

Working With The Voice Transcript

WWTV Episode 013

Commentary on The Sermon on the Mount: Part 2: Salt & Light & the Antithesis
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Hey listeners! This is Juliet Mee, the host of Working With The Voice. This is a course to learn to communicate directly with the Holy Spirit and its best to listen to the episodes in order. If you are intending to communicate with the Holy Spirit, it's important to understand the standard things that God has already communicated, and also to understand what Christianity is about. Because of that, we will be going through the first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four books tell about Jesus's life and teachings, and Jesus was the pattern we are to follow. Currently we are going through the book of Matthew and are in the fifth chapter. In the last episode we went through the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, the part called the Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount contains three chapters of material which is over 10% of the entire book of Matthew, and is the longest and most famous sermon that we have from Jesus. There is no part of the bible that has had more written about it. If you took this sermon apart, you could do a word for word analysis that could easily take over a year to complete. In light of this, I have decided to include what is interesting to me rather than trying to include every important insight. I need to credit a couple of places. First, as usual, the Holy Spirit has guided me through all of these episodes, teaching me things he wants me to pay attention to that are relevant to me and my life as well as what he would like for me to emphasize in this podcast. In addition, the Matthew Henry Commentary from the 1600s is where I got a lot of the background information that explains the Scriptures. Also, Ron Julian did a 12 part series on the Sermon on the Mount for Gutenberg College that is very good. It is available as a podcast and also on iTunes-U. Please go to my website, workingwiththevoice.com for links to his work.

Writing about the Sermon on the Mount is difficult simply because the material in it is so incredibly important, and there are many different points that could be made about every line. These teachings form the root of the understanding of Christian ethics. No matter what your religion is, Christian ethics impact our culture now and I don't think there is any way for us to understand how strong the effect has been because we can't comprehend a world without them. Technologies like the internet are obvious examples of large cultural influence, but although this example is miniscule in comparison to Jesus, an example of an individual's cultural influence is that younger people listening to the entertainer Madonna today have such a different view of her than what those of us who were around in 1984 had when we first heard her sing, "Borderline". I can remember how that song made me feel. I remember right where I was in life, with my first apartment, and although still underage, going out to dance in bars. I just re-listened to the song and it still gives me the feels. I'd never heard music or a voice like that. It was exciting. Now, I've heard the song a jillion times and have all sorts of opinions about Madonna that I didn't have then. One thing that is for sure, I could not have ever known how deeply Madonna would influence life by becoming a global cultural icon. She has impacted more musicians than could ever be listed. I'm sure that people can relate to other musicians like the Beatles and Elvis in the same way but I can't, because when I encountered them, I was already living in a culture that they had helped form.

When Jesus began to teach his disciples, he entered a culture that was dominated by two different groups in power in the Jewish church, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Throughout the Gospels you will hear a lot about these two groups and the important understanding isn't the differences between the two groups. The important understanding is that the two groups together were in charge of everything

that Jewish people encountered, and they were hostile to Jesus's message because it not only made them look bad, it made the Jews look bad to the Romans. And this would be the cause of Jesus's crucifixion. The Pharisees were more middle class than the Sadducees, and their power came from being teachers within the synagogues. They studied the 613 Mosaic laws and established practices that would keep Jews from interacting with Gentiles. Gentiles are non-Jews and the Pharisees were strictly against adopting the lifestyles of non-Jews. The Pharisees had been able to obtain an uneasy peace with the Romans by submitting to their military and political authority. The Sadducees came from the upper class, they held power by being members within the courts of the Sanhedrin and they oversaw the formal relations of the Jewish state. They directly benefitted from maintaining good peaceful relations with the Roman rulers, who were oppressing the common Jewish people. The tax collectors were Sadducees and they had integrated some of the Roman and Greek practices into their daily life. It's interesting to note that between the two groups, Jesus's philosophies and teachings were much more aligned with the Pharisees than Sadducees. In fact, although the Pharisees believed that there would be a Messiah, the Sadducees did not. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sets his sights squarely on not only teaching his disciples what he wants them to know and focus on, but also on correcting the views being expressed by the Pharisees. He also exposes the security, power and income that both groups had from using their religious position to their advantage. It's only right to identify that there were many teachers and leaders that Jesus encountered who were truly attempting to look for God and to live in a way that was sincere. But although these people may have pushed against Jesus, these weren't the people Jesus pushed against. Jesus had his sights on correcting the messages that were coming from the Pharisees who were teaching how to live by the letter of the law but not the intent. They indulged themselves in the loopholes they found and still felt very sure that they knew the rules and regulations so specifically that they could say, "I checked every box, and I'm good!" So Jesus's disciples were living in a religious culture that had gotten off the mark and from the way that he words the Sermon on the Mount, there were signs that these two groups wouldn't change easily.

