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An Eye for an Eye

Matthew 5:38-45

There is a famous quote that's attributed to many different people from Gandhi to either -- Gandhi or Martin Luther King and a whole slew of other people, and it's about the Old Testament form of justice and the quote goes something like this: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth will eventually leave everyone toothless and blind." Now whether it was Gandhi or Martin Luther King or anyone else for that matter who was trying to make the point that simple vengeance in the long run never works, I would say absolutely amen. But I would also add that there is far more to those words than an appeal to simple vengeance.

We're in the book of Matthew. We are studying Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and we're still looking at that section where we're examining Jesus's response to the whole bulk of the Pharisees' teaching. And time and again the Pharisees had succeeded, as we've seen, in reducing God's law down to a series of dos and don'ts, of rules and regulations that serve to isolate rather than promote a relationship with the living God. So we've seen Jesus in these

last few weeks systematically take apart the folly of much of the Pharisees' teaching. What the Pharisees taught was that a relationship with God was not even necessary so long as you kept the hundreds of different rules that they had enacted that circumscribed and proscribed how you could manage God. They spent all of their time codifying in minute details the living aspects of God's law into a lengthy legal approach that gave you righteousness by rule keeping. They took the ten commandments that God had given to Moses and they developed over 600 sub law commandments that pertain to every single aspect of living. And what Jesus hated about the Pharisees' approach was that it took the law that he loved and it turned it into this cold, mechanical means of managing God.

God's law was really designed to do three things. It's been described as a mirror, a curb, and a guide. First it was designed to mirror God's holiness, God's perfection. Jesus understood perfectly that nobody could fully do what the law demanded because the law is really a perfection -- a representation of God's perfection. And secondly it is a curb. I mean, God's law said among many other things that you shall not kill, steal, lie, covet, or commit adultery. In other words, it was a restraint against evil because without the law, people would spend all of their time killing and exploiting each other. And we look at areas right now

where that's self-evident, we look at Syria, we like at ISIS, we look at all these organizations that are absolutely lawless and we see the devastation that that creates. Thirdly, the law was supposed to be a guide. It was supposed to show us how to live lives that are pleasing to God. Well, the Pharisees took God's law not as a mirror, a curb or a guide that defined his perfection but rather as a recipe for righteousness. And Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is really blowing that recipe right out of the water. And oftentimes he responded to the Pharisees' long list of rules by expanding each of those rules and he made them harder, he made them more expansive, he made them much more difficult. And what he was doing was he was attacking the idea of rule keeping itself as an idea of finding righteousness that way. Now he once said to the Pharisees who tried to codify "*Thou shalt not kill*" into a prohibition merely of murder, that an angry or scornful word is just as worthy of judgment as murder. I mean, the Pharisees had implied that in any relationship that you have with others, as long as you don't murder them, you're pretty much basically okay. Well, Jesus looked at that legal type of notion and he just blew it up. He said in *Matthew 5:22*: "*But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.*" When the Pharisees tried to do the exact same thing with adultery, limiting it to the

act itself, Jesus did the exact same thing, he just blew it up. And he said to even look at a woman with lust in your heart is to commit adultery. And in effect what Jesus was saying is if you think that righteousness can be found by the Pharisees' idea of rule keeping, then you better be prepared to keep the rules perfectly because they are a reflection of God's perfection. And even today I meet people all of the time who still believe that the ten commandments are a list of rules that you are supposed to keep as best you can and that St. Peter's going to meet you up at the pearly gates and he's going to have a clipboard and he's going to check through it and see how well you did and if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, then off to heaven you're going to go. Well not only is that thinking wrong, it is deadly wrong. See the law, the ten commandments was given by God as a means of describing the perfection that God by his very nature must demand of us. God's very nature is perfection. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that perfection mixing with imperfection makes perfection no longer perfect. I mean, if you think of it in terms of sterility and germs, if I take a perfectly sterile petri dish and I add to that dish one tiny, infinitesimally small bacterium, well I've rendered it no longer sterile. And it doesn't matter if I added one tiny bacterium or a diseased ravaged body, when it comes to sterility, it's all or nothing. Well God's perfection is no different. For God's perfect justice to allow us in our

