

The Sermon on the Mount

Anger and Murder In The Heart (Matthew 5:21-26)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. As Jesus spoke to His disciples during what we call “The Sermon on the Mount” He made several statements that must have shocked and surprised many of those who heard Him.
 - A. The one statement that must have surprised most was when Jesus said, *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20)*
 1. The Pharisees, a very strict religious sect of the Jews in Jesus’ day, and the scribes who had become the legal experts in interpreting the Law of Moses, were looked upon by the common people of that day as being at the very PINNACLE of righteousness and faithfulness to God.
 - a. How could Jesus POSSIBLY expect that the righteousness of His disciples EXCEED the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees?

2. As we saw in our last lesson the answer is simply that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was:
 - a. Inconsistent and contradictory because they don't practice what they preach.
 - b. All show and had no substance because their pride of being esteemed by others led them to be like an actor on a stage, giving their greatest performance when they were in the public eye.
 - c. Untrustworthy, deceitful and dishonest because they didn't keep their word.
 - d. Selective and legalistic because they placed a greater emphasis on external worship than they did on how they treated others.
 - e. Merely a mask to hide their real fleshly, worldly nature because inwardly they were sinners who could see the sins of others but not their own.

- II. In the verses that follow Matthew chapter 5 verse 20, Jesus begins a lengthy discourse starting with verse 21 and concluding with verse 48.
 - A. Throughout THESE verses Jesus begins to show His disciples the kind of person He expects of those who would be citizens in His kingdom.

1. Jesus gets down to the very ESSENCE of what it means to be righteous.
 - a. He reveals that righteousness isn't simply EXTERNAL COMPLIANCE with the Law of God.
 - b. TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS goes to the INTERNAL CONDITION of our heart that MOTIVATES us to be compliant with the Law of God.
 2. Therefore, Jesus challenges His listeners with revelation that spells out what it means to be righteous.
- B. In **verses 21 through 48** Jesus will repeatedly say something to the effect: *"You have heard that it was said... But I say to you..."*
1. As Jesus Himself said just a few verses earlier, He had not come to destroy the Law of Moses, or in any way diminish its importance.
 - a. Jesus and His disciples were Jews living the time when the Law of Moses (the Old Testament) was in effect, and they were obligated to faithfully keep that Law.
 - b. However, the Jewish people of His day had lost sight of the true essence of that Law and were following the traditional INTERPRETATIONS of the Law MORE THAN they were following what God had actually said.

- C. Therefore, in **verses 21 through 48 of Matthew chapter 5** Jesus does two things.
1. First, He sweeps away all the man-made doctrines and traditional teachings about the Law of Moses that had been handed down from generation to generation.
 - a. What the Law of Moses actually taught about such things as murder, adultery, keeping oaths, revenge, and so forth, had been obscured by generations of traditional, legalistic, human INTERPRETATIONS of the Law.
 2. And second, Jesus taught these truths to prepare His disciples and others for the coming KINGDOM and ITS Law.
 - a. In other words, Jesus was ALSO introducing the fundamental truths of the LAW OF CHRIST – the NEW COVENANT that would eventually replace the Law of Moses.
 - b. Therefore, Jesus took His disciples back to those eternal truths and those timeless moral and ethical principles God expected all people to live by.
 - c. These eternal truths and timeless principles would be the foundation of the NEW COVENANT – the GOSPEL of the KINGDOM.

- d. This is why **Matthew 4:23** says "*Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM...*"
- D. Therefore, the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are KINGDOM PRINCIPLES – truths by which you and I are to live by today.
- 1. It isn't just EXTERNAL COMPLIANCE with Law that Jesus is emphasizing in these verses, He speaks about the INTERNAL CONDITION OF THE HEART.
 - a. It's the condition of our HEART that determines whether or not we will be OBEDIENT to the commandments of God or DISOBEDIENT.
 - b. And it's the condition of our HEART that determines whether our actions toward OTHERS will be governed by TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS or by hatred, lust, greed and all other sins of the heart.
- E. Therefore, the very FIRST place Jesus begins is by addressing the condition of the heart that often leads to acts of VIOLENCE such as MURDER.
- 1. And that condition of the heart is something that seems relatively harmless – anger.

