

The Sermon: Teachings From Jesus Christ

Part 4: A Church Full of Murderers

February 22nd & 23rd

Welcome: We're spending the first part of our year walking through the Sermon on the Mount...the most well known sermon that Jesus preached. You can find it in Matthew 5-7.

I told you last week that as we move further into Jesus' sermon, He presses deeper into the nooks and crannies of our hearts. And there will be moments when you'll feel like you're being pulled apart by His words! In the same way that a skilled surgeon cuts deep to remove disease from a sick person's body, Jesus will cut deep to expose and address the disease-ridden areas of our hearts. So...do not be surprised if Jesus' words become very uncomfortable for you at times. Don't try to run from His words if they are difficult. That would be like running from a doctor who holds the cure to your sickness. Instead, see that God might be allowing you to experience discomfort in order to heal you, maybe even to save you...because He's ultimately for your wholeness and joy!

"The Holy Spirit makes us sensitive to things we never thought of before. Never object to the intense sensitiveness of the Holy Spirit in you when He is educating you down to the scruple, and never discard a conviction. If it is important enough for the Holy Spirit to have brought it to your mind, that is the thing He is detecting." Oswald Chambers

Now...as we move further into chapter five, Jesus will take several commandments from the Law of Moses, and He'll reinterpret them...then He'll look at us and say, "This is what your life must look like! On your own you'll never live this way. But in and through me, you can!" That's the basic message of the Sermon on the Mount!

Look with me at Matthew 5:21...

"You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.'

Matthew 5:21

Jesus quotes the sixth commandment, "You must not murder." Now, the interesting thing about the law of Moses, which you might know as the ten commandments...is that many people (many of us) have a tendency to read through the law at a glance and come away feeling pretty good about themselves!

Take the last six commandments, which have to do with how we relate to people...

"Honor your father and mother." "You must not murder." "You must not commit adultery." "You must not steal." "Don't testify falsely against your neighbor." "Don't covet his house...his wife...his servant...his donkey."

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You might read these and say to yourself. "Aside from a streak of youthful rebellion when I bought the Metallica CD in high school...or got a tattoo of my girlfriend's name on my chest, I've stayed pretty true to mom and dad. Haven't murdered anyone. I've been married to the same woman for several years. It's been a long time since I stole something! I haven't really had the opportunity to testify falsely against my neighbor in court! And I don't really burn with envy over my neighbor's donkey!"

So, some of us might look at the law and say, 'if this is what God cares about, I'm doing pretty well.' Maybe that's not what you say. You might realize that you're not doing very well, and if so, be encouraged! You're in a much better place than the person who looks at the law of God with pride in his heart!

This was the Pharisees' problem! They were passionate about their knowledge of God's law, and certain that because of their rigid compliance to the law, God would accept them! The problem, Jesus said, was that their understanding of the law didn't scratch the surface of its true meaning!

And Jesus would look at us today and say the very same thing! If we look at the law and walk away from it feeling proud of our obedience, confident in our religiosity, and assured that God will accept us on the basis of our goodness, then we clearly haven't understood the depths of God's law...

If you're sick...but you believe you're healthy, then you're in a very dangerous place!

Which is why Jesus will always press deeper! Keep reading...

But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell." Matthew 5:22

Jesus says... "*It's not enough to refrain from killing someone, but you must refrain from getting angry with your neighbor, from lashing out verbally, from criticizing or insulting.*"

Idiot - The word that Jesus uses for 'idiot' comes from the Aramaic word, **Raca**. It means empty. It's like calling someone 'a nobody,' 'worthless,' 'stupid.' Behind it is the attitude of belittling someone, or of being dismissive and condescending.

Jesus is saying...regardless of whether you actually pick up the weapon to strike someone, if you look at them and say, 'he's worthless...I wish she were dead, you're no different than a murderer. If you think of someone and enjoy thoughts of their suffering or humiliation...you're just as guilty as a murderer!

How can that be?

At its core...murder is the act of destroying another person's life. The truth is that there are many ways to destroy someone's life without actually ending their life!

"You can attack another person's reputation."

"You can ridicule a colleague behind their back."

"You can speak to your spouse in such a way that causes them suffering or harm."

"You can talk to your kids in a way that crushes their peace and security."

"You can hold a grudge toward someone by refusing to be warm or gracious...and damage that relationship!"

When we do this, at best...we're harming someone's life without actually taking their life. And Jesus says, 'where this is happening in your life, and you're not dealing with it biblically, you're justifying murder!'

We might say... *"That sounds irrational. I'm not a murderer!"*

Oak Trees: If you have two acorns, both hold the potential to grow an entire oak tree. Suppose one falls into the fertile ground and takes root while the other falls onto the concrete and rots. Was the acorn that produced the tree a better acorn? No...it simply had different conditions that enabled it to grow.

Jesus is saying, *"Don't look down your nose at people who have carried out a murder. You don't understand their circumstances. You didn't have their family. You didn't grow up on their street, surrounded by the same influences. If you had been, there's no telling where you would have ended up."*

Rather...see that if your anger is causing you to hold a grudge, or to lash out at someone, you have the same seed within you. It simply hasn't been watered and placed in the right conditions to take root and grow into murder.