imperfection to have any fellowship with him would cause his perfection to cease. The reason God became a man was to live his perfect life out and die on a cross so that he could substitute his perfect life for our lives of imperfection and thereby maintain his perfection while opening the doors of a relationship to us. The very reason that Jesus became a person and lived out his life perfectly is because he knew we couldn't do it. God had to demand perfection of us and yet his love for us was so great that having demanded that perfection he became one of us to supply it by dying on the cross in our place. But while Jesus was living out his life -- and he lived it out perfectly -- while he was living out that life, he constantly opposed the Pharisees who had twisted and distorted God's laws into a caricature of its original intent. And what mattered to Jesus was not the meticulous keeping of rules made by some autocratic group of Pharisees but instead having a living relationship with a living God based on faith and trust in God's righteousness that's been given to us as a substitute for our sin. See what Jesus and his Father cherished in us was faith and trust. What the Pharisees cherished was blind rigid compliance. And nowhere was that more obvious than in our text this morning. Jesus once again blows the Pharisees' notions to pieces when it comes to their understanding of the law.

Our text this morning is Matthew 5:38-45, it says this, this is

Jesus's words: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

Well, first of all, I want to speak in defense of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The fancy name for that a retributive justice. It is the belief that God gives each of us that which is due. We call it retribution. Retribution sounds like something bad but it's not. It's the belief that a God who passionately loves truth, honor and justice must also truly hate lies, dishonor and injustice. A God who is truly just must delight in truly rewarding what is good and punishing that which is truly evil. And God says just that in Romans 2:9, he says this, he says: *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.*

For God shows no partiality. You see, God's retributive justice demanded that the wages of sin is death because he must punish evil. And since he also delights in what is truly good, he sought and found a way to become one of us, to transfer his goodness to us at the cross, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

You see, when you think about a God of perfect justice, you realize God has to practice retributive justice or he has no justice at all. If God's response to a Hitler or a Stalin would be to simply to wink and say, "Well, you know, Adolph and Joseph, they certainly had some rough spots, but after all, I'm a God of love." Well, we would have serious issues with that God. "Where is the justice?" we would say? But now if you're thinking, you might argue, well, wait a minute, where is the justice for Christians? I mean, it seems to me that Christians are the only ones who happen to escape God's retributive justice. And that's true. In fact, I once had a person say to me that, "You Christians believe in what I think is a karmic ripoff." He said it was a karmic ripoff because he understood that Christians don't receive their karmic due. They don't receive that justice. My response is but that doesn't mean that justice isn't served. What it does mean is that it was served not on the heads of believers themselves but on the head of Jesus

Christ who came to earth to rescue them from that justice. Jesus came to glorify his Father by taking the punishment of his sheep on himself on the cross. And so the Lord Jesus Christ received our justice so that we could receive his mercy. *2 Corinthians 5:21: For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Now the highest form of retributive justice there is is God himself paying the price of retribution for our sin. Somehow or other we've managed to recast retributive justice as a form of evil. The way an eye for an eye is stated today is not with an emphasis on the justice aspect of it but with an emphasis on blind vengeance. You know, this type of law this is referred to by its Latin term, "lex talionis," it's where we get the idea "retaliate" from and it dates back to the time of Hammurabi all the way through the Old Testament and it was and is a blessing from God. You see, it was a mercy established by God and it was established to limit the never-ending escalation of blind revenge. An eye for an eye was an attempt to establish an equivalent response when someone was wronged. And we have records as to why that was so necessary in scripture. Scripture shows us exactly what happens without that limitation. *Genesis 4:23* describes this, it says: *Lamech said to his wives -- this is way back at the very beginning in Genesis, says: Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;*

you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold." We don't know much about this man Lamech other than he was wicked, that he had plural wives and he was exactly why an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was a mercy. I mean, if Cain's revenge is sevenfold and Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold, we quickly see where this is going. Far better to have a law that limits retaliation to something that matches the original offense. God had this to say about the ultimate offense, he said this in *Genesis 9:5*, he says: *And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: From every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."*