2. Therefore, let's look at **Matthew chapter 5 verses 21 and 22** to see what Jesus says about anger, and how those who would be citizens of His kingdom must never allow anger to infect their hearts and souls.
3. **Matthew 5:21-22** – *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."*

BODY:

- I. Let's begin by first noticing what the LAW OF MOSES actually taught about murder.
 - A. When God gave the Law to the people of Israel through Moses, He was very specific about murder.
 1. **Exodus 20:13** – *"You shall not murder."*
 - a. The old King James Version of this verses reads *"Thou shall not kill"* and has led some to misunderstand what God was actually commanding here.

- b. God is not forbidding the taking of another life in acts of war or even taking the life of another in the form of execution or capital punishment – there are many places in the Old Testament where God specifically **COMMANDED** the taking of a life under these circumstances.
 - c. However, in **THIS** command God is specifically condemning the taking of another life as the result of murder or homicide – whether intentional or not.
2. In Numbers chapter 35, God commanded the children of Israel to designate six cities that would be cities of refuge for a man who accidentally killed another.
- a. When a man accidentally or unintentionally took the life of another, he could flee to one of those cities of refuge and be safe from revenge as long as he remained in that city.
 - b. In essence, even the person who accidentally or unintentionally took the life of another would be considered under house arrest – so to speak – and would forever be confined to that city of refuge.
3. However, in cases of deliberate homicide – whether premeditated or simply an act committed out of rage – the cities of refuge would **NOT** provide a safe haven.

- a. Those persons must be put to death.
 - b. **Numbers 35:16-21** – *"... if he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 17 And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 18 Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 19 The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. 20 If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies, 21 or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him."*
4. The Law of Moses also required the guilt or innocence of a man accused of murder to be settled in a court of law by the testimony of those who actually witnessed the act of murder.

- a. **Deuteronomy 17:6** – *"Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness."*
- B. Therefore, Jesus told His audience during the Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 5:21** – *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'"*
 1. That is, in fact, what the Law of Moses taught and what had been said to the people of OLD by God and by Moses.
 2. In fact, God even imposed the death penalty in cases of what we might consider NEGLIGENT HOMICIDE.
 - a. **Exodus 21:28-29** – *"If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. 29 But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death."*
- C. However, by the time of Jesus the Laws of God concerning taking the life of another had been given more LIBERAL INTERPRETATIONS.

1. The court system – from the lowest civil courts to the great Sanhedrin – had become corrupted by men driven more by political ambition and financial gain than by a true love for the commandments of God.
 - a. Rulings and judgments were often purely arbitrary – meaning they were inconsistent and sometimes gave preferential treatment to those of high social or political rank.
2. Furthermore, the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees tended to focus only on the ACT of murder – which they condemned – but not on what often LED to the act of murder such as anger, rage, hatred and a desire for revenge.
 - a. Therefore, during the days of Jesus people felt no guilt whatsoever for harboring anger, rage and hatred in their hearts toward others AS LONG AS they never ACTED on that anger and rage by committing MURDER against a fellow Jew.
 - b. Their reasoning was simply that envy, jealousy, anger, malice and a desire for revenge could not be adjudicated in a court of law. They weren't OUTWARD, OBSERVABLE ACTS, but merely they were conditions of the heart.
 - c. And so, while these attitudes of the heart were not openly SANCTIONED, they were TOLERATED.

- d. You could harbor envy, jealousy, anger, malice and revenge in your heart as long as you didn't commit murder.
- D. Therefore, for us to truly understand how God wanted the sixth commandment to be interpreted, and to understand what Jesus would require of those who would be His disciples, we turn to the Lord's teaching.
1. Jesus told His disciples that not only is MURDER sinful, but ALSO the emotions and condition of the heart that LEAD to murder.
 2. Furthermore, this was the INTENT behind the command, "*You shall not commit murder.*"
 - a. **Proverbs 6:16-19** – "*These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: 17 A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.*"
 - b. God has ALWAYS despised and abhorred "*hands that shed innocent blood*" (or commit murder), as well as "*a HEART that devises (plots, plans or schemes) wicked plans...*"
 3. From the first murder in the Bible – when Cain slew his brother Able – to every other act of violence against another, those crimes

were committed by those whose hearts were filled with envy, jealousy, anger, malice and revenge.

