

Russell Kelfer

**Life on
Two Mile
Island**

(Part 1)

552-B

Series: The Beatitudes

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Life On Two Mile Island

(Part 1)

We continue our study of “Blessed Are the Peacemakers”. We are looking at the Christian’s peacemaking role in four stages:

Stage 1- Leading men to peace with God.

Stage 2- Living in the peace of God.

Stage 3- Living in peace with men.

Stage 4- In the last lesson, we looked at the process of living at peace with those whom God has placed over us as authorities. In that lesson, we looked at the four-fold process of submission.

We concluded the last lesson by beginning to take a look at the Christian and his relationship with those about him, his peers. We looked at Luke 9:22-24 and concluded that as men and women dead to this world, we, in essence, possess all the rights of a dead man. Just how that manifests itself in daily life is the subject of this lesson. Our primary text is that somewhat controversial passage found in Matthew 5:38-42. It is God’s call to discipleship. The title of this lesson is “Life on Two Mile Island”. Our outline is this:

I- The Principles of the Passage – Matthew 5:38

A- What is it saying?

B- What is it not saying?

C- To whom is it speaking?

II- The Passage Particulars

A- Yielding our right of way where our reputation and retaliation is concerned . “Strike two and You Win.”

B- Yielding our right of ownership of our possessions. “Warm hearts and Free Coats.”

C- Yielding the right to our time and our strengths. “Living the Two Mile Way.”

D- Yielding the right to accumulation of money. “Believers and Blank Checks.”

III- Coals of Fire That Warm Men’s Hearts

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Let's begin by reading the passage, which I believe is the heart of God's plan to make peace among men. Let's turn to Matthew 5:38-42, and I will be reading from the King James Version.

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (Matthew 5:38-42 NKJV)

I call this "Life on Two Mile Island". We have heard a lot this year about a place called Three Mile Island. It is a place where there exists unbelievable power through a nuclear power plant. It is power which, when properly harnessed, will flood a countryside with life. When it is improperly contained, it can flood the same countryside with fear and panic. The key is containing and harnessing that unbelievable power. Thus, we approach with caution, "Life on Two Mile Island". We will see what it means to go that second mile. We will see what it means to turn the other cheek. We will see what it means to give up your coat and your cloak as well. We will see what it means to give with no strings attached.

As we approach Two Mile Island, we see a huge sign on the side road which simply says, YIELD. We are to find that as we study these specific responses from our Savior's own lips, that yielding is the key to Life on Two Mile Island.

In this illustration is the heart of it all. Picture in your mind an intersection as you approach Two Mile Island. Running left to right is a street called Christian Way. Christian Way is a one-way street. We are told it is relatively narrow and few travel thereon. It is one-way in two senses. First, it is the only road to its destination. There is no other way to get there. Secondly, it is one-way because once you are on it, you never turn back.

The intersection you see is called Conflict Corner. This corner is where Christian Way and World Boulevard intersect. Christian Way crosses World Boulevard again and again and again. Facing the Christian as he approaches the intersection is a huge sign that God has placed there saying, "Christians Yield Right of Way".

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This is where the Christian gives the world the right of way. This is the subject of our lesson.

As we look carefully at this sign, we see that it says Yield which stands for “Yes, I Enter Life Dead”. If you see that yield sign and you pass beyond as God gives you wisdom to do so, you look back through your rear view mirror, and you see the back side of the sign which is framed by a cross. The cross is what is behind it all. It is the uniqueness of the cross that gives us the power to live on Two Mile Island. Yielding the essence of the Christ-life where interpersonal relationships are concerned. But before we look at the passage itself, we need to look at the principles behind the passage. We will see why this mountain of power has through misuse become a source of confusion and has thus been ignored by many Christians as impractical, unworkable and unapplicable to modern man on a day-to-day basis. There are basically seven principles involved.

THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 1- The principle “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” involves a gross misconception concerning what Jesus said was the standard of the law. How many of you think this is a just way to transact business? Contrary to common belief this law of just retaliation was not brutal or a gross license for man to retaliate, far from it. This law was first instituted in Babylon more than 2,200 years before Christ. It appears in the ancient code of law, the Code of Hammurabi. Curiously enough, it distinguishes between men of different classes. It states that if a man has caused the loss of a gentleman’s eye, someone of import, his eye shall be taken in return. But, if he has caused someone of lesser nobility to lose an eye, he must pay 1 mina of silver.