See, this is what an eye for an eye is saying. An eye for an eye is saying that when it comes to murder, the punishment must match the crime and there's a reason for that. It's also the reason why I personally believe in capital punishment. Now first I need to say I think that absolutely every single effort should be made to be absolutely ironclad certain that the guilty party has been identified and if there's any uncertainty whatsoever, I think you have to err on the side of caution instead of capital punishment because there have been a great deal of injustices done in that

area in the past. But I do believe that what God says in Genesis still applies. He said: *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."* I have had discussions with people who find it incredible that I would hold a very high level of concern for the pro-life position and still believe in capital punishment. To me it's entirely consistent with God's idea of retributive justice. I mean, I tell my Catholic friends that I don't fully subscribe to the -- what's called the seamless garment. I don't know if you ever heard that but there's a Catholic doctrine that says the seamless garment defines all of life and that all of life is sacred and seamless and that from the womb all the way up to capital punishment, you cannot touch what is sacred. I respectfully disagree. I have non Catholic friends as well who say if you're pro-life, you have to be anti-capital punishment because all life is sacred. And I tell them the reason why I believe in capital punishment is for the exact same reason. I believe in it because all life is sacred. If you believe in an eye for an eye, then you have to understand that God is saying retributive justice demands an equivalence in crime and punishment. It's only capital punishment that maintains that equivalence. See, the reason why I believe in capital punishment is because God says that life itself is so incredibly sacred, it is so sacred in fact that if you take someone's, there is no equivalent substitute. There is nothing that you can give in

return for a life but the very life that you have yourself. Furthermore, when you refuse to accept the equivalence of the crime and the punishment, you reduce the crime to the value of the punishment. For example, in New York State a human life itself is worth on average 8 to 20 years of incarceration. I back that up by quoting George Conway, a criminal defense attorney in Saratoga Springs who says, "A person convicted of murder in the first degree -- which is a Class A-1 violent felony -- as a first offense will be sentenced to a determinate sentence between 8 to 20 years." In other words, if you premeditatedly take someone's life in New York, the equivalence of that life is no longer losing your own, it is now 8 to 20 years of incarceration. Hence that is now the value of human life in New York. And nationally it is a simple fact that any form of capital punishment requires decades long series of appeals and counter appeals before the punishment is ever even exacted, and the result is that very few people feel they will ever pay the ultimate price for taking a life. But God says in *Ecclesiastes 8:11: Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.*

Now, many people have been speaking about Chicago of late because it's the poster child for what the whole nation is seeing. I mean, the City of Chicago is often times referred to as Chiraq, because

its murder rate now mirrored that of Iraq. At one time Chicago Mayor Richard Daley said this, he said: "Welcome to America. Americans kill each other every day. We kill each other. Not in Afghanistan. Not in Iraq. In good ol' America," Daley said. That's not just Iraq. World Net Daily said: "The death toll by murder in Chicago over the past decade is greater than the number of American forces who have died in Afghanistan since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, according to a police analysis."

Okay. So what is all this talk about capital punishment? I don't want this message to be viewed as a defense of that. And I have great respect for those who are convinced that capital punishment violates the seamless garment even though I don't agree. But I want to stop -- I want to start at the very top of our understanding of an eye for an eye and kind of work our way all the way down through what Jesus was teaching by his response to the Pharisees to what our obligation to respond is when, God forbid, we become a victim. The question is, is it an eye for an eye or is it something greater? See, what God was enacting with an eye for an eye is something that has largely been lost in our culture which sees crime and punishment in far more therapeutic terms than it does in terms of justice. And retributive justice has now been reduced to a caricature of vengeance which simply says, "You take my eye, I'm going to take yours. You take my tooth, I'm going to

knock out yours." Furthermore we say, well, don't we believe that vengeance is something that God expressly says we should avoid? And he does, *Romans 12:19* says: *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*

So here's the question: How do we reconcile "an eye for an eye" with "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay*"? Well, I think we can, and this is how. There's a place where an effective godly government is supposed to work. It's where ours has failed. *Romans 13* describes it, it says this: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.*

Very important passage here. God is saying a number of things

about government in this passage. The first thing he says about governments -- and this includes all governments, good governments, bad governments and indifferent ones, he says: "Those that exist have been instituted by God." Secondly, God says that to resist government authority to resist what God has appointed. And now we know from the scriptures itself that there are limits to that government authority and that we are to obey only up to the point where they conflict with scripture. We have examples of that in the book of Acts. There we see the government exceeding its authority by arresting Peter and the apostles and forbidding them from preaching. This is in Acts 5:26, it says: *Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."*