- II. Therefore, Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 5:22** – *"But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."*
 - A. There are several things here we need to understand here because Jesus deals with three PROGRESSIVELY SERIOUS SINS.
 - 1. First, Jesus says *"whoever is ANGRY with his brother without a cause... "*
 - a. Anger is not ALWAYS sinful. There are times when anger IS JUSTIFIED – as when the Lord drove the moneychangers out of the Temple for turning the worship of Jehovah into a money-making enterprise.
 - b. But there are times when anger is NOT justified. Such as:
 - (1). When we are angry at someone who made a simple mistake, or in cases of simple forgetfulness, or...
 - (2). When the real intent is to assert our authority or power, or when we simply want to shame someone, or...

(3). When it is extreme and we act out of uncontrollable instinct to harm others – physically or emotionally.

2. Second, Jesus says, "*whoever says to his brother, 'RACA!' "*
 - a. "*Raca!*" is a word spoken with complete disrespect and great contempt for someone – it's used when belittling or ridiculing someone.
 - b. It is the kind of language Solomon calls arrogant pride:
Proverbs 21:24 – *A proud and haughty man — "Scoffer" [ridiculer, mocker] is his name; he acts with arrogant pride.*
 - c. It would be the same as us calling someone stupid, retard, idiot, lame – it shows we have no respect whatsoever for that person, and no regard for them or their welfare.
 - d. It's a word spoken to humiliate and dehumanize another person. And when we consider a person to be no longer worthy of respect or compassion; when we no longer consider them human; their life means nothing to us.
3. Third, Jesus said, *whoever says, 'You FOOL!...'*
 - a. It's not so much the word "*fool*" that is sinful, but the MANNER in which this word is SPOKEN.
 - b. Even the psalmist David said in **Psalms 14:1** -- *The FOOL has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt,*

they have done abominable works, there is none who does good.

- (1). The word here means someone who lacks good sense and who is openly rebellious against God.
 - b. But the way Jesus describes the use of this word in the Sermon on the Mount suggests a word spoken out of deep hostility toward another – a word that conveys the highest degree of bitterness and hatred, and often spoken with clinched teeth.
 - c. It comes from a heart filled with FURY and RAGE, and a heart that is ONE STEP AWAY from releasing that fury and rage in an act of violence, such as murder.
 4. Therefore, acts of violence such as murder come from a heart filled with uncontrollable rage and fury, which in turn comes from a heart filled with arrogance and pride and which sees others as worthless, which finally originates in a heart filled with anger and resentment.
- B. Jesus also shows there are THREE PROGRESSIVELY SERIOUS judgments that await those who cannot control their anger.
1. Jesus said the one who is angry with his brother without a cause *"shall be in danger of the JUDGMENT."* What *"judgment"* is Jesus talking about here?

- a. The word *"judgment"* here makes reference to the local courts of law in Palestine. These were the courts that judged civil matters as well as criminal matters that were not worthy of the death penalty.
2. But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to say that the one who says, *"whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the COUNCIL."* What is the *"COUNCIL"* Jesus is referring to here?
 - a. The council was the Sanhedrin – the highest and most supreme court of the Jews.
 - b. This court was normally reserved for crimes of a serious nature, which may require the death penalty.
3. But Jesus doesn't stop there either. He goes on to say that *whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of HELL FIRE."*
 - a. The words *"HELL FIRE"* here is a reference to the Valley of Hinnon – a valley outside of the city walls of Jerusalem where the most unspeakable sins of the Israelites were committed in sacrificing their children to the pagan god Molech, and the area they subsequently became the stinch-filled, corrupt, maggot infested garbage dump of the city.
 - b. This valley was also used to symbolically represent a place of everlasting torment.