1- While unjust in its class distinction, its intent was clear. Punishment was commensurate with the indignity involved. This law became part and parcel of the Old Testament Law. We find it laid down no less than three times. But, there was no class distinction to be sure. We find it in Exodus 21, Deuteronomy 19 and Leviticus 24 where we read,

If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—

fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.

(Leviticus 24:19,20 NKJV)

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Before you attack that as cruel, you must understand these basic facts that William Barclay outlines in his commentary. First of all, this law was the beginning of mercy. Mankind has always been, because of its sin nature, bent for revenge. A simple act of anger that bruised a man's arm could be the indignity that triggered a murder or war. An injustice done by one man was and still is reason enough for some to declare war upon a whole family, tribe or nation. The law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was God's great expression of mercy in restraint. He said that the punishment must not exceed the crime.

2- The law was not for individuals to carry out but only for judges to use in a court of law. It was never designed for man to use privately to retaliate for an injustice. Even in the Old Testament, it was confined to a legal solution for legal problems. If a man gouged out a neighbor's eye, those executing the law now had a guideline and a set of limits beyond which they could not go. But the Scribes and the Pharisees had now adulterated the principle when Jesus came as they had so many other principles. They had made it a legalistic duty to be insisted upon. If necessary, it was to be carried out personally. This meant that if I were to cut someone's arm off, he had not only the right, but the responsibility to do likewise unto me. But the original intent, as always, was not so.

3- This was and still is never carried out literally. Barclay says again that where an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth were concerned, there were five basis for settling injuries. There was injury, pain, healing, loss of time and an indignity suffered. Never in any of these cases was it proper for a person to take action relative to the physical harm they had received. It worked like this. If it was determined in a court of law that a person had received an injury, they took his value before and after the incident. Whatever the difference in his value was before and after the incident, the one who injured him was required to pay. Secondly, if there were pain involved, the judge would determine the extent of the pain and the amount of payment commensurate with the agony and pain the person had suffered. The same thing was true of healing. They had to pay the medical expenses of the one who was injured.

The law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was not literal. It was not designed for a person who had gouged out another's eye to have his eye gouged out in return. Almost in no

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case was an eye taken for an eye or a tooth taken for a tooth. So the principle was just payment for injury suffered. So God utilized this formula not as a license for brutality, but as a long step toward mercy. Its purpose was not license but restraint.

Principle 2- The new yield principles, which supersede an eye for an eye, are personal words to the believer to govern interpersonal relationships. They were never intended to be rules to govern the conduct of nations. God's code of conduct to authority always involves the responsibility of protecting those under the authority through defense or through retaliation. The nation protects its freedom by defending itself. An eye for an eye is still the code of international law. Unbelieving nations will not be moved by seeing a nation turn the other cheek. The current events in the Mideast cannot be resolved by continual vacillation between threats and words of love. I believe, Scripturally, that after reasonable negotiation, imprisonment of hostages calls for some form of retaliation. Either way, not all out declaration of war, just retaliation, eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Turning the other cheek and going the second mile are rules for Christians to follow in interpersonal relationships. They are not a code of national policy. If you want to see God's kind of plan for national defense, look at Israel. We can look at the raid on Entebbe. The situation is that they did not exceed the gravity of the crime involved, but there was just retaliation and as a result, there have not been many infringement on Israel's rights since. When Jesus comes again, He will subdue the nations. He will subdue His enemies in a battle such as mankind has never seen before.

These are God's absolute principles, however, for believers in interpersonal relationships. But don't say it won't work because it hasn't worked on a national level. It was never supposed to work on a national level. Granted, if we had a Congress, a President, Vice-President and Cabinet that were all born-again believers who were walking in the Spirit who wanted to gather together to pray and commit this nation totally to the Lord, and who gave the glory to the Lord and stood and utilized these principles, then you might have a basis for utilizing these four principles as a national entity. But that does not exist, so nationally, the principle we need to operate under is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Principle 3- These principles are exclusively for Christians.

1- Even on an interpersonal level, the eye for eye concept under law is the best the unbeliever can adopt. This is true because the unbeliever has no power to go beyond natural man's philosophy of justice. The power comes from the Holy Spirit which the unbeliever does not have.

2- He is not given that power because it is reserved to demonstrate the difference between God's people and God's power and that of the world. Hence, the world, nationally or personally, cannot live on Two Mile Island. If you have never received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, these principles may seem interesting to you but not livable. This is true. Only for those within whose lives the Spirit of God resides are these principles intended to function.