So that's where the limits of the two different laws collide, the law of God and the law of man. And Peter demonstrated that there are limits to what government authority can do, and that it's God's law that takes precedence over man's. But understand, man's law

has been instituted by God. And God says government authority is God's servant for our good. And here's the important part for us to grasp. This is what God says about government, he says: *But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.* Do you hear what God is saying in this passage? What he's doing is he's underscoring the fact that when you are the victim, there really are three different parties that typically exact vengeance. Two of them are legitimate, one of them is not. The three parties are God, government, and me. And God made it crystal clear in Romans 12 that vengeance does not belong to us and that it belongs ultimately to him. *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* But then in the very next chapter, chapter 13, God says how he has arranged that. He says he has appointed government as the primary agent for his vengeance: *For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.*

So let me put the idea of "an eye for an eye" and "vengeance is mine" into its proper biblical context. And what God is saying here is that there are always two different responsibilities that are at work when you are the victim of someone else's wrongdoing. What he's saying is the state has a corporate responsibility and

you and I have an individual responsibility, and those responsibilities differ greatly. The state's responsibility is to punish. The individual's responsibility is to forgive. And when the two are both working properly, then justice and mercy are served. To put this in the starkest of terms, if somebody, God forbid, murdered my wife, God is saying that the state has a corporate responsibility to exact vengeance and require the life of her murderer, but God also says to me that I have the responsibility as an individual saved by grace to by his grace forgive that murderer. And when the state does its job, it paves the way for me to do my job. I mean, just consider the crucial role that government is supposed to have here. It would be far easier for me to forgive someone who is headed to the gas chamber as a result of this crime than it would be for me to forgive somebody chuckling over the fact that he took my wife's life and has only eight years to pay for doing so. You see, ultimately what God is saying here is that he is the final arbiter of retributive justice, and vengeance is to be found ultimately only in him. He has appointed government as his agent to be the one exacting the vengeance. That's supposed to free you and I up for the task of forgiveness. But because government is a fallen, sinful and highly flawed institution, it very seldom lives up to its obligations.

So how does this teaching of Jesus affect us on a day in, day out

basis when we've been wronged criminally, civilly, socially or spiritually? Well, the principle remains the same. Let me repeat it. This is Jesus: *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I said to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."*

What Jesus is doing is he's describing four different areas of life where we can be confronted with an obvious injustice, and in each case Jesus' response is radical but it's identical. The first is the personal sphere, there's the sphere of unwarranted violence. Jesus says: *"If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."* Then there's the civil sphere where we might face an unjust lawsuit. Jesus says: *"If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well."* Then there's the political military sphere which has the power to coerce. Jesus says: *"If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two*

miles." And then there's the social, and in the social Jesus comes at the problem from the other side. He says if someone has been a victim and he seeks to beg or borrow from you, do not refuse him or her. Again, *"Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."* So what Jesus is he doing is he's covering all of our interactions that involve injustice. He's talking about injustice received, injustice perceived, and injustice redeemed. And in each case Jesus calls us to radically re-examine the way we react and respond when we are a victim. He sums up his teaching by saying: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."*

You see, Jesus's goal here, the goal of our sanctification is that we become little Christs, sons of our Father who is in heaven.

C.S. Lewis wrote this in *Mere Christianity*, he said: "We shall love the Father as Christ does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has -- by what I call 'good infection.' Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else."

This is the big question. And the question is: How do we become a

"little Christ"? We imitate the real Christ. I know in my life and in the lives of many people that I have had the opportunity to advise, this is the most practical advice I can give you, and it comes right from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ. When someone has harmed you, when someone has done something that is so deeply hurtful that you find yourself at a loss for words, you basically have two very different pathways that you might find yourself on. Number one, they may just seek your forgiveness and if they do, consider yourself blessed and grant it. What about those times when we are victimized and those who have victimized us either don't know or don't care about the consequences? What do we do then? Once again Jesus said it best: *"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."*

Now I've often shared my own personal encounter with a situation I had that was very similar to this. Bear with me if it's repetitive. But many years ago I had been wronged by someone personally, socially and spiritually, and for many, many months it was -- it literally made a wreck out of me. I couldn't believe that somebody that I considered to be a close dear friend, that he would stab me in the back the way I perceived that this person had, and I couldn't help but play the tape over and over and over again in my mind until I realized that the one who was being made

