November 15, 2015

“You Shall Not…Hate”

Matthew 5:21-26

**FCF**: Concern and confusion about hatred

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Jesus came to fulfill the law.

(magnet) We need to hear what He says on this – including murder.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

You may have heard about the recent student protests at University of Missouri that led to the resignation of the president and chancellor. Protests were said to be over a perceived lack of response to a series of racially-charged incidents. Which, of course, would be about hatred.

You may also have heard that, after those resignations, a communications professor was caught on camera confronting a student journalist and trying to block him from filming and taking photos – as if a public protest could be kept private. Which, of course, was hypocritical.

There’s some confusion about anger and hatred – what it is and how to handle it.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 5:21-26

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

There’s something about the fall that makes me think of road trips. Perhaps it’s the color changes in the landscapes. Perhaps it’s memories of travelling to football games. Perhaps it’s because of the times over the years we’ve set out to see family in late November and December. Whatever it is, whatever route you take, whatever stops you make along the way, it all leads to your destination. Which is the goal and purpose of the trip. It’s the point of making it.

Jesus says these striking words (READ Matthew 5:17). We talked about this last week. All the Old Testament points to Him. All the ceremonies and sacrifices, the history and key figures, the prophecies, poetry, and wisdom pointed to and prepared for His coming. And all the commands as well. All the laws and testimonies, precepts and rules, were right and true but served to anticipate His teaching that would fulfill them all, making clear their full meaning and intent. All that had been hinted at, alluded to, Jesus was making clear (READ Matthew 5:17).

Jesus came to fulfill the law. From here, as the Sermon on the Mount unfolds, He gives six examples of how His fulfilling the law plays out – including the command not to murder. Jesus came to fulfill the law. We need to hear what He says on this – including on murder.

To get at this, we need to look at three things. First, the command itself. Second, the correction Jesus gives regarding the command. And, third, the needed cautions He gives us.

1. **THE COMMAND**

So, first, we have the 6th commandment (READ Matthew 5:21). After the exodus, God said to Israel, “*I’ve redeemed you. This is then what it means to be in relationship with me*.”

1. *What It Said*

Let’s look at two things. First, what the command said. Then, how it came to be read.

1. Murder prohibited

The command was not “You shall not kill” but “You shall not murder.” Meaning that it ruled out the premeditated taking of an innocent life. Which has implications for us today as we think about the issues of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, just war, self-defense, and capital punishment.

1. Grounds of the prohibition

The grounds of the prohibition are the eternal value and inestimable worth of all human persons. For all human persons – no matter who they are – are made in the image and likeness of God.

*Illustration:*

C. S. Lewis put it this way in “The Weight of Glory” (READ quote):

It is a serious thing to…remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal…It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

That’s the grounds. That is why we have the 6th commandment, “You shall not murder.”

1. *How It Was Read*

That’s what the commandment said. But how did it come to be read?

1. Limited application

In Jesus’ day, it had a limited application. Meaning that it spoke only to the actual taking of a physical life. No more. And the penalty would be carried out by an earthly court. That’s it.

1. Grounds for the casuistry

Now, the grounds for this casuistry, the cause of this misguided emphasis on legal technicalities, was what? It was easier. It’s easier to limit how far the commands reach and how much they demand of us. It’s easier to play down the stakes and the gravity of these words.

But though this was how it was read, we need to grapple with what was actually said.

*Application:*

Which sets the stage for the correction in the next point. But before we go there, we need to ask this question. Are we aware of such casuistry in our own hearts, of these legal shenanigans? Is it possible that we too could be limiting the application, deluding ourselves as to our heart’s condition, thinking too lightly of the value and worth of other people, and dismissing the possibility that we could be murderers? Because, think with me here, it is easier, isn’t it?

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1. **THE CORRECTION**

Which brings us to the correction (READ Matthew 5:21-22). What’s going on here?

1. *Clarifications*

First, we need a few clarifications, some clearing away of some confusing debris.

1. Not a critique of the law

First, Jesus is not criticizing the law itself. The law is timeless and truthful, an expression of the heart of God. Jesus is not criticizing the law but the human traditions that surrounded the law.

1. Not against all forms of anger

Second, Jesus is not speaking against all forms of anger. Jesus himself got angry – never for personal mistreatment but always for the sake of others. So He is not speaking against all forms of anger but against anger borne of pride, malice, and hate. There is a righteous indignation.

1. *Intensifications*

Moving then from the clarifications, let’s look at the intensifications that we find here.

1. Situations

 (READ Matthew 5:22a) Given that God alone can see the heart, the judgment mentioned here must be His. (READ Matthew 5:22b) The insult here is one of abuse, an attack on intelligence. The council beyond just the temporal. (READ Matthew 5:22c) The insult here is an attack on character. The “hell of fire” referring to a site used for child sacrifices years before, later a smoldering garbage dump in Jesus’ time, known then as a symbol of eternal punishment.