Principle 4- These principles do not apply to a Christian's national duty when his country is at war. If you want to know God's position on pacifism, don't wrongfully extract it from this passage, but read Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. When his nation calls him, God's man ought to be the first to answer. He should be the best soldier in the outfit, the one most clearly under authority, fighting and if need be killing to protect the freedom and lives of those he loves under the authority placed over him. He needs to do this even if, in his opinion, the war itself is unnecessary and unjust.

Principle 5- These principles, or rather God's guidelines, are for dead Christians so that through their death the world might see life. Every time the believer comes in contact with conflict, he must make a choice. He must choose to defend his rights and create the conflict or yield his rights and maintain peace. Each time it happens, the believer can say this is a test. God is in it, and therefore I yield the right of way. The test becomes a testimony. It is a testimony of the grace of God.

Principle 6- These principles do not imply compromise or apathy where God's reputation is at stake. When the Father's reputation was at stake, Jesus was as bold as a lion and just as strong. But, when His own reputation was questioned, He laid it aside and became nothing so that through His yielding and dying, we saw life. When we yield and die, others see life.

Principle 7- With these principles understood, the precepts

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of yielding personal rights for peace are the will of God for every Christian. Everyone who names the name of Jesus and in whose heart the Spirit of God dwells, now is being spoken to having understood the framework around it on four counts. In interpersonal relationships, God set aside in one breath the rights of the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The law, in itself, was a step towards mercy. He superseded it as He said,

“But I tell you not to resist an evil person.”

(Matthew 5:39 NKJV)

THE PASSAGE PARTICULARS

Now let's look at the commands themselves. The four statements that the Lord makes cover God's yield signs for every area where we seek the right of way at Conflict Corner.

“Strike two and you win”.

1- Turning the other cheek. Jesus said this,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

(Matthew 5:38,39 NKJV)

The essence of this principle is that when the Christian's reputation is challenged, or he is assaulted undeservedly or even humiliated publicly and the flesh cries out, “Retaliate! You have your rights!”, the Spirit so softly says, “Yield.”

This statement involves far more than physical abuse alone. To the Hebrew mind, to be slapped by the back of the hand was the ultimate of humiliation. It was more physically hurtful for a right-handed man to slap you on the left cheek. But in order to slap you on the right, he must need slap you with the back of his hand. This was more of an expression of anger to the Jewish mind. It was the ultimate insult. Jesus said that even if you have been both humiliated and injured, do not retaliate. Your reputation is not at stake. You are a dead man, and dead men cannot defend their reputation even as Christ chose not to defend His. Love the offender as Jesus did when He said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” God becomes responsible for your defense.

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In his commentary on this passage, Martin Lloyd Jones gives these two illustrations of two of God's men who turned the other cheek. The first man he wrote about was Billy Bray, a famous Cornish evangelist, who before his conversion was a very successful boxer. After his conversion, he was working in a mine. A man who once feared Bray but had heard of his conversion, thought this was an opportunity to test him. He struck him down with absolutely no provocation. Bray was the stronger of the two and could have easily beaten him to a pulp. Instead, he stood up, looked the man in the eye and said, "May the Lord forgive you even as I forgive you." He walked away. They say that the young man endured for several days in agony before he was converted a few days later to faith in Jesus Christ.

The second story he gives is about Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary to China. He was standing on a riverbank one day, dressed much like a native and thus was not recognized as a visitor. Taylor had called for a boat to take him across the river. A wealthy native saw the boat arrive and desiring to get into it, pushed Hudson Taylor in the mud and began to climb aboard the boat. The boat owner stopped him and said, "This man called for the boat, and he is a guest in our country." As the embarrassed native stepped aside to allow Hudson Taylor to have the boat that was rightfully his, Taylor climbed up out of the mud, reached his hand out very graciously to the man who had pushed him down and said, "Won't you come along and share the boat with me?" While on that trip, Taylor shared his faith in Jesus Christ.

