

Bible Readings

Matthew 5:21-48

Murder

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵ "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Adultery

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it

off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Divorce

³¹ "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths

³³ "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' ³⁴ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Eye for Eye

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.

Love for Enemies

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour 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.

Sermon How True Righteousness Works in Daily Life 21-Mar-21

Context/Recap

- We continuing our series on Matthew's Gospel
- We've had a break from it for 2 weeks
- But last time we looked at Jesus' Sermon on Mount
- One of the most amazing parts of scripture
- Jesus' sermon goes from Chapter 5:1 to Chapter 7:29
- In our earlier looks at chapter 5
 - We looked at the attitudes we should have as followers of Jesus
 - And we said that Jesus didn't come to get rid of God's Law but to fulfil it in all perfect obedience
 - And we said - we should hunger and thirst to be like Jesus - not so we are saved for Heaven - Jesus is the one who saves us- but so we become more like Jesus
- In our passage this morning - Jesus explains what it means to hunger and thirst to be like Jesus - and He makes it clear it's not just about what we do but in fact about who we are inside

Intro/Self Righteousness

I was listening recently to a minister who had a prison ministry - he visited inmates in prison.

One day he visited an inmate who'd been imprisoned for rape - the inmate told the minister "at least I haven't murdered anyone"

An hour later, he visited an inmate who'd been imprisoned for murder - the inmate told the minister "at least I haven't raped anyone"

(pause)

I wonder if we're guilty of saying similar things?

We might say "I may have told lies occasionally - but I haven't murdered or raped anyone - or committed adultery? I'm not that bad!"

I wonder if we're guilty of grading sin?

Do we think God gave us rules to put on our fridge and go - Tick - I haven't done that one or that one or that one - 7 out of 10 isn't bad?

Do we think God gave us His commands - so we compare how bad or good we are in relation to someone else?

That sort of thinking is being "self-righteousness"

It's not up to us to decide if we're righteous or not

Righteousness means being right with God - He determines whether we are

And as we said last time - in **Jesus' day** - there were a **bunch of religious people** - called the **Pharisees** - who were **self-righteousness**

So, in v20 Jesus tells the crowd listening:

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

So, in our passage this morning

Jesus shows what it means to have righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees

You see the **Pharisees had the wrong idea about God's laws - they thought being right with God meant obeying a list of external actions that were sinful - like the list on the fridge - but Jesus is about to **make a fundamental change** without altering God's laws. **He's going to deal - not with externals - but internals - He's going to look at the **attitudes of the heart.******

So, Jesus looks at six important Old Testament laws - and interprets them for the people listening - in terms of the new life He came to give

Six Commands Jesus Intensifies

Murder (vv21-26)

[PowerPoint 1-Murder]

- The **first command** comes from the 10 commandments Ex 20:13
- Which says simply "You shall not murder"
- **Murder** is: *the unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another.*
- Should be easy enough to tick that off the list on the fridge - we haven't murdered anyone - tick!
- But look at how **Jesus intensifies the teaching on murder**
- Jesus says V22 - *but I tell you anyone who is angry with a brother or sister - he's not talking family - he's talking community - if anyone is angry with someone - they're just as guilty as if they murdered them*
- Jesus is saying - if we give someone a verbal lashing in anger - "You fool! You idiot! You moron!" - we're guilty
- Jesus didn't say anger leads to murder - He said anger is murder
- He's saying anger and hatred is murder in the heart
- As 1 John 3:15 puts it: *Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.*

- Application - what are we going to do with the anger or hatred we have inside
- **It needs to be repented of** - doesn't it?
- **Jesus gives a way forward** - in verses 23-26
- **He says if we come to worship and remember that someone has something against us**
- Then we **need to go and sort it out** -
- This **requires** again **examining our heart** - do we have a grudge or resentment or **anger against someone** - then go and sort it out - before worshipping
- **God wants our worship of Him to be pure** - and not hindered or distracted by an unresolved problem with someone - because then we're not focusing on God
- Question - is there someone we need to reconcile with?
- The longer we wait - the worse the resentment - the worse the anger or hatred festers
- **Matthew 18** - gives a good way of reconciliation

Adultery (vv27-30)

- The **second command** Jesus deals with is also from 10 commandments
Exodus 20:14 - You shall not commit adultery

[PowerPoint 2-Adultery]