- (1). This is the same place of everlasting torment where Peter says the angels who sinned were cast, and where they are in chains of darkness reserved for judgment. **(2 Peter 2:4-10)**
- c. There were several forms of execution that were commonly practiced among the Jews – execution by hanging, strangulation, beheading, shot with arrows, slain with a sword, and stoning.
 - d. But for crimes of an extreme nature, normal burial of the executed person was not allowed. Instead their bodies were burned in the Valley of Hinnon.
- C. However, since civil courts didn't adjudicate in cases where someone was merely ANGRY at another, or pronounced RACA!, or called them a FOOL, what did Jesus REALLY mean here?
- 1. Jewish civil courts never concerned themselves with matters of the heart – such as anger, bitterness, hatred, resentment, or a desire for revenge.
 - a. Those courts were reserved strictly for matters that concerned violation of civil or criminal law – such as fraud or murder.

2. Therefore, Jesus used the terms JUDGMENT, COUNCIL and HELL FIRE (a reference to the Valley of Hinnon) as being representative of the judgment of Almighty God.
 - a. Some believe this use of three progressively severe forms of judgment suggest varying degrees of punishment in torment.
 - b. But I don't see anything in Scripture that suggests the punishment of some in hell will be greater than the punishment of others.
 - c. The reference in the parable of the Unfaithful Servant to being beaten with "many stripes" verses being beaten with "few stripes" seems to suggest that those who KNOW the Lord's will and yet refused to DO IT will suffer greater anguish and mental torment in hell than those who NEVER knew the Lord's will.
3. It seems that Jesus is saying even the sins that we might consider less serious – such as anger – are still going to be judged by God in the same manner as sins we might consider more serious – such as bitterness, hatred, wrath, violence and murder.
4. In fact, the apostle John put it this way.
 - a. **1 John 3:14-15** – *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love*

his brother abides in death. 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

- b. **1 John 4:20-21** – *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*

5. This is why the apostle Paul said this:

- a. **Ephesians 4:26-27** – *"Be angry, and do not sin": [quote from Psalm 4:4] do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil.*
- b. **Colossians 3:5-9** – *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. 8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds...*

- III. If we think we can harbor anger, bitterness and resentment in our hearts toward someone and escape the judgment of God we are only deceiving ourselves.
- A. Anger, bitterness, resentment, mocking, belittling, and uncontrollable rage will send our souls to an eternal hell just as quickly as murder.
1. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that God judges the HEART because it is FROM THE HEART that ALL SIN originates.
 2. Therefore, the RIGHTEOUSNESS that Jesus demands of ALL His disciples is a righteousness that EXCEEDS that of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - a. The "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" just condemned the act of murder.
 - b. But Jesus wanted His disciples to know that those who harbor anger and resentment are just as guilty!
 3. The "righteousness of the kingdom" which Jesus demands of His disciples is actually in harmony with the original intent of the Law.
 - a. As Paul put it: **Galatians 5:22-26** – *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us*

also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

CONCLUSION:

- I. It's time for us to pause and do some serious soul-searching.
 - A. So let me begin by asking: Have you committed murder?
 1. I'm not asking if you've actually taken the life of another during an act of violence – I'm asking if you have the seeds of anger, hatred, wrath, violence and murder in your HEART?
 - a. How well do you handle anger?
 - b. How good are you at controlling bitterness, resentment and rage?
 - c. How about mocking and belittling someone, or speaking to them in harmful and hurtful ways that demean and humiliate?
 - B. Jesus offered this solution to those who heard Him preach on the Sermon on the Mount.
 1. **Matthew 5:23-26** – *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with*

him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26

Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

2. There is simply no way we can expect to escape the judgments of God and the eternal consequences of the sins of anger, bitterness, resentment and hatred unless we don't do something about them.
 - a. It means we need to confess those sins to those we've hurt and ask for their forgiveness.
 - b. And for certain, it means we need to confess those sins to God and ask for His forgiveness.
 - c. It doesn't matter to God how many sacrifices we make, or how much we do for others in the Kingdom, if we harbor sin in our heart.
 - d. We need to FIRST resolve the sin, and THEN offer the sacrifices of our heart to God.
- C. If there is sin in your heart standing between you and your God, then do whatever you need to do to remove that sin.
 1. For those who have never obeyed the gospel...
 2. For those who HAVE obeyed the gospel, and been baptized into Christ, but are hiding sin in your heart...