This is what turning the other cheek means. In addressing this passage, James Boyce tells a more contemporary story about Tom Skinner. Skinner is a converted black gang leader whose life has touched so many. He was the leader of the gang, the Harlem Lords, and was so remarkably converted that he left the gang the day after his conversion to begin a life of sharing the gospel. Soon, Christ gave him victory over hate and bigotry as well. Several weeks after his conversion, he was playing in a football game. In carrying out his assignment, he blocked the defensive end, setting the halfback free to make a touchdown. The boy he blocked, a white man, stood up in a rage, stepped in front of Skinner, and slammed his fist into his stomach. The white man then hacked him across the back yelling racial indignities as he hit the newly converted man. The old Tom Skinner would have pulverized him. The new Tom Skinner got up from the ground,

looked the lad straight in the eye and said, "Because of Jesus Christ, I love you anyway." When the game ended, the white man came over to Skinner and said, "Tom, you did more to knock the prejudice out of me than if you had socked me in the jaw." This is an example of "Strike Two and You Win". An accurate paraphrase of these two verses might go something like this:

The law designates this principle. If a man injures you or humiliates you, you have under the law just cause for retaliation so long as your retaliation is commensurate with the indignity you suffered. But I say unto you, Do not retaliate when evil men attack either you or your reputation. If they assault you at one point, quietly remain vulnerable to further abuse, neither lashing back nor hiding yourself from further blows. That is not weakness; it is meekness. Meekness for God's glory is the ultimate in strength.

Practically speaking, what does turning the other cheek mean? It means that in your marriage you must graciously accept undeserved bitterness and respond with love. If your love is not returned, you love them more. It means that you make a list of those who have or would do you harm and pray for their welfare knowing that God is responsible for yours.

On the job, if you encounter personal abuse or vicious character assassination, you remain in place and love those whose venom is directed at you. In the marketplace, if you do not receive just service for your money, quiet entreaty profits nothing. You treat them with greater love and make yourself vulnerable to even further abuse. If you are working or in a business and certain customers take advantage of you or pressure you or presume on your generosity or demand what is not theirs, you give them what they ask and you offer them more. This passage means that you are totally vulnerable and thus you become totally usable. This is God's pathway to peace.

James Boyce asked this question, "What is your attitude toward what Christ is saying here? Are you still dealing with the question of your rights and your wrongs? Or are learning to live the kind of life lived for us by Jesus?"

Listen to what Watchman Nee had to say,

"Since the day that Adam took the fruit of the tree of knowledge, man has been engaged in deciding what is good and what is evil. The natural man has worked out his own standards of right

and wrong, justice and injustice. He has strived to live by them. Of course, as Christians we are different. Yes, but in what way are we different? Since we were converted, a new sense of righteousness has been developed in us with the result that we, too, quite rightly, are occupied with the question of good and evil. But, have we realized that for us the starting point is a different one?

Christ is for us the tree of life. We do not begin from the matter of ethical right and wrong. We do not start from that other tree. We begin from Him.

The whole question for us is one of life. Nothing has done greater damage to our testimony than our trying to be right and demanding right of others. We become pre-occupied with what is and what is not right. We ask ourselves, 'Have we been justly or unjustly treated?' We think thus we need to vindicate our actions, but that is not our standard.

The whole question for us is one of cross-bearing. You ask me, 'Is it right for someone to strike my cheek?' I reply, 'Of course, not.' But the question is, 'Do you only want to be right?' As Christians, our standard of living can never be right or wrong, but our standard needs to be the cross. The principle of the cross is our principle of conduct. Right or wrong is the principle of the Gentiles and tax gatherers. My life is to be governed by the principle of the cross."

2- "Warm Hearts and Free Coats." Yielding our right of ownership of our possessions. Jesus' second admonition is as foreign to the world's thinking as the first. Let's look at verse 40,

And if any man will sue you at the law, and would take away your coat, let him have your cloak also.

(Matthew 5:40 NKJV)

This principle deals with the Christian's call to yield when his possessions are at stake. The coat or the tunic that a Jew wore was a long, sack-like inner garment made of cotton or linen. Even the poorest of men had two or more of them. But, a man's cloak was his blanket-like outer garment that he used as a robe by day and as a blanket at night. Of such, each Jew would have but one. A man's coat could be taken as a pledge but not his cloak. The law protected his cloak. As expressed in Exodus 22,

If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.

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For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin.
What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to
Me, I will hear, for I am gracious. (Exodus 22:26,27 NKJV)

In other words, you can't take and keep his cloak because he needs that as a covering for sleep. So then, legally, a man's cloak could not be taken from him. He had his rights. Jesus said, "Even if a man takes you to court and unjustly takes what he legally can, should you retaliate? No, offer him, in addition, that which he legally cannot take." In other words, all of your possessions belong to God. As a testimony when you are threatened or abused, you have no rights to claim. You joyfully offer more instead. You give away what others would never dare to take and by yielding, Jesus comes on the scene.

