

GOD'S WORD IS NOT WHAT YOU EXPECT – MATTHEW 5:21-37

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“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.’ 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. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. “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. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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. 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. “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 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. “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.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I can remember hearing stories from my parents and grandparents how inexpensive it was to go to college when they were younger. I heard stories about a guy who for the first six weeks of summer was able to make enough for the upcoming school year, and the remaining six weeks of summer was able to save up for a car. Unfortunately, those days of paying for a full year of college with a summer job are long gone. But that doesn’t mean everything is completely hopeless. When my parents were preparing to send me off to college they were told the way they could get the most financial support was to fill out a simple form called the FAFSA.

What sounds so simple at first, turns out to be anything but simple. If you think doing your taxes is difficult and complicated, they are child’s play compared to the FAFSA form. To give you an idea of how long it takes to fill out – The first time my parents filled one out for me it took them five hours to complete. IT’S NOT WHAT THEY EXPECTED. What sounds so simple is anything but simple.

Now, the Jews of 2,000 years ago didn’t have to worry about filling out some FAFSA form, but they did worry about fulfilling God’s Law given to them by Moses. Laws such as remember the Sabbath, honor your parents, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal. These laws seem so simple at first. I

could probably ask you to raise your hands if you have murdered someone, and I doubt anyone would raise their hands. But GOD'S WORD IS NOT WHAT THEY EXPECTED. Jesus, in his sermon on the Mount showed them and us how much further God's Law goes.

1. God is serious about his Law
2. God is serious about his Gospel

(1)

Once again, our verses jump right into the middle of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the longest stretch of Jesus' teaching we have recorded in Scripture. In order to get a better picture as to why Jesus is expounding on the Law of Moses we must reach back one verse. Maybe you remember it from last week. **"I tell you the truth, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."** This verse is the springboard into what Jesus is talking about here. It is the springboard to say what you have heard from the Pharisees is not all that God expects. God expects far more.

Jesus introduces each new commandment with these words, **"You have heard that it was said..."** You have heard one thing from the Pharisees, and you think you understand the law, you think you have kept the law but, **"I tell you..."** This is Jesus' way of expanding on the law. The law of God and the commandments are more than just the outward actions of just murdering someone, or sleeping with someone's wife. The Law of God demands much more. And God is serious about his Law, and our keeping of it.

He begins with the fifth commandment of "Do not murder." **"I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment."** Anger is equivalent to murder in God's eyes. So if I were to ask you to raise your hands once again if you have broken the fifth commandment, I would not be surprised to see every one of you raising your hands. And look how serious Jesus is about it, **"If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift...and be reconciled to them."** There is no time like the present to rid yourself of that anger. There's nothing too pressing that you shouldn't stop and try and fix the problem. This is how serious God is about sin and doesn't want it to fester.

And then Jesus moves on to the sixth commandment – **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."** The sin of adultery doesn't just take place in a shady hotel room when a married man sleeps with another woman, it takes place anytime there is any sexual misconduct or thoughts outside of the marriage contract God set up. President Jimmy Carter summed it up when he said, "I've looked on a lot of women in lust, I have committed adultery in my heart many times."

Jesus is serious about this sin as well when he says to pluck out your eye, or cut off your arm if it causes you to sin. There is no better time to rid yourself of the sin than the present. And yet, is the point of Jesus giving this sermon just to let us know how to get rid of sin in our lives so we can go on living and be right with God? No, that's not it at all. It just shows once again, God is serious about his Law, and you should be too.

And yet, how serious do we find ourselves when it comes to God's Law? From what I've seen, people are more than willing to admit that they're sinners, that they have messed up a little bit, but then take the attitude that it doesn't matter too much – there are people worse than they are, their circumstances led them to do it, God is too serious. And I'm not just talking about the people I see, I'm talking about what I see in myself. I have made those excuses myself to excuse my sin. But who am I to

think that my opinion of how good I am should matter one iota in God's courtroom? It's his Law we are held to, not our warped opinion of it.