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's taking the law down into the crevices of our hearts!

Now...someone might say, *"Hold on for a moment. Didn't Jesus get angry? Didn't he call people fools?"* **How can Jesus equate anger with murder in one breath, and**

in another grow angry with the religious leaders and call them ‘fools’? Let’s look at that for a moment!

In Matthew 23, Jesus called the Pharisees, '***blind fools.***' And that word 'fool' that Jesus used describes a person who is so wise in his own eyes, yet so blind that he doesn't see the havoc he is wreaking! The Pharisees were rigid in their observance of the law, yet they overlooked things like justice, mercy, and love.

For example, in Mark 3, when Jesus healed a man's deformed hand, the Pharisees accused him of breaking the Sabbath and began plotting His murder! Mark writes that Jesus became angered by their hard-heartedness because they cared more about their man-made traditions than the welfare of this man!

Finally, In Matthew 21, just days before His death, Jesus entered the Temple and turned over the tables of money-changers and peddlers. He did this because they were taking advantage of those who were coming to the temple to worship God!

In each case, it helps to consider what made Jesus angry! You see, Jesus was passionate about two things...God's glory and people! And when either of those things was threatened, Jesus sometimes responded with a righteous anger.

Love: Listen...if someone that you love is being threatened, it is natural and God-given emotional response to become angry and to rise up in defense. If someone tries to harm Beth or one of my kids, I'm not going to be passive in my response, ok! In that case, my anger would be motivated by love.

Jesus' anger was always rooted in love! We see this most clearly by looking at the times when He didn't get angry. Do you remember how Jesus responded when the Roman guards drove nails through his hands and feet?

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing!" Luke 23:34

When Jesus' life was being threatened, He didn't lash out! He didn't fight back! He extended mercy. That is because Jesus' anger was never motivated by ego, pride or selfishness, but a commitment to the glory of God and the good of people!

But that's not true of us all the time...is it? We don't have a Jesus-anger. We have a Raca-anger. We tend to get angry about petty things. We get angry when someone offends us. When we feel disrespected. When our expectations haven't been met. When we don't get what we want (We get passed over for the promotion; our kids don't behave how we'd like; we're embarrassed

publicly). And when this happens, we lash out...we strike back and wreak havoc!

And Jesus says... "Watch out...your anger is the seedbed of murder, and whether you ever take someone's life isn't the point. Your anger is going to cause a lot of damage and destruction!"

The question becomes, "What do we do with our anger and harsh words or critical attitudes? What do we do if we know that Jesus is speaking to us?

Let me suggest to you that you need three things! And you can find them verses 23-24.

You need an urgency. A humility. And a sacrifice.

First... You need an urgency. (Look at verse 23)

"So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God." Matthew 5:23-24

Now...let me put this in modern language for a moment. To us, Jesus might say, when you gather together to worship and listen to the Scriptures being taught. Or...when you are off by yourself praying, and right in the middle of worship or prayer, the Holy Spirit brings someone's face to mind. And you realize that you have done something to wrong them.

You yelled at your kids...

You snapped at your spouse...

You spoke disrespectfully to your parents...

You harshly criticized a colleague...

You're harboring unkind thoughts about someone...

You ridiculed a person behind their back...

Jesus says, "If you suddenly remember that you have offended someone, leave your sacrifice at the altar (meaning, leave that place of worship or prayer), go to that person and be reconciled to them! Then, come back..."

Now...when I taught on this same passage earlier this year during our *Getting Past Your Past* series, I told you that after growing up around the church and being a pastor for 15 years, it is painful to me how often we, as Christians, don't actually take Jesus seriously. Our tendency is to sidestep Jesus' words and say, "*There is no way that Jesus actually wants me to get out of my seat, and walk out of this worship gathering to pursue reconciliation with someone I've offended!*"

Yet, this seems to be exactly what Jesus is saying!

Go – In fact, when Jesus tells us to “*GO*”, that word in the Greek implies an intense action! It means that you may have to travel or work hard to do this! **There's a sense of urgency to it!**

Jesus is saying...there is something that matters more to God than our church attendance, worship or prayer! What He really wants is for us to love our neighbor and labor for relational wholeness! The true test of whether we love God or not is whether we are willing to do everything in our power to be reconciled to our neighbor when we have offended them...

Husbands, do you humble yourself before your wife when you speak harshly toward her?

Ladies, do you confess to your husband that you've been critical and condescending toward him?

Parents, do you get on your knees in front of your children to acknowledge that you were impatient or harsh?

Are we willing to open up past wounds with a friend or family member and apologize for something we said or did?

This is the kind of worship that honors God! It is the mark of someone whose heart has been changed by Him!

Jesus says, "Go now...do whatever it takes." There's a sense of urgency to his words. And I'm going to suggest for a moment that if anger or criticism or gossip or slanderous speech has a stronghold in your life! That no matter how hard you try,

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you still continue to harm and hurt people with your words and behavior, it just might be that you haven't acted with a sense of urgency that Jesus demands!