How do you deal with those who would abuse your possessions? What is your testimony worth? A borrowed book? A dented fender? A gold watch? A ten-cent discount? If a man would take, presumptuously, that which you could live without, would you joyfully give him what you have great need of as well? Or, are your possessions not worth the price of peace?

Each of us worship something different. I worship fountain pens. I have 48 fountain pens. I have green, blue, red, purple and black. I have ones with felt tips and others with ball tips. I have some heavy tips and some little tips. I have some that write and most that don't. I have re-fills that don't fit. I keep them in a big box in a big pile. I have so many that they overflow that box. I have to plow through them but usually can't find the one I want, because there are so many. I clutch at them.

When I am at work, someone can come up to borrow my fountain pen and my first response is, "Not that one! It is my favorite." Some of you have come up after class and asked me if I had a pen so that you could write something down. I fumble around to look for one of the three I have that I wouldn't be crushed to death if you walked off with. That is what my testimony is worth, the price of a fountain pen.

Some of us need to go home and put a tag on our lawnmower or our car or our furniture or our clothes or our house. The tag needs to say something like this:

"This article is the property of Jesus Christ for the sole use of bringing honor to Him."

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On the flip side of that tag you might write this:

“On loan, in temporary custody of,” and then fill in your name.

When the doorbell rings this afternoon, and someone wants to borrow that shiny new lawnmower that doesn't even have a knick in it, offer them the edger, too. If someone asks to borrow your new tape recorder that you have never used, give them some extra cassette tapes. Look at the tag. God sent someone to borrow His lawnmower or His tape recorder. Are you going to tell God He can't use His own things? What must you do when the doorbell rings on Two Mile Island? Yield.

We will take up here in the next lesson and take a concluding look at what it means to go the second mile. We will ask the question, “How do you give to whoever asks of you and never turn aside those who would borrow?” We will look as well at what it means to heap coals of fire on a neighbor's head. I think you may be surprised as to what this means.

Life on Two Mile Island. The key to it all is that it is real and that it really works. At every point and at every turn, life on this earth produces potential conflict. The Christian way and the world's ways collide. The paradox is that the Christian never surrenders his convictions, but he never claims his rights. By yielding, he proves himself the stronger and proves God to be the essence of a life whose middle name is Peace. It works in the home. Try it. Give up the right to be right. Give up the right to those possessions which one day will not even matter in the light of eternity. It works.

It works on the job. Allow yourself to be abused, to be ridiculed, to be misunderstood and to be the brunt of something that you did not do. Rather than responding by retaliation, do simply as the Scripture says, “Do not resist evil,” but it says, “in turn, give back good. Love those who persecute you.” In other words, the object on the job is that not only do you take that abuse and smile, but you return love. That is life on Two Mile Island.

It works on the freeway. Try it. It works in the supermarket when you are trying to get out of the store quickly. You are eyeing all of the rows with different numbers of people in them. You run back and forth to see who has the least amount of groceries so that you will get in the quickest line. You always, in fact, get in

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the wrong line. No matter which one you get in, the person in front of you wants to cash a check on an Alaskan bank. What happens next? People stack up way behind you. However, the line beside you that you didn't want to get into, zips on through with the people getting in their cars to go home quicker than you. You have such a good spirit about you, don't you? We thank the Lord that He has left us there for a while and know there must be somebody next to us who needs to have the gospel shared with them or who needs a word of encouragement or love. No, we take that loaf of bread, and we squeeze the life out of it. It works in the supermarket. It even works in church. It works on the bus going to and from this building. It works at every point in life where your life comes in potential conflict with others.

This week, remember that when your reputation is challenged and your right to retaliation surfaces, that you need to quickly call out to God, "I yield." When your possessions are abused or called for and you must decide who really has title to your car, to your furniture, to your silverware, to your clothes and your right to ownership surfaces, quickly reach for God and whisper, "I yield." See if when you yield the other cheek, and the cloak, as well as the coat, if God doesn't flood you with joy and fill you with peace. Through your quiet yielding to the demands of another, see if God doesn't lift up the Prince of Peace. Remember, when He be lifted up, He will draw all men unto Himself. That is our goal that men may see Jesus, the Jesus who lives on Two Mile Island. This is the island in the center of life where all of the signs say, "Yield."

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