But when all of the excuses are brushed aside, we are left to despair. We are left to realize that God's Law cannot be kept. We are left to realize how hopelessly trapped in sin we are, we are left to admit that we need a Savior, a Savior is the only thing that can save us from the only just punishment for breaking God's Law – the fires of hell. These words would have come as a shocking realization for Jesus' first listeners, but they had an advantage we don't have. They had the advantage of the Savior speaking to them.

Our excuses can be brushed aside, but God's Law can't be brushed aside. That's why he sent Jesus. He was the perfect example of keeping the Law. All you have today is just a guy up here in a white robe, they had Jesus – the fulfillment of God's Law. Which is why my job is to never just tell you about God's Word, my job is to point you to Jesus. There was a painting that came out of the 1500s in Germany. The painter was Lucas Crannach and he depicted several scenes in Martin Luther's life. This picture here is a perfect example of what I'm talking about. You have Luther on the right pointing one hand in the Bible and the second hand at Christ in the center.

God is serious about his Law, that's why he sent Jesus. It began at Jesus' birth where he kept every single one of God's laws for us. He actively obeyed everything that we could not do. He not only displayed it on the outside, but on the inside as well. He is the only person who was never angry at his brother or sister, he never looked lustfully at a woman, he never used God's name in vain, he honored his parents, he remembered the Sabbath. Jesus was just as serious about God's Law as God is. And he didn't do it just to show us how to do it, he didn't do it in order to give us an excuse to not take God's Law so seriously, he did it to be the way the truth and the life for us to get to heaven.

(2)

OK, so maybe that is nothing new to you. Maybe you've heard that a time or two before in church – whether here or at another place. And maybe you're wondering if I know how serious God is about his Law, then why should I have to even worry about coming to church anymore? I'll tell you why, because God is just as serious about his Gospel. Now what do I mean by that?

While God's seriousness to his Law demonstrates his justice, God's seriousness to his Gospel demonstrates his love. God was so serious about his gospel that he moved heaven and earth in order to save us. He sent his Son to come down at the perfect time, in the perfect place. Jesus actively kept all of God's Laws perfectly, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again to prove his victory. And God is so serious about getting you his gospel that he moved heaven and earth to make you believe. When you were dead in sin and unbelief, God made you alive in faith. He organized all the events in your life to lead you to him. God's gospel is not that you chose him, but he chose you. God takes his gospel very seriously, and as believers in Christ, we are able to take his gospel seriously too.

Taking his gospel seriously is taking what Jesus did for us seriously. When we take the gospel seriously we see the true cost of our sin. When we take the gospel seriously, we recognize our sin for what it is – a disease that destroys our body, instead of a delightful pleasure. We recognize the gospel does not give us an excuse to sin, but it gives us a reason not to sin – not to live for ourselves but for him who saved us.

Taking his gospel seriously is taking Jesus' message seriously. That doesn't mean we can't have fun, but we have fun within the framework he has established. Jesus talked about not living for yourself but for him. Jesus spoke against adultery and any who tried to circumvent the rules of marriage. Jesus talked about the benefits of gathering together with believers and the dangers in avoiding them. Jesus

talked about keeping his Word and not departing from it. Taking Jesus' message seriously means we want to listen to what he says.

Taking his gospel seriously is taking the mission seriously. If you really believed what you really believe, how is that going to change your life? How is that going to change the lives of those around you? We love, because he first loved us. We love, because there is no salvation outside of him. How can that not be a vital message in people's lives? His mission is not only valid here on Sunday morning, but on every day of the week. It is a mission that starts with just one person. It begins with the instruction Jesus gave – to always be prepared to give an answer to what you believe.

Certainly at first if you hear the gospel, that Jesus has died for you and you don't need to do anything to get to heaven, it's the temptation to abuse the gospel, it's a temptation brought on by our old sinful nature. But the amazing thing about the gospel – it creates an unexpected result – not only does it give us faith to believe the message, but it also gives us a new man, a new person inside of us that fights for all that is good, right and true. On this side of heaven, there will always be a battle going on between the new man and the old man. But it is a battle that is worth the effort. And we can thank God that his Word is not what we expected. We can thank God that he is serious about his Law and he is serious about his gospel. Because he is serious, we can have certainty. Amen.