

“But I Say to You: ANGER” Matthew 5:20-26

Wednesday 6/26/19 – Jeff Lyle

As Jesus goes deeper into His message on the hillside, He begins to move His hearers beyond the popularly accepted religious teachings of their day. Opening with a shocking statement about the eternal destination of the Jewish leaders and teachers, Jesus intentionally shifts focus from our outward moral behaviors to the inward condition of our hearts. While all of those listening would agree that murder is a sin, Jesus calls them to address the deeper issue of unresolved anger in their hearts. In doing so, He begins a portion of the Sermon on the Mount that forces all of us to diagnose the status of our own hearts before His exalted Kingdom expectations for us. Actions are easier to manage than attitudes. The King wants all of His followers to know that He did not come to enforce a new moral behavioral list of regulations. He came to completely transform our hearts.

I. Jesus Hits A Reset for Kingdom Thinking (20)

A. The Kingdom is more than moral behavior (20) - “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus is about to launch into a portion of His sermon which challenges the current belief system of His day that was established primarily by the scribes and Pharisees concerning who would be able to enter the Kingdom of God. The scribes and Pharisees were the biblical scholars and religious leaders of their day. They were moral, educated, extremely conservative and very disciplined. Their growing list of traditions had come to a near-equal status with the Law of God. Entirely absent, however, was any emphasis on true heart change. These religious leaders knew the Law and how to enforce it, along with their list of human standards. Jesus never came to abolish the Law of God, but He did come to reveal that mere outward obedience to religious rules was not at the heart of His Kingdom. As He affirmed the Law of God, Jesus says no fewer than six times, “*But I say unto you...*” He is elevating everyone’s understanding about what Kingdom righteousness means. It is first a heart issue, secondarily a behavioral issue.

B. The Kingdom is beyond traditional teachings (Matthew 7:28-29) - “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were

astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

When it comes time for Jesus to conclude this sermon, the people are impacted heavily by how He says what He says. As Matthew describes in 7:28-29, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." His original audience recognized that Jesus did not view the common teachings of the scribes and Pharisees as being sufficient to characterize the nature of the Kingdom of God. He spoke with holy authority to issues of the heart. By the time He concludes this Sermon on the Mount, all those who heard them understood that Jesus was offering them something they had never heard from the accepted religious instruction that they had been given by their human leaders. Jesus spoke with Heaven's power to the deepest issues of the Kingdom. He dealt with their hearts, not just their behaviors.

I. The Hebrew Bible Addressed Murder (21)

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'

Jesus will speak to six separate issues that He will call His listeners to explore more deeply: **Anger, Lust, Divorce, Keeping your word, Revenge, and Love**. In this message, we will focus on the first in His list: Anger in the heart.

A. Their ancient examples - "You have heard that it was said to those of old..."

Jesus' audience would have been very familiar with the many life-stories in their bible. Violence, murder and anger is all over their bible, our Old Testament. Jesus establishes that to commit murder is to act in a sinful way that is foreign to the heart of the Father. Below are just a few examples in which it would have been easy for His audience to see the spirit of murder at work.

1. Cain - the first recorded sin of man against man was murder
2. Joseph's brothers - envy, jealousy, bitterness and anger led them to get rid of Joseph
3. The days of the Judges - every man did that which was right in his own eyes which bred extreme violence
4. King Saul - insecurity, envy, bitterness, and vengeance led to attempts to murder David

B. God's eternal expectation - "...You shall not murder..."

The seventh of the Ten Commandments forbids murder. This was and is still a non-negotiable prohibition within the Kingdom. God is a Father, and every human life comes from Him. To take that life in an act of violence breaks the seventh commandment. While we will see below that God does not forbid all killing, He distinguishes murder as a sin. Jesus will go beyond the action of murder and address the source of it within the human heart.

C. The judicial execution - "...whoever murders will be liable to judgment."

Jesus reminds His hearers that God attached capital punishment to the sin of murder (see Genesis 9:6 below). To take a human life is to place yourself in jeopardy of having your own life taken as an activity of God's justice. **Many Christians are surprised to learn that God is not opposed to capital punishment.** While, as individuals, we are to always lean toward mercy, grace and forgiveness, God allows for the human institution of government to legitimately carry out justice via capital punishment. The Apostle Paul highlights below in Romans 13:3-4 below that, even in New Testament times, human government is permitted to enforce capital punishment. To "bear the sword" is a reference to judicial execution. Paul characterizes human government as operating in the role of God's servant to carry out His justice against evildoers. There is a heavy warning in these truths for all of us to seriously consider.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image." - **Genesis 9:6**

"For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."

- **Romans 13:3-4**

II. Jesus Reveals the Spirit of Murder (22)

A. Smoldering anger in the heart - "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother..."

Most of us have never committed murder with our hands. I would venture to say that all of us have, however, felt the impulse in our hearts. Jesus addresses people who have present anger towards another residing within their hearts. Murder is the fruit, but unresolved anger is the root. Who

among us has not had a moment of rage toward another person? When we are mistreated or misrepresented by someone else, there arises the possibility of some angry seed burrowing into the soil of our hearts. When we do not process that anger in a manner that is consistent with the nature of God, we can become bitter, and even learn to live with managed anger at the core of our beings. Becoming angry with someone is not always a sin but *remaining* angry with them definitely is. Jesus' words motivate us to examine our hearts to see if we have unresolved anger living within us.