- **Adultery:** *is voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not their spouse.*
- **Again** - it might be easy for us to tick that off the list on the fridge too - and say well I haven't committed adultery - tick!
- **But look how Jesus intensifies the commandment** about adultery
- Jesus says - v28 - *anyone who looks at someone in lust has committed adultery in their heart*
- We're not talking about **admiring a woman's beauty** - A man might say - "Wow! Michelle Pfeiffer or Marilyn Munroe are absolutely beautiful" - that's not lust
- A woman might say "Pearce Brosnan or Brad Pitt are so gorgeous and handsome" - that's not lust either
- Lust is: *a strong sexual desire*
- It's going beyond thinking someone is beautiful or handsome - **to undressing them with our eyes** - and desiring to have sex with them
- It includes - **sexual flirtation** - **sexual inuendo** - it includes looking at pornography - all these things are saying - **I want that other person and I desire them more than my husband or wife** - even though you might not actually act on those desires
- You see Jesus - is going beyond the act of "doing" - and saying sin comes from the heart - and **He's addressing the sinful desires** of our heart
- And of course, **Jesus gives the solution** - in vv29-30

- If your eye is causing you to sin - pluck it out
- If your hand is causing you to sin - chop it off
- In some cases, in **Saudi Arabia** - hands are amputated -for theft
- Is Jesus being literal?
- He's certainly being radical -
- If we plucked both our eyes out - would that stop us lusting - we can still lust in our hearts?
- If we chop both our hands off - does that stop us lusting - we can still put our arms around a woman or man in lust - in our hearts
- Jesus' point - is whatever is causing a person to lust (or sin in other ways for that matter) - needs to be removed
- A minister I heard about - who speaks to people addicted to looking at pornography - tells people to get rid of their computer - so far no one has taken his advice - but really that is the only solution - unless someone else has the password and watches the person use the computer all the time!
- 50 years ago - people had to go to a certain venue to see porn - or buy pornographic magazines from a special shop - now it's accessible by the click of a button - so there needs to be something radical - to avoid the temptation
- Are we serious about removing lust, pornography, sexual flirtations, secret messages & meetings with the opposite sex from our lives?

Divorce (vv31-32)

- The **third command Jesus deals with** is
- This is dealt with in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**

[PowerPoint 3-Divorce]

- The command was that if a **man divorces a woman** and gives her a **certificate of divorce**, and she **marries another man**; and this **second man also divorces her**, she cannot return to the first husband
- The idea behind this command was to **make the husband think twice before hastily divorcing his wife as he can't get her back again.**
- Also, it would take time to find a scribe to write a certificate of divorce - which **gave an estranged couple time to reconcile** their differences
- Where the sticking point came though, was the **grounds for divorce**
- What does it mean when Deut 24:2 says a man can divorce his wife if he finds something indecent about her?
- There were **2 schools of thought in Jesus' time** - from **2 different Rabbi schools**
- **Rabbi Hillel** and his school took a **lax view** and said a **man could divorce for almost any reason** - **like burning his breakfast**
- Whereas **Rabbi Shammai** - said **divorce was only allowed for sexual sin** - i.e., **unfaithfulness in a marriage**

- The problem in Jesus' day and today - is that **people divorce without really attempting to address the problems they have** - and there's a **very loose view of marriage** - so much so that in some countries - **people take out a pre-marriage agreement before they get married** - to say **what will happen should they break up** - that's hardly a serious commitment to staying together
- When Jesus was asked about marriage and divorce in Matthew 19 - **He went back to God's original design and intention for marriage** -
- God's plan for marriage was it was to be a **life-long exclusive commitment between a man and a woman** - **God's plan for marriage is that the two become one flesh** - the original Hebrew has the idea of being joined together permanently - it's like the couple are **superglued together**
- So, Jesus says here in v32 and in Matthew 19:9 that the **grounds for divorce are sexual immorality** - i.e., being unfaithful in marriage [I would include domestic violence as being unfaithful in marriage too]
- But **Jesus also acknowledged that Moses permitted divorce in OT** - because people's hearts were hard
- There's that heart thing again
- **People divorce because their heart is not for their spouse anymore** - their heart is **hard, selfish and unloving**
- It boils down to the fact that **people aren't loving each other** as God intended

- The **Apostle Paul** (in Ephesians 5) **describes marriage as husbands loving their wives like Jesus loved the church** - how was that - **Jesus loved the church by dying for it** - so a husband must love his wife **sacrificially with a to-die-for love**. In doing so - the wife will willingly want to follow a husband who loves her like that. Notice the onus is on the man - as head of the house - to love the woman **sacrificially like Jesus**
- When this happens - love **can't fail** - Paul says love never fails in 1 Cor 13:8 - **why? Because God is love.**
- When divorce happens **it's not God failing** - **His love never fails** - **it's humans failing to love as God intended**
- So, the question is - **in our marriages are we loving each other as God intended** - **are we committed to a lifelong relationship** - **committed to resolving difficulties** - or are our hearts hard?
- One final point on divorce - even in the case of there being **unfaithfulness in a marriage** - God doesn't command that the couple divorce - **He only permits it**
- In any marriage unfaithfulness - **there is the Godly option of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation**

Oaths and Vows (vv33-37)

- The **fourth command Jesus deals with** is the command to do with oaths and vows

- Lev 19:12 & Num 30:2 & Deut 23:21 - says **people are not to make a false oath or vow** - they shouldn't promise to do something - and then not do it!

