violence – not to be covered up by the Church). This may happen within my own family or it may happen publicly on social media or in the street. (Just yesterday in the USA a man entered a synagogue and killed 11 people and wounded others in a religious hate crime. This man has been arrested and charged). In the UK reports of religious hate offences in England and Wales rose by 40% last year. (Home Office Data).

Revengeful retaliation, however, is not the Jesus way. But the seeking of revenge – the shedding of blood may be my first thought if my person, my family, my place of worship or home is violated by someone else's hate. And this unrestrained is how family feuds, clan and tribal battles and wars are perpetuated.

### **What happens when I pray and encounter God?**

My enemy may change (they may not). I will certainly change if I am saying "yes LORD". What would you ask God for your enemy who persecutes you or hates you because of your faith in Jesus?

## **Talion - footnote**

law

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[See Article History](#)

**Alternative Title:** lex talionis

**Talion**, Latin **lex talionis**, principle developed in early Babylonian law and present in both biblical and early [Roman](#) law that criminals should receive as punishment precisely those

injuries and damages they had inflicted upon their victims. Many early societies applied this “[eye-for-an-eye](#)” principle literally.

In ancient Palestine, injury and bodily mutilation, as well as theft, were considered private wrongs. As such, the matter was settled not by the state but between the person who inflicted the injury and the one injured, an attitude that also prevailed in early Rome. Talion was the ultimate satisfaction a plaintiff might demand but was not mandatory; the injured person could obtain satisfaction with money if he wished.

On the principle that two different persons could not have exactly the same bodily members, the Palestinian sages enacted a law by which the injured party could not demand an eye from the person who caused the loss of his eye but could demand the value of his eye. This led to the abolition of talion in Palestine. By the 5th century bc in Rome, fines known as [delicts](#) had begun to replace talion in many instances, though the concept of talion did reemerge in [medieval](#) Germany and in some areas of Scandinavia in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Until the end of the 18th century, talion provided the rationale for such [corporal punishments](#) as [flogging](#), branding, mutilation, the stock, and the pillory. The principle still serves as a partial basis for punishments or the [assessment](#) of fines against minor offenders in some legal systems where customary law is recognized.