B. Spoken anger with the mouth - “...whoever insults his brother...and whoever says, You fool...”

Jesus reminds us that our words are manufactured in our hearts. Your heart is the factory of all that your mouth produces. When angry, insulting or derogatory words come from our lips about another person, it is always due to something foul living within our hearts. It is impossible for the Holy Spirit to produce sinful words in us. Whatever our mouths speak discloses the contents of our hearts. Jesus declares in Luke 6:45, "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.**" Anger will not be able to be buried, ignored or hidden forever. Eventually, people with anger in their hearts will release anger with their words.

C. Sinful anger with consequences - “...will be liable to judgment...will be liable to the council...will be liable to the hell of fire.”

What does Jesus mean here? Jesus is referencing both temporary and eternal judgment. Can we possibly be damned for saying unkind, unloving, insulting words to others? Of course not. Jesus is not trying to teach that breaking rules about what we say will cause us to enter into eternal judgment. **Remember, He is seeking to elevate our understanding about His Kingdom.** While the rule is "You shall not kill," Jesus is trying to get us to think on what might produce the activity of murder. He is revealing the status of our hearts. Anger can birth murder. How might we know if we have hearts that are angry? By analyzing what comes forth from our mouths. If a person can easily insult, judge or harshly speak to or about another person, that person should be very concerned about his or her heart. Is it legitimate for any of us to believe we have been born again through faith in Jesus, while still acting in patterns of sinful speech toward others? It is not the breaking of rules that Jesus wants us to see, it is the condition of our hearts. If our words are fueled by lovelessness or anger, how can we say that Christ rules our hearts? If He does not rule our hearts, then how can we legitimately believe we have eternal life? The scribes and

Pharisees focus on the act of murder as being sinful. Jesus goes beyond their teaching and raises the possibility of our having murderous hearts even though our hands have not committed the act.

III. Jesus Prioritizes Repentance from Anger (23-25a)

A. Search your heart (23) - “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you...”

What a practical teaching from Jesus! He offers the illustration of one of us coming to a time and place of focused worship toward God. While we approach the Lord in humility, reverence and submission, suddenly, an awareness of a rift between us and another person comes to mind. Perhaps we try to continue on with our prayers, our singing, our private worship as we suppress the uncomfortable awareness that things are not quite right between us and the other person. This is not necessarily a rare occurrence. We present ourselves to worship God, and the Holy Spirit brings to mind a broken human relationship that we have been ignoring.

B. Submit your heart (24a) - “Leave your gift there before the altar and go.”

Jesus instructs here to stop worshiping God. Stop praying. Stop singing. Stop preaching. Stop giving. Before we go another inch in our outward worship of God, Jesus tells us to get up and leave. What could be so important, so urgent, that Jesus commands us to stop worshiping and leave that place?

C. Sanctify your heart (24b) - “...first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

This might startle some of us who are reading. We are not imagining things. Jesus tells us to leave worship and go do whatever is in our power to make things right with the person/people with whom we have fractured fellowship. He does not leave us any wiggle-room here. Before we pray, before we sing, before we worship God, the call of God is to make things right with one another. This is shocking! Jesus links our human relationships to our ability to offer Heavenly worship. God will not receive worship from our lips if our hearts are refusing to work at our human relationships. While this is not always an easy task, the Savior wants us to do whatever we are able to do to ensure that our hearts are free from friction, discord or division in our human relationships. Once we have done what we are able to do, no matter how the other person/people responded, we are invited to come back immediately and resume our holy and heartfelt worship of God.

D. Soothe your heart (25a) - “Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court...”

Jesus offers the illustration of a person who has wronged another needing to seek to make things right prior to standing before the judge. How much wiser would it be for the wrongdoer to seek to resolve the matter before he/she had to stand before a judge? In the illustration, God is the judge in the courtroom. We are the person who has an accusation against us due to our brother/sister having something against us. Jesus urges us to quickly seek to bring closure to the matter before the judge has to weigh in.

IV. Jesus Sobers Us About the Fallout from Anger (25b-26)

A. Unresolved anger imprisons you (25b) - “...lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.”

Now Jesus unveils what can happen to those who refuse to deal with the anger in their hearts. The person with whom we are at odds brings the case before God, the judge. God rules against us in this illustration. Please make a mental note that the ruling is not primarily about the specifics of the issue between us and the other person. The ruling is about whether or not we chose to obey the command to try and settle the matter with the one with whom we have the broken relationship. When God moves in the matter, the illustration moves from a courtroom scene to a scene within a prison. The application is that God turns us over to the guards (some other authority), and the guards place us in a prison. Almost without exception, those who refuse to deal with the anger, friction or relational discord in their hearts will end up feeling imprisoned. Relationships become cages. Freedom disappears. Vision becomes a cold dark wall in a cell. Unresolved anger locks us down. God turns us over to our own flesh or, perhaps, even the enemy (See Matthew 18:23-34). He cannot bless the bitterness in our hearts.

B. Unresolved anger isolates you (26a) - “Truly, I say to you, you will never get out...”

Not letting up on His heavy emphasis on our need to live free from anger, Jesus leaves a life-sentence of unhappiness over us. He literally tells us that we should have no expectation to experience the joy, freedom and power of God in our lives if we choose to continue to ignore our soured hearts.

C. Unresolved anger impoverishes you (26b) - "...until you have paid the last penny."

It is extremely helpful to remember that we can exit our inner prison-cell if we will simply settle the debt we owe. We owe one another forgiveness because we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:32). We owe each other a debt of love as those who are loved by God (Romans 13:8). As people who have received mercy, we are to extend mercy to others (Matthew 7:2). If we refuse to forgive others, we cut ourselves off from the experience of living in the forgiveness of God. When we humble ourselves and seek to honor those made in the image of God, He views those actions as our desire to honor Him. If we will seek to make it right with the other person/people God will open the cell and we will walk out pardoned and free.