

The Sermon On The Mount

*Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.
2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: (Matthew 5:1-2 ESV)*

You Shall Not Murder

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Matthew 5:21-26

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 5.

We are continuing to make our way through the Sermon on the Mount where we find Jesus' instructions on how we are to live as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This Sermon reminds us of a reality that we often forget: Christian, if you have confessed your sin and placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then you are NOW a citizen of Heaven! Your name is written in the Book of Life! Jesus has gone and prepared a place for you and it is YOURS RIGHT NOW! Therefore, as you live your life HERE, your true citizenship – your true home – is THERE.

If you truly believe that you will live differently. You will love differently. You will grieve differently. You will spend your money differently. You will shape your priorities differently.

That's what The Sermon on the Mount is about. Jesus is describing how Holy-Spirit-filled, new-heart-possessing, blood-bought citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven are to live in the present age.

Last Sunday we learned that followers of Jesus are to be marked by a righteousness that is qualitatively different than that of the scribes and Pharisees. Their righteousness was merely *external*, but our righteousness will flow from transformed hearts; their righteousness was performed for men, but ours will be performed for God; theirs was motivated by Law, but ours will be motivated by love and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Now, for the rest of chapter 5, Jesus is going to contrast the OLD standard of the scribes and Pharisees with his NEW standard. Look with me to Matthew 5:21-26. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:21-26 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

For the rest of chapter 5, Jesus will be framing his teaching with the expression ‘You have heard that it was said, but I say to you’. With this expression, Jesus is presenting himself as the final authoritative interpreter of the Law over and against the religious leaders of the day. They were disobedient servants who misunderstood the Master, but Jesus is the obedient Son who reveals – not only the *letter* of the Law – but the *HEART* of the Law Giver. They were blind guides, but he is the way, the truth, and the life.

He begins this teaching by drawing our attention to the sixth commandment. We read in verse 21:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ (Matthew 5:21 ESV)

Now, when it comes to the ten commandments, this is the easy one, right? Most people give themselves a passing grade on the sixth commandment. The scribes and Pharisees certainly did. They refrained from murder – they obeyed the *letter* of the Law – and they therefore saw themselves as righteous. That was their standard.

But the righteousness that God requires of us is a righteousness that *exceeds* that of the scribes and Pharisees. So, what does that look like when we consider the sixth commandment? What is the new standard?

The New Standard

The Pharisees looked at the sixth commandment and rightly understood that God will judge our *actions*. But that's where the righteousness of the Pharisees stopped. What they failed to recognize is that God sees past the surface. He searches our hearts. Therefore, Jesus teaches us here that:

1. God will judge our actions *and* our emotions

Look again at verse 22:

But I say to you that **everyone who is angry** with his brother will be liable to judgment (Matthew 5:22a ESV)

Stop and think about that for a moment.

Jesus specifically points here at the person who is angry *with his brother* – language that he reserves for the household of God. If you claim to be a Spirit-filled, blood-bought citizen of heaven, and yet your heart is full of anger against your brothers and sisters, then that is like a check engine light going off in your heart! Something is very wrong!

Congregations in this city have been torn apart because God's people were angry at each other. Are any of those old grudges still alive in this room? Christians are jumping from church to church because they are unwilling to deal with the people who have offended them. Are any of *those* old grudges in this room? We live in a culture that lionizes victimhood and encourages you to define your life by the record of wrongs committed against you. Has anyone here bowed down to that idol?

Listen: Our culture is an *angry* culture. But that anger has NO PLACE in the church. 'Blessed are the MEEK' Jesus said. 'Blessed are the MERCIFUL'! Christian, you have been filled with the Spirit of God which means that you have all the resources you need to OVERCOME your anger!

If you are a follower of Jesus, then you need to let that anger go.

As I say that, I want to make sure that some of us don't wrongfully let ourselves off the hook. When we think of anger, we often picture a big, childish man slamming his fists and raising his voice. But the sin of anger is also on display in the quiet intellectual who is always making passive-aggressive remarks, or the woman who rolls her eyes and then gossips with her friends, or the person who sits silently and seethes on the inside. Jesus here is moving past the *manifesting behaviour* and he is addressing the *heart*. If you are an angry person, however it presents itself, your anger needs to go.