I'm not trying to beat a dead horse here, but you have to not only understand what is said by Jesus, but understand the larger picture that he is teaching. Obviously there are big arguments not only from non-Christians to Christians about the words that Jesus used taken out of context, but within the Christian church today over issues that are honestly irrelevant or that have been broken down into the component parts so far that they have lost their meaning. Saying that anything from the bible is irrelevant is profoundly at odds with what is accepted within the Christian community. However, you'd have to be blind to not see that lots of people who consider themselves Christian today do not hold themselves to the simple overarching principles of loving God and loving others like you love yourself. The issues today surrounding race, gender, and all other forms of bias show that there is an entrenched vertical hierarchy where some people are seen as better and more valuable than others. If you can't get your head wrapped around the big Christian concepts, then I don't know that any other issues matter.

You have to work to have a basis of understanding these things Jesus is expressing in the Sermon on the Mount so you can think, and get used to figuring out what other passages meant then and now. Last episode we went through the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, which is called the Beatitudes, which identify eight challenges and the rewards for meeting those challenges, paradoxes that guide and direct a disciple's religious practice. A paradox is when two seemingly opposite things seem to be true at the same time. In the Beatitudes Jesus says that those who are currently suffering are going to be blessed, so to suffer is a good thing. Jesus identifies why it was important that they concentrated on inwardly and outwardly aligning with what God wanted. The focus was not on gaining power in the world, but on understanding your duty, acting from an inner humility. There are other things that Jesus is pointing directly at throughout the sermon. First, he is consistently pointing at the end result of

following Him and his teachings, which is the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven. I want to maintain the focus in this podcast of experiencing the kingdom of heaven while we are here, alive as humans, on the earth. Here's another unpopular opinion! In my opinion, there is too much emphasis on the kingdom of heaven that is anticipated in the future, as well as life after physical death. My rationale is that if we do for today what needs to be done, and we do it in the right way, then tomorrow will take care of itself.

Telling people what to do and how to do it is tricky business. Generally, most people do not want to be told what to do. As an employer and a trainer, I have written many student handbooks and employee manuals, and I have helped many business owners create theirs from the beginning. There is always an initial fear from new managers about writing down policies and procedures because they are clear that you can encounter both ignorance and malicious obedience. There's no way to write a policy and procedure manual that outlines every single situation imaginable. Overarching principles must guide behavior. Problems created through ignorance can potentially occur when a well-meaning employee says, "I need to know what to do, so, I am going to go to the manual and do exactly what it says." This is usually fine as long as the employee is truly well intentioned, there is an understanding of the overarching company principles, and the manual is adequately written. The first lines of any training manual should always be, "It is expected that you will perform your duties in a way that shows an understanding of the intent of the procedures. If you are unsure of the intention behind the procedure, ask your superior before performing the task." The concept of malicious obedience is different from ignorance. Malicious obedience is when a person strictly follows the rule rather than what the rule intended, and causes harm because of their "by the book" interpretation. I have encountered people who are masters at finding vague policies, misspelled words or policies that backfire by being overly specific. These people will complete the task in a way that is clearly not what was intended, but technically correct, then when they are called out for this action, they will point to the manual and say, "But this says I am to do X..." This malicious obedience is a form of hypocrisy. It appears that the person is being obedient, but their true motive is harm. Jesus points out things that on the surface appear to be honest misunderstandings of the law, but are actually loopholes that are benefitting the leaders, providing them income and indulgences at the expense of other people as well as their relationship to God. He is clear in this sermon that you can't get away with things just because you see a loophole.

In the sections of the Sermon that follow the Beatitudes, Jesus starts out by giving us, his disciples, a couple of images that relate who we are, then he discusses the moral law so we can know what we are to do.

