

July 14, 2019

## Lesson7: Jesus Teaches Us to Love One Another

Scripture: Matthew 5: 21-32

### Context:

This week continues with Jesus's sermon on the mount with another passage. This time Jesus moves from allusions to very practical and real concerns of the crowds that have gathered. There are certain behaviors Jesus wants to warn against and there are healthy ways that people can move forward. He has given them the theoretical knowledge and now it is time for the practical knowledge.

These next several verses are part of what are known as antitheses. The beatitudes gave blessings, and the antitheses give the form of "you have heard it said, . . . , but I say to you." It is the equivalent of revisiting past theories or facts and either adding to them or saying that they many mean something different from what is previously understood. The primacy of many of these antitheses is that there is an ethic of love as the key command to the scriptures.<sup>1</sup> These are not so much new laws as they are a calling towards a new way of life.

Jesus begins with the Ten Commandments and addresses two of the ones that deal with love of self and of neighbor. The first deals with murder. Jesus explains that it is not just the act of murder that violates the law of God, it is the anger that gives birth to physical violence and murder that God condemns.<sup>2</sup> Jesus then breaks down that murder is more than killing someone. It is all the behaviors that lead up to killing: calling them ugly names, labeling them as fools, holding long term grudges, being uncivil in matters of conflict, and then borrowing without giving back. All those could be considered forms that lead to violence and murder of sorts. Jesus's teachings fall in line with the rabbinical teachings of the day and enforce the understanding that murder is any form of violence that hurts a neighbor in any form or fashion.

The second antithesis moves to the topic of adultery, another one of the Ten Commandments. Like the first antithesis, this one moves to deeper intentions that go on with the commandment. In Exodus and Leviticus, there are specific understandings of marital "theft:" an adulterer (a man) deprives another married man of his rights concerning his wife.<sup>3</sup> Yet Jesus goes on to say more about the topic: it is not just the act of adultery that are sins, it is the things that lead up to it including lust and the small movements that lead to the act. It is a violation not only of the man, but of the woman whose rights have been violated in the process. Jesus then goes on to make it clear that men who chose to forego their marriage and divorce their wives due to lust have committed adultery and have broken a relationships at the expense of their own ego. They cause a system of brokenness and hurt to continue.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare, "Matthew," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1993), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 53.

## **Application**

The basic premise of Jesus's teachings in these scriptures is that relationships are important. Whether it is our acquaintance or someone that stirs within us a deep passion, we are called to respect them and to treat them with reverence. Every human being is valuable and no one deserves to be hurt or dismissed.

In the first antitheses we learn that the sin with murder is not just about spilling someone's blood. Murder begins when we have anger towards another person that simmers and festers. While some of us may have not thought of spilling someone's blood, we all have probably thought of ways to hurt others, particularly when we do not get our way. This even means when we call others ugly names, we are transgressing that line that Jesus has given us.

Perhaps what is most condemning here is that Jesus tells us that not even our offerings mean what we want them to when we harbor anger or resentment towards another person. For us, we might imagine that as when we come to the Lord's table to receive Holy Communion. While we may understand that this is a means of grace and that it is open to all, do we understand that as we receive the bread and the juice, we are being asked to love and forgive just as Jesus did even the one on the night he was betrayed? For us, that should put into perspective the importance of this message.

The second antitheses also puts into perspective how damaging adultery can be. It is not just about the person who commits the act. It involves a string of people who get hurt in the process, particularly if the offender is already married. That person puts their spouse in an awful position and then a whole string of family, friends, and maybe even co-workers and leaders within the community. Jesus wants people to understand that adultery is not just a tiny little offense that affects one person; it spreads and hurts numerous people.

Unfortunately, even within my five years of ministry I have seen how the breaking of these two commandments rips communities, churches, and families apart. And it's not just cold-blooded murder or couples' having fights because one person cheated on another.

I have seen how the anger of one person can lead to violence that devastates multiple people. Anger in and of itself is not bad; it reveals that we are sad or mourning something. But if we use our anger to hurt people or get our way, we have committed a murder of sorts. We have tried to kill someone's spirits and hurt them in an attempt to show that we possess power. I once heard a quote: "Watch your thoughts because they become words; watch your words because they become actions; and watch your actions because they become your character; and watch your character because they become your destiny." We are given a choice about the way we respond to the anger that comes our way.

I have also seen how the lust of one person has led to hurt and pain for not just their family, but entire groups of friends, churches, and communities. The worst part is that when the offender gets away with it, particularly if they are males, they continue to exhibit behaviors that are violent and hurtful towards others. It is an endless cycle and people continue to get hurt because someone lusted sexually after another and so many people begin to pay the price for their sin. I continue to keep in my prayers their victims whether it is their new fling, their old partner who grieves a death of sorts, their family,

and their churches and communities broken apart in the wake of their behavior.

Yet there is redemption for them, just as is there is for all. Some people commit adultery and are given a second chance where they redeem themselves. The same goes for those who divorce. My experience with people who have gotten divorces is that they tried everything in their power and this was the place where they were forced to move towards whether the person was abusing them or financially using them. A clergy friend and I once remarked that one of the greatest unsung ministries of the United Methodist Church is the love and grace offered to those who are divorced. I think that is a wonderful reputation to have and falls in line with Jesus's call for us to offer second chances.

What do you want your legacy to be? Do you want to be known as an equipper and encourager? Or do you want to be known as a violent and destructive person? How can you support people going through a divorce? How can you watch yourself so that you are faithful in your relationships? Who are the people you turn to in order to be held accountable?

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