

Real relationships part 4.

“Outwit. Outplay. Outlast”

Matthew 5:38-6:4; 1 Peter 3:8-16

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- *Citius, Altius, Fortius*

This is the Olympic motto – Latin for "Faster, Higher, Stronger."

The Olympics is about competing to be the best you can be. It's about setting goals. Pushing your limits. Being your best.

The TV show Survivor also has a (*hendiatris*) motto :

- “Outwit. Outplay. Outlast.”

Not being a watcher of “Survivor”, let me explain it to you as someone who has absolutely no idea –

This group of people go to an Island. And they have challenges and competitions. Tribes are formed. And then people get voted off the Island by the other competitors. And the idea is to win by being the last one on the Island. Something like that. An island. Lots of people. One survivor.

The aim is in those three words: **“Outwit. Outplay. Outlast.”**

To be smarter than the other players, to play the game better, and to last the longest.

Some people see the world like a Survivor Island. Their aim in life is to outwit, outplay, and outlast others. To be better, faster, smarter. Life can become a competition, aiming to reach our own goals, or goals others have imposed on us. Trying to look the way the world expects us to look, to own the thing the world expects us to own. And even to have our own children meet the expectations that society tells us we should put on them!

But sometimes life is a bit like this...

- (*Chicken pic*) “It’s been a rough week, but I made it. How about you?”

At the start of a new week, what are you hoping for? What are you aiming to achieve? What are you expecting to happen? What are you longing for? Are we aiming to outwit, outplay and outlast other people in our world? Are we aiming

to check of the “to do” list and meet everyone’s expectations? Or are we just aiming to get through the next 7 days?

- Today, we’re talking about how we relate to people day by day? What is our AIM in relationships? And in life?

What Jesus says in Matthew give us what I’ll call “a comparison of life” – We can either aim to “Outwit, outplay, outlast”, or we can live as a follower of Jesus. And what I hope we can see today is that living Jesus’ way gives us great freedom from what the world offers.

Let’s have a look – from verse 38:

- *38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

Jesus goes on in verse 43 – allow me to summarise:

Love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you. Don’t just be nice to people who are nice to you. Be nice to people who are horrible to you!

Then chapter 6:

Be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult. Give to those in need – but don’t announce it to anyone. Be generous in secret.

When we look at all those verses, it seems that the heart of what Jesus is saying is that life is NOT a competition!

We are not playing a **game** against the rest of the world. We are not here to get revenge or to pay back or to make ourselves look better than others. But this is what the world often does. Outwit. Outplay. Outlast. In our world, the human desire is often either competitive, or it’s about meeting everyone’s expectations. And we can find ourselves playing to the world as our audience.

Its almost like we have this mental report card in our head. We look at how we’re doing. How we’ve improved. If we’ve done everything we need to do. And then we compare ourselves to everyone else around us. And we tally up this mental report card and rank ourselves against the people around us. How good am I

compared to him, or her, or them? Have I met everyone's expectations? Have I done what needs to be done?

But if you want to be a follower of Jesus, let me encourage you to hear these words of Jesus:

- **Verse 48:** *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Be perfect. What does that mean? Obviously, we cannot be **perfect** this side of heaven. Christians are not perfect people. So how can we be "perfect" like God himself?

This is the meaning of the word "perfect" here. Jesus is talking about what we are living for – and WHO we are living for. And there are two choices:

We can aim to meet the expectations of the world. Or we can aim to meet the expectations of God, whose expectations are perfect.

Instead of loving just our neighbors, we also love our enemies. Perfect.

Instead of giving to the poor, and making sure everyone sees it, we give generously when only God is watching. Perfect.

Instead of just walking the mile we HAVE to walk, we walk the extra mile. Perfect.

Instead of repaying an insult with another insult, we turn the other cheek. Perfect.

God's expectations in our life instead of the expectations of our world – our friends, family, parents, boss...

This is perfection – to seek to please God and not people.

- **6:4** - *Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

God is our audience. And he doesn't see just what we DO. He sees what we DESIRE to do. He sees our desire to help the poor. Our desire to love our enemy. He doesn't judge us by the dollar amount we give. He judges by the amount we DESIRE to give.

He sees the way we love our enemies, and how hard it is for us. He sees how someone wrongs us, and when we choose not to retaliate or take revenge. Even in our hearts. The same way he saw his son Jesus – beaten, mocked, spat on, flogged, and crucified. And he did not retaliate. He did not seek revenge.

What Jesus showed us, in his life AND death, was a desire to meet God's expectations of him – obedience, love for enemies, humility, compassion. This is perfection.

- And there is our freedom.

If we follow Jesus, there is no competition. There are no checklists. You can let go of the burden of competing with yourself or others. The burden of performing to the expectations of your parents, your boss, your friends, the world. Because you're only audience is God.

What a burden that takes off us! Someone comes to complain to you about something you did or didn't do, someone wants to have a go at you for a decision you've made, someone wants to put you down for your performance in some way – but you've performed for God. Not for them. And even if they strike you, you turn the other cheek and say: "God's my audience. You do what you like to me."

And no, that's not easy. Unless we let go of those worldly expectations. I think that often the hardest thing for us to learn is to put less value in what the WORLD thinks of us and more value in what GOD thinks of us. Less focus on worldly expectations to perform, to achieve, to own things, the expectations to do better, to go faster, higher stronger, to outwit, outplay and outlast... That is an enslaved way to live. And then to put more focus on what God expects of us – humility, mercy, love, generosity.

It means we are free to serve just ONE master. To meet the expectations of ONE God. And he's a God who forgives our mistakes and shows us mercy when we fail.

Maybe we're living to meet the expectations of everyone around us so much that we've forgotten what God asks of us – to love our enemy. To be generous when no one is looking. To be humble. To turn the other cheek. To walk the extra mile. To have God as our audience, not the world. To aim to please him, not people.

This is true freedom: Being free from worldly expectations; being free to please God.

- What expectations are on you today? Who is your audience? Who are you aiming to please?

Let's pray.

Let me also encourage you, if you want to know more about being a follower of Jesus, and more about how God calls us to live, please let me know after the service so we can talk about this. It's the most important thing you could do today.

Matthew 5:38-6:4

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ **39** But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. **40** And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. **41** If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. **42** Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be children 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. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? **47** And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

6 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

1 Peter 3:8-16

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. **9** Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. **10** For,

“Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.

11

They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.

12

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? **14** But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” **15** But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,