Salt and Light

¹³"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Jesus gives us the visual of being salt and light. I used to think that if a person was said to be the salt of the earth, that meant that they were plain people who didn't have much, there was nothing special about them, and they were kind of boring. I have no idea where that misunderstanding came from except maybe I thought that salt is an inexpensive commodity, and it's so available to us now that we usually take for granted. Salt is one of the most important substances on earth and it has so many uses

that to even begin listing them here creates difficulties because there is no way to go into all the relevant examples of the importance of salt. Salt is essential to life, and was an important item that was pivotal to trade and to civilization. Access to salt is so important that wars have been fought over it. In fact, the people of India won their independence from Britain in 1947, and Gandhi started the non-violent rebellion because of salt. Indian citizens were required to purchase their salt from the British who charged them high taxes on it. They were forbidden to collect it from sea water or manufacture it in any way. Gandhi would march to the sea with his supporters so he could collect the salt that was naturally deposited on the shore after the tides came in. Ironically, the British police ground the salt into the mud, and after Gandhi picked the salt out of the mud, he was arrested for breaking the law. News of this spread which led to great civil disobedience, arrests of over 60,000 people, and ultimately through the guidance of Gandhi, the Indian people were released from 200 years of British rule. This situation will be expanded upon later in this episode and I find it to be truly amazing.

Salt was ordered in Mosaic law to be used in all sacrifices, and there are many different religious uses of salt for cleansing and purifying. A covenant of salt was considered to be an everlasting covenant. Sharing salt between two friends meant that they had both agreed to something and it couldn't be taken back. It signified trust and loyalty. But what does it mean to be the salt of the earth if you are a disciple? It means to be useful and necessary, and to enhance every situation you are in. It means to be interesting and engaging, trustworthy and loyal. If you go back to your high school science class, you will remember that salt diffuses into water and the visual of that movement could be analogous to how the disciples spread the word of Jesus's teachings throughout the world. Jesus was teaching this small number of people sitting on a mountain. There is absolutely no way that they could have understood what was happening from that spot, and there's no way even looking back at it from our perspective now that we can truly comprehend the way the message of Jesus spread throughout the world in the last 2000 years. In addition, salt represents a person's willingness to do what Jesus demands of them. So a person "losing their saltiness" can refer to a person who initially wanted to do what Jesus asked, but they lost their vigor for some reason.

Jesus also said that the disciples were the light of the world. The world without the influence of good people, guided by love, is pretty dark. Christianity is the religion of love, and those who practice it are expected to bring light into dark situations. When you turn a light on, you can see clearly. The edges of objects appear sharper. Light also bounces off the other objects in the room which makes them brighter, and it also allows what is in a situation to be clearly seen. You aren't meant to hide who you are, you are meant to just be it, be light. Light doesn't point to itself, light just is, and can be used to point at other things so you can see them better. If you are salt or light, people are going to notice once they encounter you. You can't help it. So go ahead and do the good that is placed in front of you to do, and let people see the good things that come out of people who dedicate themselves to living by the code that Jesus teaches.

The Fulfillment of the Law

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

¹⁹Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

This section begins the parts of the Sermon on the Mount called the antitheses. If something is the antithesis of something else, it means that they are opposites that are being compared and contrasted. In this next section, Jesus says “you have heard this, but I say this.” In this section prior to those types of statements he makes clear to the disciples that he is not taking away from the Mosaic law that they had been living under, he is adding more depth to their religious teachings. He is making the teaching complete. He was an observant Jew and in addition he was God in human form who came to add additional understanding to the people. Some of the things that he will say in the next sections, could easily be interpreted as him saying, “This is what the Mosaic Law says, but I’ll tell you what is really correct!” Jesus really isn’t presenting it that way even though there were probably already rumblings in the community about Jesus because he was condemning the current leaders for their superficial and self serving applications of the law. He identifies to the disciples that they have to be more morally aligned than the Pharisees, or they would not reach the Kingdom of Heaven.