miserable was not "my enemy" but me. I figured, you know, he was not walking down the street suddenly gripped by pangs of conscience as I was often times suddenly gripped by pangs of bitterness. And he certainly wasn't playing the tape over and over in his mind as I was playing it in mine. I was the one who was playing the tapes and I was the one who was allowing them to continually get the better of me. And it was at one of those moments that the words of Jesus at first very reluctantly began to make sense. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. And so I began to pray for this person -- and I say this to people all the time -- not for his sake but for your own sake. See, I knew that I could not afford to be locked into this pattern where 20 or 30 times a day I would find myself brooding over what this person had done to me. I just didn't have the energy to spare for that, and so like I said, I reluctantly at first began to pray. And I had just recently read C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*. Those of you who don't know, it's a fictional account of correspondence between a senior devil named "Screwtape" and his junior devil nephew named "Wormwood." Fred's study group in fact is doing that even now. The correspondence is over this junior devil's lousy poor performance at getting this person that he's assigned to to fail. And to fail is to become a Christian. The senior devil always has this threatening tone because his junior devil is always messing things up, and against all of the odds, this person is moving

closer and closer to the gospel. So the junior devil is always in trouble. I just pictured my prayers having the benefit of getting whatever junior devil was assigned to me in as much trouble as I could get him in, because I pictured him as some junior league minor league junior varsity devil assigned to jam this person's problems with me into my life at every opportunity. And I decided that it would be in my best interest and his worst interest for me to take the time whenever my mind went there to stop right then and there and to pray for this person. And I've shared with you many times what a terrible prayer my first prayer was: "Lord, may a brick fall on his head." And I know that's my own personal imprecatory psalm, but I also know that after I prayed, I said, "Lord, I know that's a terrible prayer but it's a start. It's the best thing that I can do to start off with." And like I said, I used to pray for this person 25, 30, sometimes 40 times a day because I didn't know what else to do. I did this for months. And during the course of the time that I spent praying, I began to sense the Holy Spirit taking over my prayers and changing them. I started to see that I was not completely innocent in the situation after all, that I had some confessing to do as well, and I began to see this person, sin and all, as a person to be pitied in the best possible sense. And so I prayed and prayed and prayed and God answered but it wasn't until seven or eight months later and it was a situation where I heard the person's name come up and I realized

for the very first time I didn't have this burst of adrenaline or bitterness. I just experienced freedom. In fact I heard his name and there was nothing but peace and calm. And I realized that by simple obedience to what Jesus said: *"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"* I was able to get that monkey off my back. I was able to gain complete control over it. That's the power of the gospel. It's a power available to every one of us but it's seldom used. And the key to the power is simple, we imitate Christ. We become little Christs. And the Christ that we imitate knows all about injustice on the receiving end. He knows how terribly governments can fail at being God's servant for justice. He received from the Roman government the greatest injustice the universe has ever known. He was on the receiving end of injustice personally, civilly, politically, militarily and socially. There's not one sphere of human endeavor that did not overwhelmingly pour out injustice on Jesus, and he is our model. He's who we imitate.

Well, so how did Jesus find the grace to endure when he was the victim? *1 Peter 2* says: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued*

entrusting himself to him who judges justly. Jesus was able to endure by trusting ultimately in the one who judges justly. So the question for all of us is can we do that? We can if we place our trust in the very same God. You see, we don't do vengeance very well and God does vengeance perfectly. His justice is retributive justice because an eye for an eye is what justice calls for. But it's also restorative justice because as *Romans 8:28* says: *We know that for those who love God all things work together for good.* And finally, we know that this is righteous justice because of who God is. *Genesis 18:25:* *"Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?"* God appointed government to be his agent of justice, and almost all of the times government fails. But God's justice never fails. Jesus trusted enough in that justice to endure crucifixion on our behalf. I just can't help but think that in places like Syria right now our brothers and sisters are imitating Christ by enduring the very same thing, literally there are people being crucified for Christ. Clearly that government has failed. Yet these folks can go to their deaths singing by trusting in Him who judges justly. Now it's doubtful that we'll ever even get near that, but we have seen that injustice towards Christ and his kingdom in our culture is on the march. And so we, too, need to learn this same lesson of trust because when injustice comes, our marching orders are identical. Again: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy' but I say*

to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you and praise you for your word, I thank you for a way of thinking that is so counterintuitive, we just seldom if ever go there. Lord, when we are hurt, we want to hurt back. Father, help us to understand that government has been established as your agent to reek vengeance, freeing us up to offer forgiveness and yet that so often doesn't happen. Father God, I just pray that you would give us the grace to trust in you implicitly and explicitly, that you would give us the ability to place our trust in the one who judges justly. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.