

*A Lesson in the Beatitudes...*

# The Other Cheek

By Jack Guilford

*Jack  
(Guilford)*

*"Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also..."*

"Do you really believe," I turned to Helen and Norman, "that in the practical world of today we can survive by not fighting back when someone hurts us? How is it possible to offer the other cheek to someone who has already done us harm?"

Norman and Helen paused in the road. Helen blinked at me with curiosity. Norman adjusted the straps of his knapsack reflectively. But in a second they had both traced the reason for my question to the sight of the little

mountain hovering in the background. We began walking again.

"When the Bible was written," volunteered Helen, "many of the sayings were not meant to be taken too literally. Besides, the speech and the writing of Oriental lands were full of paradoxes."

"I don't think that is the explanation," interrupted Norman. "The Sermon on the Mount, you know, became the guidebook of the Christian life. It was a difficult set of rules to live up to, and from the beginning believers realized that they had to face a continual conflict within themselves. It was a struggle between their imperfect

HISTORIC SEA OF GALILEE

*"We rested on the western shore under the welcome shade of an aspen tree."*

THE historic Sea of Galilee lay motionless in the heat of a Holy Land summer. Three twentieth century pilgrims—Norman, Helen, and I—rested on the western shore under the welcome shade of an aspen tree, and gazed at this most revered "sea" in the world, which is actually a lake, an enchantingly picturesque lake.

Off to the north, the hallowed waters of the River Jordan flowed into the lake. Beyond towered the rugged peak of Mount Hermon. Along the eastern shore, bleak rocky hills formed a white frame for the crystal green basin. Southward, the river coursed outward again, descending into the fruitful Jordan Valley.

We three young wanderers were hiking through the biblical country of Galilee, which today lies in the State of Israel. The afternoon heat was so intense in this 700-feet-below-sea level hollow, that we anxiously sought respite by the banks of this heart-shaped emerald lake.

After an hour of swimming and splashing in the refreshing waters, we resumed our journey northward toward the site of ancient Capernaum. Down the stony road we trudged, where have

trod the feet of untold millions since the days of Scriptures. Today the pathway is a lonely, desolate one where the brambles and thistles cling to your clothing as you brush by. Blue and white cornflowers color the fields, which are otherwise drab with weeds and spiked thorns. The thorns are no doubt of the same kind that were thrust on the brow of Christ on the cross.

WE WERE in the heart of the Land of the New Testament. The place where we had bathed was near the traditional site of the miracle of loaves and fishes. Two miles away lay the ruins of historic Capernaum, and, as we trudged ahead, we passed in the shadow of the Mount of Beatitudes. This is the sacred elevation, it is said, where nineteen centuries ago a stranger from nearby Nazareth first uttered those imperishable Christian truths known as the Sermon on the Mount.

Silently we tramped along the parched path under the pitiless sun, each of us absorbed in thought. In my imagination's ear I heard verses from that sermon echoing down from the height:

THE RIVER JORDAN

*"Off to the north, its hallowed waters flowed into the lake."*

human nature and the ideals of perfection which Christ demanded. He himself knew how even His followers would often fall short of these noble precepts, but these high ideals were set before them as a pattern for that perfect state which Jesus called the Kingdom of Heaven.

"But concerning the other cheek," I insisted again, "don't we have to resort to force to defend our interests today? The very idea of impassivity offends us."

Norman hesitated. His eyes roved down over the pink oleander bushes growing by the waterside. "I believe," he began slowly, "that when Christ spoke of the other cheek He was first thinking of the person who has been injured. His self-interest would tend to make him seek for justice. But Christ knew that revenge only breeds strife and further revenge. Secondly, He thought of the person inflicting the injury. He knew that the only way to overcome evil was to return good; that

the only way to win an enemy was to love him."

"Then do you mean," inquired Helen, "that by giving in, or by offering passive resistance, we are obeying the rule to 'resist not evil'?"

"Not at all," said Norman emphatically. "The important thing is the necessity of showing good will. Not by yielding meekly, or appeasing shamefully, or by using trick strategy. Christ had God's will uppermost in mind—to encourage every individual to become a better person; to have all humanity develop in a divine direction."