Up til now in this sermon we have had Jesus identifying blessings to be received for difficult circumstances in the Beatitudes, then he says we are salt and light, which are both cooler than I originally thought, and he states clearly that he isn’t taking away the previous moral code, he’s expanding it and saying that there is an external expression that you must make sure to stay away from, but there is also an internal part that must be attended to, one that only you and God can truly see . This is all good, and I’m glad to see it because although the interpretation he gives makes it more difficult, I think it is better. The instruction from him is clear on each of these six subjects, and that is that you don’t get to make excuses or limit your interpretation of your responsibilities just so you can feel good about doing something else that is fundamentally wrong. For instance, the first one is about murder. Now, not murdering someone isn’t difficult for me, and I’ve never done it. I’m good! Check! But then he says, “Whoa now. It’s not just murder that I am prohibiting. You don’t get to be angry at people or act like you are wise and they are foolish either.” Okay, I guess that’s the right way to be even though I will have to work on my anger issues and the fact that I enjoy calling people names. You don’t just get to not commit adultery; you can’t lust after people either. You have to answer to the internal reality, not just the external act, and I give my personal stamp of approval to that and wish that everyone took the instructions seriously. So that leads me to what was unveiled for me during my exploration of the antitheses.

I’d like to gloss over the scripture says, because it points directly at something that has tripped me up for all of my adult life. It’s about the obvious message from Jesus that God is looking at what we are doing and deciding if it’s what he wants from us. He is judging us, and we might be punished due to that judgment. He even mentions hell a couple of times. Okey dokey. I got clear about the concept that there is external evil, the devil, after not believing in him for my entire life. This topic snuck up on me and it really pushes my buttons in some of the same ways too. It also says something fundamental about the way that I still choose to arrange my world with me above God at times. I don’t want to talk about God judging us, especially not in an eternal way, but the message is clear. We can be blessed by God like he identifies in the Beatitudes, or we can be subject to judgment and punishment if we don’t measure up, and its based upon the external acts as well as the internal state of the person. This was a big enough conflict for me that I just produced a full episode on how God changes us and judgment that I released at the same time I released this episode. It goes much deeper into the issues with judgment that I personally experienced while doing this episode. Let’s go further into the scripture to see what its all about.

Murder

²¹"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Jesus clearly is referring to the sixth commandment "Thou shalt not kill" and giving the disciples the deeper meaning here. Not only are you not to kill but you are not to have rage against other people. It doesn't mean you can't be angry. Anger is a normal emotion but it's one that must be handled properly. Anger becomes a problem when instead of dealing with the problem that caused the anger, the angry person boils, refuses to be soothed, holds a grudge or keeps it all inside. It is especially problematic and becomes related to the commandment to not murder when the person who is angry begins to think about or talking about retaliating against the other person. So here is the first place in the sermon where hell is mentioned. Jesus says that a person who calls his brother a fool will have to answer not only to the courts but is in danger of the fire of hell. The Jewish New Testament Commentary identifies that there's a couple different terms used in the bible that relate to what we have translated as "hell" and the term that was used here is related to a valley near Jerusalem called Gehenna (je-he-na). It's a bad place, a valley that was cursed after children were sacrificed there, and it was used for cremation of the bodies of the wicked. To parallel the concept I have for this podcast that the focus will be on this life, this example makes sense. You are getting too close to the fire, and there could be very bad results. If you are really upset with another person, you can cause all kinds of problems. You must stop the thoughts because by the time rageful or furious thoughts have reached the level where you say something about them; you are next to the step where you **do** something about it. There is a weird thing about acting out on your anger and I feel that Jesus recognizes this here. If you are violent, like indulging in temptation is a situation where you don't get to decide how far it goes. Violence brings more violence because once it starts, it takes intelligence and self-discipline to stop the cycle. This will be a big part of some of the other antithesis that will go into this concept but for now, we must understand that being ragefully angry at another person is prohibited, just as killing them is prohibited.

The next part continues on with the theme that it is important for us to live in an intentionally harmonious way with others. Jesus says **if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,** ²⁴**leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.**

Although it doesn't directly say this, I believe that it's reasonable to make the assumption that the thing your brother has against you is valid, but it's also reasonable to apply the principle to every interaction, whether their bad feelings toward you are warranted or not. It is clear that God wants us to be reconciled to one another, to be the peacemakers that are spoken of in the Beatitudes.

The next section ties into these concepts, and again, I think we can assume that the adversary has a legitimate beef with us:

²⁵"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Jesus may be referring to a judge in the court, but I think he is referring to the judgement of God and encouraging us to do something to get right with other people in this world before we are judged by God. If you don't, then there will be a day when the matter is placed in God's hands to render a decision, and then there will be nothing you can do.

I believe that the next three **antitheses** can be considered together even though they aren't really about the exact same things. Let's look at what it seems that the comparisons are saying, and then let's take it just a bit further.

Adultery

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Divorce

³¹"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'

³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

³³"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.'