1. Summary

The point being that Jesus is concerned not just for the fruit of murder but its root, the anger within. So He extends both the nature of the crime and the duration of the penalty. For such anger is a sign of what? Of a low view of another person and a desire to be rid of them.

We need to take this seriously and ask if we will hear the correction to the command.

*Illustration:*

I saw a headline this past week, “*Suspect in New Mexico Road Rage Killing Pleads Not Guilty*.” Tony Torrez is accused of killing a four-year-old girl, Lilly Garcia. Lilly’s father had just picked up her and her brother from school. Along the way, an incident took place over a lane change. There was an argument that escalated. Torrez shot Lilly in the head as he was chasing her father’s pickup truck. And now a family is left grieving the loss of this little girl.

*Application:*

We say, “I’d never do that.” Well, maybe we wouldn’t carry it that far. But think with me. What do we do in traffic snarls? What do we say? What’s going on in our hearts? Or in social gatherings and the petty snubs? Or at sporting events and the bad calls? Consider how easily we erupt over such small personal offenses. And then what Jesus actually says about this.

We need to stop our arrogant minimizing of His commands. To feel such anger and contempt is equated to murder. And any form of murder deserves a grave punishment.

Jesus came to fulfill the law. We need to hear Him on this, including on murder.

1. **THE CAUTIONS**

Which then brings us to the needed cautions Jesus gives (READ Matthew 5:23-26). If anger is this serious, then action needs to be taken. Jesus then puts these two scenarios before us.

1. *Make Peace with Your Brother*

And the first presses home the need to make peace with a brother.

1. Explanation

The context is temple worship. A more contemporary context would be a church service. But we need to notice this. Who is angry here? Not us but someone else, another party, angry at us.

1. Principle

The idea being that, if it’s good for us to refrain from anger within our hearts, then in love, we should strive to do all we can to prevent such anger within someone else’s heart. Do you see?

And note Jesus does not say they have “something justified against you” or they have a right to be offended. It’s just that they are offended. So we need to go to them, seeking reconciliation.

1. *Make Peace with Your Enemy*

We need to make peace with a brother. And, pushing further, also with an enemy.

1. Explanation

The context here is the judicial system of the time and the custom of debt imprisonment. Moving this to our context, we might see it as settling out of court, before things get out of hand.

1. Principle

“Come to terms quickly” with them, not so much here for their sake but for yours. Do all you can. Take responsibility for what you’ve done. Don’t delay. Take immediate action.

The clarification of the command demands these serious cautions. Whether it’s a brother or an enemy, we cannot afford to wait. Do what it takes. Do not delay. Take immediate action.

*Illustration:*

My office sits near I-24. So occasionally I’ll hear sirens and then see emergency vehicles heading to an accident scene. An ambulance, in case someone is hurt. A fire truck, in case of hazards. The police, to make a report and clear the traffic. But what if the 9-11 call went out and got no response? Not because no one was available but because no one felt like it? What would we say? They were being derelict in their duty, not grasping the urgency of the situation.

*Application:*

What about us? Do we grasp the urgency of the situation when a brother has something against us? Do we see the need to go to them lest that anger take root to their harm? Do we grasp the urgency of the situation when an enemy has something against us? Do we see the need to go to them lest that anger take root to our own harm? Or do we dismiss it, as though it doesn’t matter. It may not to us. But it does to Jesus. Hear these words of John Stott (READ quote):

Yet how seldom do we heed Christ’s call for immediacy of action! If murder is a horrible crime, malicious anger and insult are horrible too. And so is every deed, word, look or thought by which we hurt or offend a fellow human being. We need to be more sensitive about these evils. We must never allow an estrangement to remain, still less to grow. We must not delay to put it right. We must not even allow the sun to set on our anger. But *immediately*, as soon as we are conscious of a broken relationship, we must take the initiative to mend it, to apologize for the grievance we have caused, to pay the debt we have left unpaid, to make amends.

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**CONCLUSION:**

So where does this leave us? Jesus came to fulfill the law. That’s clear. The problem we have with this is not lack of clarity. Our problem is far more serious and runs far deeper.

I’m travelling a bit these days for our presbytery’s Shepherding Committee. Which means I’m on my cellphone before and after meetings. Occasionally, the signal will drop in and out as I’m heading through the hills. Sometimes it’s hard to hear the person on the other end.

That’s not our problem here. It’s not that Jesus isn’t clear on the nature and extent of the command. The problem is in here, in us. For we do get angry. And not for the right reasons. We want what we want. We don’t get what we want so we get angry – angry at those in our way, angry at those who won’t give us what we want. Which leads to our broken relationships and our hesitation to restore what’s been broken. It’s just too hard. And we take it too lightly.

We have a problem. But we also have good news. Jesus, the One who requires these things of us, redeems. Jesus, the One who speaks these strong words, saves. Jesus, the One who gives us these penetrating commands, gave His life as a ransom. And His Spirit to help.

Again, Jesus came to fulfill the law. Let’s hear what He says on this – including murder.

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