First...You need an urgency.

Second...You need a humility.

The truth is that most of us don't see how deeply our words or attitudes affect the way that we see or treat others!

And most of the time we won't see it, unless we have someone to help us!

Beth – This week...Beth pulled me aside and asked me, *"Do you realize the tone of your voice, and how it can actually set the kids on defense?* I'll be honest. My initial response to Beth was pride. I didn't want to hear that I was hurting rather than helping the situation. But Beth was right! So, I went back and told her, then I went to my son and I confessed it to Him!

I needed Beth to be a voice of honesty in my life, because I can be too proud to see the truth about myself! It's naïve of me to think otherwise.

I believe that you need the same thing! Who is that person who you've given permission to speak into your life? What would your spouse, or a good friend say if you asked them, *"Do I come off angry? Do I speak harshly? Am I condescending or critical?"*

George Whitefield...the great English Anglican preacher understood how easy it is to become blind toward the effect that our words have on others. So, Whitefield developed a series of self-evaluation questions that he asked himself every day in the morning, at lunch, and at bedtime.

"Have I thought or spoken unkindly, unsympathetically, or uncharitably to anyone."

If you'll take the time to ask these same questions...and invite someone who knows you well to speak honestly into your life. You'll start to see things about your own heart that you never did before! And it will wreck you at first...it will humble you!

When you have the humility to see the truth about your heart! And you have a sense of urgency to do something about it! You're on the path toward healing and freedom!

But you must have one more thing!

Finally...You need a sacrifice.

My guess is that by now, most of us have identified areas of our lives where Jesus' words have hit home! If this is true, the danger is that we would take Jesus' words and say, "*I'm going to get to work on this.*" "*I'm going to temper my anger...develop some self-control.*" "*I'm going to fix the way that I speak about others.*" "*I'm going to do better!*"

But if we're being honest, we need more than good intentions don't we? I mean...how do we right wrongs from the past? How do we mend the wounds that our careless words or attitudes have caused? How do we go back and fix the damage that has already been done?

We might reconcile a relationship, but Jesus' words still stand! We're on the doorstep of judgment...in danger of the fires of hell, and when Jesus returns His will be a kingdom free of anger, resentment, harshness, and retaliation!

No worship song we sing...no prayer we pray...no gift we give, no amount of obedience today can atone for the injuries we have caused, nor can they change our hearts!

We need God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves!

In 1 Peter, the Apostle Peter speaks of this...

"For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed." 1 Peter 2:21-24

On the cross, Jesus endured the spit and slander of men. He was wrongfully accused. He was ridiculed and insulted. Yet, he did not retaliate or threaten anyone in return. Jesus suffered, but he didn't fight back!

What did He do?

He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly (meaning, He didn't judge us...if so, we'd all be dead!). Instead, He personally carried our sins in his body so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right.

Do you see what Peter is saying?

*Jesus took your anger and your meanness.
Jesus took your critical and condescending heart.
Jesus took your careless words and attitudes.
Jesus took your irritability and short temper.
He took your propensity to strike back when offended.*

Jesus died to those things...so that you can be dead to sin and live for what is right!

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones says it this way...

"Thank God, His terms are very easy. They are just this, that I face and acknowledge this sin and confess it utterly and absolutely, that I stop any self-defense or self-justification, though there was provocation from this other person. I must just confess and admit it without any reservation to God. If there is something in actual practice that I can do about it I must do it at once. Then He will tell me that all is right. 'I will settle with you', He will say, 'indeed I will forgive it all because, though you are a guilty and foul sinner before Me, and the bill you owe Me is one you can never pay, I have sent My Son into your world and He has paid it for you. He has cancelled it. He did not do it because you are loving and kind and good, He did not do it for you because you have done nothing against Me. It was while you were an enemy, hateful in yourself, hating Me and hating others. It was in spite of all your foulness and your unworthiness that I sent Him. And He came deliberately and gave Himself even unto death. It is because of all this that I forgive you utterly and freely and absolutely.' David Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

Close

Do you want to be free of anger? Do you want God to press into the attitudes of your heart that lead you toward bitterness and slanderous words and condescending attitudes? Start by confessing that sin to God and placing the trust of your heart in what Jesus has done for you!

Do you want to grow in your freedom from anger? Begin cultivating a sense of urgency in dealing with sin and brokenness. Ask the questions Whitefield asked...

"Have I thought or spoken unkindly, unsympathetically, or uncharitably to anyone."

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The best way to cultivate humility is to stop playing and cultivate honesty! Get honest about your sin!

"I'm not kind with my words."

"When I speak about people, my words have an edge."

"My spouse is afraid of me."

"I'm holding a grudge toward this person."

"I look down my nose toward certain people."

Confess that...then, go to that person and apologize! Ask for forgiveness...and do the hard work of reconciliation!

Finally, set your heart on the gospel over and over again...until the beauty of what Christ has done for you captures your heart! When you see how awful your sin is...but how beautiful and good Jesus is...and you embrace Him, your heart will be free!

And with time...you'll become more and more like Him!

Pray!