Oaths

³⁴But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;

³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.

³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.

³⁷Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Here Jesus is referring to sex, divorce, and the promises you make. It actually weaves some principles into each aspect of the scriptures that we are talking about here, and rather than condoning certain behaviors, he points to the fact that there should be greater controls on behavior. For as much emphasis as the Christian church of today places on sexual activity, Jesus really says very little about it. As a reminder, the full Sermon on the Mount and especially the antithesis have the behavior of the Pharisees directly in its sights. These were people who were following the letter of the law but not the intent of the law. In the first section, if you take his words literally, he is talking about sex between people where at least one of the people are legally married to another person. He isn't specifically talking about pre-marital sex, or sex between people who are widowed or single. But I think we can still understand what he is leading us to when he begins by mentioning not one, but two commandments, the commandment to not commit adultery and the commandment to not covet, which means to yearn to possess something you do not have. He says: ²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸But

I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus then encourages the person who is falling into improper feelings to cut out the part of the body that was behind it, either their eye or their hand. This next part sort of makes me laugh because I have only one question: with so many super religious sanctimonious Christians out there who take the bible literally and use it to justify that they are very very interested in other people's sexual behavior, why do we not have churches full of one eyed, one handed people???? Committing adultery and looking lustfully at other people is so common, popular and accessible today that it has been said that the internet is fueled by pornography. Whether you are aware of it or not, these things owe big debts to the pornography industry because the ability to easily view internet pornography required them: e-commerce, webcams, vcrs and digital cameras. Think about it. The hypocrisy is real.

I attempt to not get ahead of ourselves through this podcast, but I do think that although it is not directly identified in this section, the information here begins to point to something that is truly amazing that most people do not focus on when they think about Jesus and his impact. And I also think there is obvious mischaracterization of true Christianity that must be dealt with. Jesus brought the full experience of God to women, and his teachings and life clearly show that he felt that there should be equality in the sexes. This wasn't just a little tweak in the ways people interacted, it was revolutionary. During Jesus's time, women were not supposed to directly address men. They were to kneel in front of a man, place their face towards the ground and not speak until they were recognized. Most women were required to have male guardians and many had to exclusively rely on their husbands for money. Divorce was allowed in Jewish law even though it did require that there was a reason given, and that reason had to be something that the husband found undesirable in the woman. Being a divorced woman or somehow losing the protection of your husband would have had very much more severe consequences then than today. Throughout all of his teachings, Jesus treats women as equals to men and forbids any hierarchy. With as much access to bibles and Jesus's teachings, how have we not gotten to full gender equality yet? How does the church's persecution of women continue? How has Jesus not been taken seriously about the fact that all people are equal in God's eyes???

The people Jesus was speaking with lived in a culture exactly like ours where hypothetically a Pharisee who was leering at women or enjoying the thoughts of having sex with them could continue to feel like their behavior was strictly moral as long as they didn't actually have sex with her if he had a wife or she had a husband. In this section, Jesus isn't really pointing to gender equality, he is pointing to the requirement that you must incorporate good behavior towards other people into your thoughts, not just your actions. And that its serious! He next tackles the specific issue of divorce. In these times, there were definitely divorces going on, and it was done by a man giving his wife a piece of paper called a "get" and potentially give her some money for her support. For her to be able to divorce him, she had to sue in the rabbinical court.

Jesus acknowledges that a man can by law legitimately divorce his wife by giving her the document, he then goes on to say that people should not get divorced unless the purity of the marriage has already become "adulterated" by the introduction of another person. After he speaks of these things, he goes directly into talking about oaths, and encourages people to not "swear to God" or "swear by God" about anything. Before we go into the full meaning of what he says about oaths, I think we need to touch on the fact that Jesus is encouraging and instructing us to take our relationships with other people seriously. That we are to not see them as just objects for our sexual desires, and that if we choose to marry or create an oath to join in life with them, we shouldn't adulterate that two person oath by

introducing another person into the equation. In these passages, it seems to me that Jesus is telling us to consider the marriage oath very seriously, and later Jesus will tell us that the only reason that Moses allowed divorce was because people were hard hearted. If you make an oath to one another, keep it. Soften your hearts to one another.