A FLOCK of sparrows flew overhead down toward the lake. Our throats were dry from the dust of the road. We hoped there would be drinking water at the monastery at Capernaum, which was not far off now. To divert our attention from the heat and our thirst, Norman told a little story.

"King Philip of Macedonia was a man of great moderation and self-control. One day some diplomats from Athens called on him and his court to com-

Left: THE MOUNT OF THE BEATITUDES



plain about hostile acts committed upon their city. When they were preparing to depart, Philip asked them whether he could do them any service. 'The greatest service you could do to us,' said one of them, 'would be to hang yourself.' Despite the shocked anger of his court members, Philip answered calmly, 'Go tell your superiors that those who make use of such insolent language are more haughty and less peaceably inclined than those who can forgive them.'"

At Capernaum we were given pitchers of cool water by the kindly monks of the Franciscan monastery. Afterwards we roamed through the massive ruins of a second century synagogue said to have been built on the site of the one constructed in gratitude by the Roman centurion after Christ had healed his servant. Later we sat in a quiet garden dotted with wild poppies, eating the fruit and sandwiches we had brought with us. The place was enveloped in a reverent atmosphere laden with the dramatic tales of biblical times.

Norman recounted the miracles and cures which Christ had performed in and around Capernaum . . . the walking on the water . . . the calming of the storm . . . the healing of the nobleman's son . . . of the blind man . . . of Peter's mother-in-law.

**I**T WAS growing late and we were anxious to return to Haifa that night, still many miles away. We remounted our knapsacks, and set out to retrace our steps back to the road leading to Tiberias. From there, if it were not too late, we hoped to get a bus to Haifa.

The shades of dusk were already being drawn as we stood on the empty highway hoping for a lift. There were no cars in sight for miles.

Across the road the sloping outline of the Mount of Beatitudes was darkened in the twilight sky. Crickets began their evening song, and a distant jackal shrieked an eerie howl. We began tramping south on the highway, and an automobile finally approached. But our frantic thumbing was in vain. The driver shrugged his shoulders to show his car was full to capacity. Another car sped by. Once again there was no room.

Then a station wagon appeared. Its headlights were already turned on as it came racing down the highway. The rear seats were empty, but the driver paid us no heed as we desperately waved to him. He whizzed by, ignoring us.

A feeling of deep resentment filled my whole being, and my eye caught Helen also repressing some dark wish. A flicker of disappointment crossed

Norman's serene face. Suddenly there was a loud report, and the station wagon skidded to a halt about two hundred yards down the road.

"Come on!" shouted Norman. "Let's go see if he needs help. He's probably gotten a flat tire."

"Help him?" I sneered. "After he wouldn't even stop to pick us up?"

But Norman was already hastening ahead. When Helen and I came up a few minutes later, Norman was already raising the jack, and the driver, a nervous little Arab fellow, was trying to extricate the spare tire out of the back seat. Reluctantly, I gave him a hand, and he smiled gratefully. Suddenly my attitude toward him changed, and I felt an eagerness to help him. Helen had caught the spirit now also, and insisted on participating by collecting the bolts as I unscrewed them with the wheel wrench. In a short while the job was finished, and the little man stroked his mustache as he asked us where we were headed for.

"We were trying to get to Tiberias just now," I told him.

"Are you staying in Tiberias?" he asked. He spoke good English.

"No, as a matter of fact, we are trying to get to Haifa tonight, if possible," I answered.

"Nothing to worry about," he said with a broad smile and a flourish of his arms. "Please get in. I am going to a town twenty miles from there, but I will personally bring you to Haifa tonight."

We climbed inside, and emitted sighs of relief. After all, our boat was sailing from Haifa early the next morning.

"By the way," said the driver, "I hope you forgive me for passing you up on the road back there. I was really somewhat fearful of picking up strangers, because of the terrible tension between the Arabs and the Israeli. It was very thoughtless of me, and very generous of you to help me after my doing so. You have taught me a lesson in kindness."

The three of us looked at each other and smiled. As the vehicle rounded a bend in the road, we turned our heads back to catch a last glimpse of the silhouetted Mount of Beatitudes.