Throughout the New Testament the Apostles explain and apply this teaching. In Galatians 5 for example – right before describing the fruit of the Spirit – the Apostle Paul describes the works of the flesh. Notice what he includes in his list, and notice how he ends his list:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, **strife**, jealousy, **fits of anger**, rivalries, **dissensions, divisions**, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that **those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** (Galatians 5:19-21 ESV)

If your life is characterized by anger, and strife, and divisions, and dissensions – if you have a trail of people behind you that you have quarreled and parted ways with and you constantly find yourself in battles – then you need to hear this warning. Nasty fruit like that grows from the flesh, not the Spirit. Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul's warning sounds a lot like Jesus' warning:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, **you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.** (Matthew 5:20 ESV)

If you don't take your anger problem seriously, you need to understand this morning that Jesus does. The stakes could not be higher. You can't bring that rage with you into the Kingdom.

The scribes and Pharisees lulled themselves into a false sense of security. But our God searches the heart. He will judge our actions *and* our anger.

Jesus goes on to set this new standard and he explains that:

2. God will judge our actions *and* our words

Look again at verse 22:

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:22 ESV)

If I were preaching this in another time or culture, I would have probably summarized all of verse 22 under the first point. But Jesus is warning us here that God is going to judge the words that we speak to and about one another and – in a social media world – we need to sit in this for a while.

We all understand that murder is the destruction of a life. But we often fail to recognize that there are other, easier, subtler ways to destroy lives. When we insult, and when we gossip, and when we slander one another, we commit acts of violence that we don’t even comprehend. Passing on something that you are aren’t absolutely SURE is true, is like firing a gun into the air. You are being RECKLESS with people’s lives. You are putting others at risk simply because you like making noise! Listen: That is DEADLY, DAMNABLE behaviour¹. Matthew Henry warns:

The good name of our neighbour, which is better than life, is thereby stabbed and murdered; and it is an evidence of such an ill-will to our neighbour as would strike at his life, if it were in our power.²

Have you ever shared gossip? Do you realize how *evil* and *destructive* that is? Rumors can change lives forever. Do you want a terrifying thought experiment? Try to remember a time that you shared a rumor of someone. Now, try to imagine just how far that rumor might have spread. How many people will never see that person the same way again because of what you said? How much damage did you do? James warns us:

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ **And the tongue is a fire**, a world of unrighteousness. (James 3:5b-6a ESV)

One day, we will stand before the judge, and I suspect that we will be HORRIFIED to see the devastation that we have caused. In that moment, none of us will dare to object, ‘But Lord, I never *actually* murdered anyone!’ because in that moment we will finally understand that:

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, **for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.** (Luke 6:45 ESV)

¹ Credit to Pastor Paul Carter for this sentence from the preaching workshop.

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary On The Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1296.

That's the new standard. Therefore, citizens of Heaven – empowered by the Spirit – put away anger and grow in love and patience by one degree of glory to the next.

Now, before we move on, I suspect that you may have accumulated some questions at this point. Questions like, 'Didn't Jesus get angry sometimes?' and, 'Is it ever appropriate for Christians to be angry?'. Those are good, clarifying questions, so let's ask them.

Clarifying Questions

First:

1. Didn't Jesus get angry?

He sure did. For example, one time he was about to heal a man with a withered hand, but the religious leaders were upset because Jesus was doing this 'work' on the sabbath. The text says:

And **he looked around at them with anger**, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. (Mark 3:5 ESV)

Similarly, we find an angry Jesus driving merchants out of the court of the Gentiles in the temple, and we find an angry Jesus rebuking the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in Matthew 23. Jesus DID get angry at times.

So too did the Old Testament prophets who often used sharp language in their warnings. So too did the Apostle Paul – he even called for the heretics in Galatia to castrate themselves!