Jesus does then directly address oaths, and in my mind insinuates a situation like this. One person wants to borrow another person's car for the evening. The car owner will be inconvenienced if the person does not return the car on time, and is seeming to be reluctant to say yes, so the person without a car says, "Come on, I swear to God I will bring it back on time." . This is problematic in the exact ways that Jesus alludes to. First, we must recognize in all our interactions that we are not in charge. We do not know what will happen and should not say anything other than, "I will return the car on time." The next section that says that doing invoking God into the deal is an evil thing is an indication that we are not to use our relationship with God to manipulate other people. Say yes or no, don't bring God into it.

This next section is fascinating to me because it has literally changed the world.

Eye for Eye

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

³⁹But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

⁴¹If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Remember earlier in the episode where we talked about Gandhi's march to get away from the British salt tax the British had imposed upon the Indian people? It was totally influenced by this very passage in the Sermon on the Mount. Leo Tolstoy is the famous author of War and Peace and many other books. He is considered to be one of the greatest writers of all time. In addition, Tolstoy was a pacifist who based his beliefs in non-violence on the teachings of Jesus, specifically through the Sermon on the Mount. Tolstoy believed that Jesus literally commands us to be completely non-resistant to evil by force. In 1908 Tolstoy wrote "A Letter to a Hindu" which outlined his belief that non-violence was a means for India to gain its independence from Britain. A copy of this letter made it into Gandhi's hands, and the contents of it as well as Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is Within You" convinced Gandhi that Tolstoy was correct; non-resistance was the way that would work. Tolstoy only lived until 1910 so he was unable to see the impact that his writings had on the millions of Indian citizens who received independence in 1947. Non-resistance worked, and Gandhi would speak of the guidance he received from the Holy Spirit, which he acknowledged as the inner voice of God. His official religion was Hindu, but he said that if the Christian religion was encompassed in the Sermon on the Mount, then he was Christian. He would call his campaigns of non-violent resistance "Satyagraha" . "Satya" is truth that equals love, and "agraha" means force, so Satyagraha means truth force or love force. Ironically, Gandhi was ultimately assassinated less than five months after independence was achieved.

In the early days of the civil rights movement in the United States, Martin Luther King believed that even as a Christian, the philosophy of turning the other cheek in response to large social systems was not practical. It would be his readings about Gandhi that would change his mind. He would come to believe that nonviolent resistance was one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their quest for social justice. His work would change the entire landscape of American from then til now. IN addition, he credited the entire Sermon on the Mount as well as hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit at influential times in his life as being potent aspects of the difference he was able to make in his life. As we know, Dr. King was also assassinated.

Cesar Chavez would join Gandhi and King in pursuit of a better life for farm workers through the path of non-violence. He said, "I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of humanity, is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice." Although these four men, Tolstoy, Gandhi, King and Chavez did not work together, they all stood together in solidarity that the message given in the Sermon on the Mount is not just a good theory for people to follow in personal relationships, it is an effective strategy for world side social change.

This section on an eye for an eye gets quoted many times as a "law of retaliation", a justification for harming other people, but it really was never intended to be that way. The Jewish New Testament Commentary identifies that God was never commanding revenge in the old covenant, he was limiting it. It was not death or burning down their house if a person blinded you in one eye, it was to be no more than equality in damage. There was a connection made through the old covenant that although it was right for a person to expect compensation for a wrong done to them, that compensation was linked to their social status and their ability to make you do something. The punishment for that eye was different if it was a wealthy person's eye, or a slave's eye. Jesus's message of mercy, forgiveness and grace was the key to social change, and the message spread like salt through water from that small area near Jerusalem to every remote place on the planet.

There is a section here that if someone wants something from you, give it to them, and then give them more willingly. If someone wants to force you to walk one mile with them (like the Roman soldiers would do in these times) then you are to go further than they demanded. That all sounds ridiculous and as if God is forcing you to be a doormat. But I don't think that is what is being pointed to here. What I think he is starting to say, he will finish in the next section, which is that in all your interactions, you are to consider the welfare of the other person, even if they seem to be working in a way that seems to be unfair to you.

Love For Enemies

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

⁴⁴But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

There it is. You have to love everyone, and understand that you must cultivate a desire for the best to happen for everyone, even if you don't like them or they don't like you. And the bar we are to aim for is one that we will never reach; perfection.

