



theme: Justice – Take The Punch (Matt 5:38-48)

materials: Bibles

What social justice/action issues should matter most to us? How is social action and salvation linked? Should we only serve people in order to see them become Christians? What should we think about partnerships between government and religion? What social needs do you see around you? To what form of social action might God be calling you?

welcome

How many people in the room have ever really taken a punch in the face?

Describe how that felt to everyone else.

How many people would say they truly have an enemy (besides Satan), someone who seriously wants to do them harm? How do you feel about that person?

interact

Some of the main things that hold us back from acting out for social justice are fear and (unholy) anger. Take some time in prayer together to identify what you are afraid of, what might prevent you from fighting for justice, what are you afraid to lose, what makes you angry or hateful. Identify those things as best you can, and start bringing them before God, offering them to Him in prayer and asking Him to begin freeing you from them. Pray in smaller groups so that everyone has a chance to share and be prayed for.

read

Read Matthew 5:38-48 together. (You may have to refer somewhat regularly to the Leader's Guide for some of the specific contextual answers here).

Why do you think Jesus is teaching people not to fight back violently, to help an enemy carry a pack further, to give away all their clothes, to love their enemies? Isn't He just asking people to get walked all over?

What do you think it really means to turn the other cheek? Who do you think Jesus is giving this instruction specifically to? How realistic is it to turn the other cheek in your life?

What does the instruction to give your cloak as well as your tunic mean? Who would sue somebody for the clothes off their back? What would you want to do if someone was trying to take absolutely everything from you? Who would be forcing members of Jesus' audience to walk for a mile, carrying their packs? What would it look like in your life to be forced to do something you don't want to do, but to go the extra mile in doing it?

If you lived as Jesus is teaching here, to the letter, what do you think your life would look like? How would it be different?

How would things be different if nations behaved according to these teachings? Are they realistic for international politics? How does a nation turn the other cheek? How does a nation love its enemies and pray for those that persecute them?

think

As a cell, see if you can locate a Christian politician in your area or country. Consider writing them a letter, asking how they would best apply these teachings of Jesus to your country's foreign policy.



live & pray

Take at least one of these teachings (maybe turning the other cheek) and focus on applying it in every situation this week. Remember, this is not about running away from problems, but about engaging with them in a different way.

useful resources

Book: *Jesus and Non-violence: A Third Way*, by Walter Wink

Book: *No Future Without Forgiveness*, by Bishop Desmond Tutu

Movie: *Gandhi*

leader's guide

Jesus is teaching His audience a radically different way to live here. He is teaching them a form of resistance, but one that does away with the violence we usually want to use.

Masters would strike their slaves on the right cheek with the back of their right hand. It was an insult, a declaration that the slave was less than the master, less than fully human. Jesus says, instead of striking back, or of doing nothing, show him your left cheek as well. That way he would be forced to punch you with his right hand (the left hand would not be used), thus recognizing you as an equal, as human, not just as slave.

The rich would sue the poor for debts, trying to impoverish them to the point that they could take their land. The last thing someone could take in collateral was someone's tunic, and OT Law said you had to return that before sundown. Jesus is saying if someone is trying to remove that dignity from you, give them your cloak as well.

Essentially, strip down naked in front of them, in court. This would not be shameful for the person stripping, but for the person who saw their nakedness. It is again turning a power imbalance on its head.

Roman soldiers could force a Jew to carry their bags for one mile, and no more. It was a humiliation. So Jesus taught that they should not drop the bag, but carry it another mile. The soldier would be at a loss, and again the power dynamic would be shifted. The soldier might even get in trouble.

In all of this Jesus is teaching people to go against their natural inclination to either just give in or fight back violently. He is teaching them how to engage non-violently and effectively, and how to live out a new Kingdom of God life. Part of this was learning to love your enemy, not hate them, and to see them as human as well. It is the only way to stop the cycle of violence.

Even today, living like this will cause trouble. Violence is still advanced as a solution to most problems, from personal to international. But really engaging in Kingdom social action will require us to go about it as Jesus suggests, which means putting our feelings, our reputations, even our lives as secondary.