

It Has Been Said....Jesus Alone Is The Light – Matthew 5:21-37

- 1) He lives the holy life we cannot
- 2) We live the holy life to show that Jesus is our light

It has been said that if you want to get into Carnegie Hall, you need to practice, practice, and practice. But no one got into Carnegie Hall by practicing *Hot Cross Buns* a million times and nothing else. What they really mean is that you need to keep practicing what's difficult so you get good enough to play in Carnegie Hall. It has also been said that if you want to get in shape, you need to exercise and eat right. It's not enough to cut out the occasional sweet treat or walk an extra 5 minutes a day. What they really mean is that you should make your plate look like that new portion control diagram that's replaced the food pyramid. That when you work out, you increase your reps and shorten the time between your sets. That when you do crazy yoga moves you not only bend your bodies in impossible ways, but you keep your core involved by controlling your breathing. When you do all these things, then you are really getting into shape.

And it has also been said that if you want to show the light of Jesus to this world, you need to live as a Christian. One big way to do this is to make time for God's Word on Sunday morning by going to church. Because there are few places like church on Sunday morning where we are surrounded by like-minded brothers and sisters who gather around the good news of our Savior Jesus. But as we're going to see in these verses from the Sermon on the Mount, there's a lot more to living a Christian life than silencing our phones and locking our houses to come here. Because you see, the Christian life is a holy life. A life so holy that we cannot live it, but we get to live it so we may show that Jesus alone is the light.

In our verses for this morning, Jesus clarifies 3 misunderstandings about the Christian life – what murder is, what adultery is, and what it means to take an oath. Just so you know where I'm going in this morning's sermon, we'll first look at how Jesus clarifies these misunderstandings. Then we'll come back to these 3 topics to see how we can live holy lives to show that Jesus alone is the light. Let's start with the first topic – what murder is.

Jesus starts this section off by saying **“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”** This is in reference the 5th Commandment which says **“Do not murder.”** The religious teachers of Jesus' day and people today often think

we're good as long as we do not kill anyone. But Jesus clarifies what this commandment is all about. It's not just the literally stopping of another's person life. It also includes the emotion behind it – anger. In fact anger is so sinfully serious that God views it the same as murder. In the 1st century AD, a Jew who was charged with murder would have to appear before the Sanhedrin which is like our Supreme Court. But Jesus illustrates how serious anger is that if someone were to say “**Raca**” or “**You fool**” – which were very mean things to say – they should be treated as a murderer and appear before the Sanhedrin. And if they are found guilty for the crime, they would be thrown into prison until they paid their last penny meaning forever. So Jesus teaches us that the holy life is one where we don't get sinfully angry at other people.

Let's go to the next topic – what adultery is. Jesus tells us “**You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**” Like today, the people of Jesus' time were taught that they could look all they want as long as they didn't touch. But Jesus clarifies that adultery also happens if anyone desires someone else besides their spouse. If a spouse continues on the road of adultery, it will eventually lead to one of the two biblical reasons for divorce. Those two reasons are marital unfaithfulness, which Jesus mentioned, and desertion, which the Apostle Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 7. Since the time of Moses, God had permitted divorce as the lesser of 2 evils when it was clear that a couple's marriage has been completely broken by one of these two reasons. But like society today, the people of Jesus' time thought that a divorce could happen for just about any reason. You just had to be sure to fill out the paperwork to get the certificate of divorce. But as Jesus clarifies, we aren't to have a casual attitude towards divorce. So Jesus teaches us that the holy life is one where we don't desire people other than our spouse or casually accept divorce.

The last topic Jesus clarifies is about taking an oath. Like today, people took oaths to assure they were going to do something or that they were going to tell the truth. But if they didn't the thing they swore by would punish you. So there were two levels of oaths – those where you called upon God as your witness and those where you didn't. The idea was that if you swore to God, you better follow through on your oath because if you don't God himself will come after you. But if wanted to give yourself some wiggle room, you could swear by something else. But as Jesus shows us, you can't make a distinction between God and other things because it all goes back to God. Listen to how Jesus explains this. “**But I tell you,**

Do not swear 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 then to make it clear how pointless it is to swear by anything Jesus continues **"And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black."** So Jesus teaches us that the holy life is one where we don't needlessly swear by anything.

As we reflect on Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, where do we see ourselves? When we learn that anger is as bad as murder, or lust is as bad as adultery, or a casual attitude towards divorce mocks marriage, or swearing by anything is swearing by God himself, how does our life stack up to the holy life? Not all that great. Because you and I, we see how often we have failed to live the holy life. How we have lost our temper and gotten angry, how we have looked and touched, how we justify unbiblical divorces within our families, how we have to swear by God to convince others that we're telling the truth. Your and my lives are in no way holy. And because of this, we deserve the punishment Jesus brings up twice in these verses. We deserve to be thrown into the fires of hell as punishment for our unholy lives for the rest of eternity.

And this is why Jesus alone is the light since he alone has lived the holy life God demands. As we look through the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, we see that Jesus is the best one to teach us what the holy life is because he actually lived it. And it's not because the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John cherry picked the good moments of Jesus' life, but because Jesus never once strayed from this holy life. Along with that holy life, Jesus also suffered everything because we have not lived as we should. The punishment that we deserve for living unholy lives is death and suffering in hell. And that is what our Savior endured on the cross for you and me. So that he could be our substitute and show the entire world that he alone is the light.

And that light now shines us on. Jesus has died so that we will not. Jesus has suffered for our sins so that we may receive the forgiveness of sins instead. Jesus has covered us with his righteousness so that, even though we struggle to live the holy Christian life, God may look down on us and call us his beloved children who are right in his eyes. And so Christ empowers us to live a life free from sin. And we are shown how in these same words from the Sermon on the Mount.

The holy life we get to live is one where we are free from anger. Not only by keeping ourselves from getting angry, but also by making things right with those

we've angered. Our Lord tells us that even if we're about to go to worship and then remember that we've angered someone without trying to reconcile things, we are to quickly **"go and be reconciled to your brother; then come"** back and worship our Lord with a heart free from anger so we can completely focus on our loving God.

The holy life we get to live is one where we honor marriage as the gift from God that he designed it. And we do this in two ways – by fighting off the temptation to lust and to have a correct view of what divorce is. Even though lust may seem harmless, it can easily ruin a marriage as much as adultery does. So rather than fall into that temptation, which will happen if we rely on ourselves, take whatever steps are necessary so you avoid them. Go against the casual view that society has about divorce and recognize it for what it is – a lesser of two evils when it is clear that marriage bond has been broken beyond any repair. Because when we do these two things, we hold marriage up to be the joy that God intended it to be.

The holy life we get to live is one where our word is our bond because we mean what we say. Instead of having to convince someone that you mean what you say, let your yes be yes and your no be no. Tell the truth or keep quiet instead of saying lies. If you find out later that what you said earlier was incorrect, tell people you were wrong or mistaken. And the hidden blessing from this is that not only will we have integrity, but people will believe us when we say that Jesus alone is the light.

I know how hard it is to live this holy life laid out before us. That's why I encourage you, whenever we fail to live this way, to look back to Jesus who lived the holy life. Because he lived it for you and me, our sins are forgiven. His righteousness covers us so that we are holy in God's sight. And out of thanks for this wonderful gift, we get to live this holy life to show this sinful world that Jesus alone is the light. Amen.