In the first line of the Beatitudes, the beginning line of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that the poor in spirit will have the kingdom of heaven as their blessing. The last line of this section of the antitheses, he says that we should be perfect, as our heavenly father is perfect. To be poor in spirit means to understand that we don't have it together, that there is a standard set by perfect God that we will not meet and are not meeting. He then gives us the parameters for what the desired attitude and behaviors are; we are to be repentant, patient, trusting seekers who show others mercy when we could harm them, we must only serve God's purposes or our hearts will not be pure. We are to consider ourselves children of God alongside every other human child of God, and to bring peace to the

relationships between individuals and between humans and God. We must know that this can cause us to be seen, and in that being seen we can be persecuted by people who don't feel the same way we do. But that is because fundamentally as disciples we will be like salt and light, we will infiltrate and illuminate the situations we encounter, and it is only right to continue in our quest even though we may draw attention to ourselves by doing good. He then says that there is not only a death of the body that can occur from our actions, but a death of spirit that comes from thinking about others in an angry way. WE should consistently look to how our human relations are before we go to God to do his work, because we can take care of those relationships easily through humility. Our interactions with others should not just be for our own sense gratifications but for their best good, and we should consider our promises to others as important. We must care deeply enough for them to fulfill what we said that we would do, even if it is difficult, even if it requires extreme self-discipline and reflection. We are to love people and ask God for the best for them, even if they don't want good things for us. We are to be different if we call ourselves followers of Jesus, Christians. When we have completed our investigation of the books of the gospels, it will be clear that we don't have any private thoughts. And that is a truth that I have experienced personally in my interactions with the Holy Spirit. He knows every thought we have ever had, and he knows our deepest intentions. He places circumstances together to fill in exactly what we need, the perfect final piece of a complex puzzle. The incidents that can either be so beautiful or so painful because it is absolutely meaningful to us, even if other people can't see it.

What the Holy Spirit showed me this week through this scripture was that we do not yet have the mind of God, and that I had been very misguided in my dealings with many people and situations. I usually didn't judge them too harshly, I did the opposite. I ascribed good intentions to them even if that wasn't exactly the case. I wanted to let them off the hook and give them an excuse. I wanted to be the judge and have no punishments for anyone. If they did something wrong, they probably had a reason. I was like a little kid yelling "Me do it!" around the barbecue grill. Useless, potentially dangerous, and above all annoying to those who were actually doing their jobs. And that although he could use me in some ways in the past, he couldn't use me in all the ways he wanted because of that.

I had animosity, hostility towards a God who judges.

And all it took for this issue to emerge for me was for the word to show up for the first time in the New Testament; judgment.

But I finally snapped out of it. I went to a place where I was able to sincerely say, "I really don't understand this and I need you to tell me what this is all about." The Holy Spirit began to rebuild me from a totally new place and it was so easy to accept. He put together some parts that I had seen before, but now it all worked and was cohesive. It wasn't really new but now it was a tool, a simple understanding that I could implement. It's simple. There is a judge, and it's not us. He doesn't involve us in the dealings of the world in that way. And its okay for us to feel bad about the things that we do that aren't aligned with what God wants for us because when we feel bad we try to change it. And we shouldn't try to stop other people from feeling bad about things either if its appropriate. We should always let them know to take it to God and see what he wants them to do about it. It's not up to us to make it right, but it is up to us to be kind and compassionate.

God is above us, we are below. He sets the rules and they are all good for us individually and as a community. We have the Holy Spirit to ask for any help we need, and He will always, consistently point to the life of Jesus that we can easily know about by reading the scriptures in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books tell the story of what happened to him, and what he did and said in response. There

is a way to directly apply these teachings even though they occurred a long time ago. The Holy Spirit cares about us right where we are in space and time, and he is the only one who really knows us, really knows why we do things or don't do things. He knows us better than we know ourselves, so he can show us things that we need to see. We are to stay vigilant in our human relationships, positioning ourselves shoulder to shoulder with every other human, and although there is judgment in the world, we aren't the judges. Our duty, and it's a serious one, is the cultivation of love and compassion, and we are never to take matters into our hands without the specific guidance of the Holy Spirit. We aren't to care for only people who care for us. We are to care for and about everyone.

I'm Juliet Mee, and this is Working With The Voice. Next week we will continue our work in the Sermon on the Mount, the collection of words that changed the world. Thanks for listening. It's an honor to bring this material to you, and I appreciate your feedback! Check out the website workingwiththevoice.com for show notes, transcripts and lots of other great resources!