[PowerPoint 4-Vows and Oaths]

- Why is that? Because God hears that vow - and He holds them to account
- Again, **Jesus intensifies the idea of making vows**
- See vv34-37 - *Jesus says that our conversation should be so honest, and our character so true, that we should not need "crutches" to get people to believe us. Words depend on character and oaths cannot compensate for a poor character.*
- Jesus and James 5:12 - both say **all we need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No" – rather than swearing by someone or something.**
- **The more words a person says to convince us they're telling the truth, the more suspicious we should be!** "The lady doth protest too much"
{Hamlet: Shakespeare}
- We've had some examples of making promises this morning in our service - the **new members made certain promises** - they're not making these promises to me or to the congregation, we're merely witnesses - these promises are made to God. They didn't swear on their children's lives or their dog's life - they simply said **"I do"** to the questions asked
- It's the same with marriage promises - the couple say **"I do"** before God
- What about us - can our **"Yes"** be trusted - can our **"No"** be trusted?

(pause)

Retaliation (vv38-42)

- The **fifth command** Jesus deals with is the command to do with **retaliation**

[PowerPoint 5-Retaliation]

- The OT [Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20 and Deut 19:21] teaches that the **offender is to pay back like for like**. It was a **fair law** in that it didn't force the offender to pay a greater price than the original offense deserved.
- **Again, Jesus intensifies the law - with an attitude: be willing to suffer loss yourself rather than cause another to suffer.**
- Of course, this is for "personal" offences/insults - not groups or nations. The **person who retaliates only makes themselves and the offender feel worse, and the result is a fight rather than peace**.
- In order to **turn the other cheek, we must stay where we are and not run away**. This demands both faith and love. It also means that **we will be hurt; but it is better to be hurt on the outside rather than be harmed on the inside**. It also means we should try to **help the offender**. **We are vulnerable, because the offender may attack us again; but we are also victorious, because **Jesus is on our side, helping us and building our characters**.**

- Psychologists say violence is born of weakness, not strength. It is the **strong person** who can love and suffer hurt; it is the weak person who thinks only of themselves and hurts to protect themselves. **They hurt others and then run away.**
- By turning the other cheek, we are **showing the offender a better way.**

Love to Enemies (vv43-48)

- The **sixth and final command** Jesus deals with is **loving our enemies**

[PowerPoint 6-Love to Enemies]

- The **OT taught** to **love your neighbour-** and in certain cases to treat **people that were anti-God - as your enemy**
- **Jesus** again **intensifies the command** - see v44
- He says **love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us**
- Why would Jesus tell us to love our enemies - **enemies are enemies, right?**
- **Here's Jesus' reasons** from vv44-48
 - It is a **sign of maturity** that we are "sons" (literally) of God, the Father, and not just little children.
 - **It is Godlike.** The Father shares His good things [sun and rain] with those who oppose Him.
 - Loving our enemies **creates a "climate" of blessings** that makes it **easy to win our enemies** and **make them our friends.**

- It is a **testimony to others**, when we show love to enemies. God expects us to live on a higher plane than the people lost from God. The latter return good for good and evil for evil. As Christians we must return good for evil; this is **an investment of love** - and **shows them the love of Christ** - and **may win them to Christ**

Solution - Jesus' Perfect Righteousness

- You might be saying to yourself - it's **all too hard** - Jesus has **raised the bar too high**
- Well, **Praise God** - we're standing on this side of the cross - and not sitting on the hillside listening to the **Sermon by Jesus**

[PowerPoint 6-Self-Righteousness]

- We need to realize it's not about our self-righteousness - it's about Jesus' **perfect righteousness** and what He has done for us!
- So, how do we purify our hard hearts?
- Well clearly - **we need to search our hearts to** see if there are any offensive ways in us (Psalm 139:23-4) - and **repent**
- And then we need to **come to the One who makes us right with God**
 - The One - who **never had anger** other than righteous anger over sin
 - Who **never murdered anyone**

- Who never looked with lustful eyes at a woman
- Who never put His arms around a woman in lust - only with love and compassion
- Whose eyes were blinded by tears/blood/sweat - as He hanged on a cross crucified for the sin of the world
- Whose hands were nailed to a cross - not around a woman in lust
- Who never broke a promise - but in fact - is the one who fulfils all of God's Promises
- Who didn't retaliate with an eye for eye - who literally turned the other cheek - and who literally went the extra mile - and carried His cross to the Hill of Calvary
- Who loved His enemies - by laying down His life for them on the cross
- Who prayed for those who persecuted Him - and even said "*Father, forgive them – they don't know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34)
- And as we come to Jesus - we remember He has made us right with God
- And we remember that apart from Jesus we can do nothing (John 15:5)
- And we remember - as the Apostle Paul says - Phil 4:13 - "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me"

Let's pray...