So, if Jesus was angry at times, and if the Apostles and Prophets were angry at times, then it begs the question:

2. Is it ever appropriate for a Christian to be angry?

The answer is yes. There IS a place for righteous anger in the life of the Christian.

The brokenness of this world should provoke righteous anger in you. The intrusion of death should provoke righteous anger in you. The presence of sin should produce righteous anger in you. Those things provoked anger in Jesus, and since we are called to serve as Jesus' ambassadors and we are indwelt with his Spirit, OF COURSE there are times when it is appropriate for us to be angry.

But, Paul warns us in Ephesians 4:26-27:

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26-27 ESV)

The ONLY anger that is commended in the New Testament is anger that is untainted by sin – and even that anger should be released before the sun goes down. Which is why I am VERY SKEPTICAL when people cite the example of Jesus, or of the Apostles and the Prophets to justify their anger. D.A. Carson addresses that tendency and that danger head on. He says:

Indeed there is a place for burning with anger at sin and injustice. Our problem is that we burn with indignation and anger, not at sin and injustice, but at offense to ourselves. In none of the cases in which Jesus became angry was his personal ego wrapped up in the issue.³

Listen: When Jesus was angry, it was the only time that a man was ever perfectly, righteously angry. His was a SINLESS anger.

But – let's be clear – you and I are NOT sinless. Which means that we need to be very careful not to assume that OUR anger is perfectly righteous. If we're honest with ourselves, we know that most of the time it is decidedly NOT. If we look closely and honestly at our anger it doesn't take long to identify our own pride, and our self-defence, and our insecurity, and our ignorance.

This is why the vast majority of the teaching in the New Testament about anger calls us AWAY from it. Because our anger is NEVER untainted by sin. James warns:

³ D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 42.

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, **slow to anger;**²⁰ **for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.** (James 1:19-20 ESV)

In this internet age, you will be tempted to vent your “righteous” anger online for the world to see.

Don’t.

That is a dangerous game. You have never once experienced anger that wasn’t tainted in one way, shape, or form by your sin, which means that the words that come out of that anger are unlikely to be helpful. They will go out like a spark, and you won’t see the extent of the damage you’ve done until you stand before the Judge and look over the ashes that remain. Jesus warns:

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak (Matthew 12:36 ESV)

In the same way that cigarette packages have warnings from the governor general printed on the package, this verse should pop up before any Christian is allowed to write a post on social media, or a text, or an e-mail. You will give an account for EVERY CARELESS WORD! Proceed with caution.

In summary – Yes, in this broken world sin and death will provoke feelings of anger in you – as they should. But do not sin in your anger. And do not let the sun go down on your anger. Surrender it to the Lord, and trust that He will do what is right.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19 ESV)

With the time that we have remaining, I want to quickly turn your attention to verses 23-26 where Jesus will help us to apply this lesson.

Applying The Lesson

Look with me at verses 23-24:

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24 ESV)

How should you apply this lesson? For starters:

1. Do your part

If you look closely at these verses, you might be surprised by what you see. You might expect Jesus to say, ‘If YOU have something against your brother, go to him’. But instead, Jesus says, ‘If your BROTHER has something against YOU, go to him’. That’s fascinating! Up until this point, Jesus has been talking about MY anger, but in the application Jesus essentially says, ‘If you REALLY understand how important this is, not only will you resolve YOUR anger – that goes without saying! – but you will also consider if you have offended someone else and you will do whatever you can to help THEM to do what’s right as well’. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says here:

We must not only repress these unkind and unworthy thoughts, says Christ; we have to do more than that. We must actually take steps to remove the cause of the trouble; we must aim at a positive goal.⁴

THAT is the heart of the Law Giver. When God said, ‘Thou shalt not murder’ His desire went deeper than merely restraining our rage. His desire was that we would actively and intentionally work to see one another flourish! THAT is love! THAT is evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in your heart!

Not only will you NOT murder, but you will repent of the anger in your heart, and you will use your words to build up rather than to tear down, and you will help people to lay down THEIR anger! THAT is what you are called to! It sounds an awful lot like verse 9 where Jesus declared:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9 ESV)

Are you a peacemaker? Honestly sit in that for a moment. If you are a Christian, then your life should be marked – not by DIVISION – but by UNITY! The puritan Richard Sibbes issues a challenge that I would love to see us take up today. He writes:

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 200.

It would be a good contest amongst Christians, one to labour to give no offense, and the other to labour to take none. The best men are severe to themselves, tender over others.⁵

How many petty disputes would dissolve if we would learn to be severe to ourselves, and tender to one another? In this application, Jesus is calling each of us to do our part to bring about peace.

And then, lastly, he is calling us to:

2. Do it now

Look again at verses 25-26:

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:25-26 ESV)

In these verses we find a mini parable. Jesus tells a story of two men walking to court together. If the accused was wise, he would talk with his accuser on the way to try to figure out what he did wrong. He may be able to settle accounts and avoid court altogether! But if he ignores the issue and waits until he stands before the judge, it will be too late, and he will pay for what he has done.

The point of the parable is that we need to adopt a sense of urgency in our peace-making. Are you involved in a conflict? Is there a talk you need to have? Have it now! No more procrastinating!

Quit telling yourself, 'I'll just wait until it comes up naturally'. It might not ever come up naturally! And you might find yourself standing before God with unforgiveness in your heart and wrongs that you never tried to make right. He cares about the unity in His church, and He expects you to as well.

In my estimation, this is a MASSIVE blind spot in the church today. It is rare to find Christians who are brave enough and faithful enough to do the hard work of peace-making. More often, Christians in our culture simply run. We dissolve friendships. We leave churches. We do everything that we can to avoid following through with what Jesus calls us to here.

⁵ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1630, 1998), 26.

Brothers and sisters, if that is you then I want to plead with you to listen to Jesus.

Stop running.

Do your part.

And do it now.

When I say ‘now’, I mean right now! Do you have something to apologize for? Get out of your seat and get that done before you sing the closing song! That’s what Jesus calls for in verse 24:

First be reconciled to your brother, **and then come and offer your gift.** (Matthew 5:24b ESV)

Do you see that? The God of the universe is telling you: ‘Listen, I can wait! Settle that dispute first!’ The purity of our love for one another is SO IMPORTANT to God that He commands us to forego our worship until we have done our part to set things right.

Now, this doesn’t mean that we can’t worship God if people are angry at us. We don’t have the power to change one another’s hearts. But this DOES mean that we are called to do everything that IS in our power to make things right.

Do you think someone might be angry at you? Have they been cold toward you? Has your relationship soured?

Go to them. You may discover that you unknowingly sinned against them. What a great opportunity that would be to apologize! That would be so pleasing to the Lord! You may discover that you accidentally hurt them with your clumsiness. Maybe they misheard you one time, or you made them feel excluded, or you offended them accidentally. Don’t be too proud to apologize for clumsiness. Do whatever you can to make it right. And do it now.

Now, they may choose to not to forgive you. Or they may receive YOUR apology but fail to apologize for any of the ways that they sinned against you. In fact, I'm going to come right out and say that you should EXPECT that. Hurt people hurt people. But if Jesus could forgive his accusers as they nailed him to a cross – and if he could forgive you and me while we were still covered in our sin – then you can forgive people who are too immature to own their mistakes.

You see, that's the secret right there. If your eyes are on Jesus – if you see the way that he has forgiven you – then your grip will miraculously release on the anger that you used to hold so tightly. If you are in Christ, then you don't have to carry that bitterness anymore. In fact, you *can't* carry it anymore.

Lay it down at the cross. Become who you were saved to be. Start living like who you are!

A citizen of heaven! An ambassador of Jesus! A Holy Spirit empowered new creation! You could sum up this sermon – and the entire Sermon on the Mount – and the entire ethical teaching of the New Testament! – with five words.

Live. Like. Who. You. Are.

That's your calling, Christian. That's your PRIVILEGE! And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.