



Lent Study week 4

Broken Relationships Matthew 5:21-26

Giving up offenses

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Have you ever noticed how when people are angry, things tend to get broken.

Someone throws a punch and a nose gets broken.

Express too much anger when disciplining a child, and trust gets broken.

Use angry words and perhaps a heart gets broken...

...Church unity gets broken...

...Relationships get broken.

As a matter of fact, angry outbursts ruin many relationships. Jesus addresses this vital issue in His Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus is announcing God's Kingdom is here on earth. He surprises people by telling them God approves of them in spite of their imperfections. Those who follow Him will be as distinctive as salt and light. They'll stand out.

Because those in this Kingdom won't attempt to be impressed just by obeying rules – they will gain their good standing with God through a relationship with Jesus.

In Matthew 5:20, He tells us that our righteousness needs to surpass that of those who look perfect on the outside. Because far from being satisfied with good appearances, God is looking for hearts that have been changed. And now He's going to illustrate this kind of the heart in several ways.

The average American would consider himself/herself to have a good heart, basically a good person. A common line of reasoning that exists today in determining if we are good sounds something like this – "Well, I know I'm not perfect, but at least I'm not a murderer!"

As if murder is the line between good and bad – perhaps also assuming that murder is the point of no return. Once a person commits murder, they can never be considered a good person ever again.

That's actually a very ancient way of thinking. (Ancient in the truest sense of the word). Because that appears to be exactly what some thought about what it meant to be a good person in Jesus day. I'm basically a good person. I haven't murdered anyone.

Jesus says, whoa! Not so fast. Give this some thought.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder.'" (That's in the OT. That's commandment number 6 of the 10 Commandments. Do not murder...)

So here is what Jesus says...

"But I tell you, that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." (v. 21) His point?

ANGER IS SERIOUS AND DANGEROUS (v. 21-22)

He describes anger here like a crescendo - it builds through Three stages.

1. The first stage, of Anger...Anger directed against another person

Anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgment. That is...worthy of the same consequence as murder

Because...Angry thoughts break the murder prohibition too. How can this be?

Anger, in its simplest form, is a spontaneous response that has a vital function in life. It alerts us to an obstruction of our wills and immediately raises alarm and resistance, even before we have time to think about it.

Not all anger is bad - even Jesus got angry when people were having obstacles put in the way of their coming to God at the Temple - Bible talks of the wrath of God.

The problem is our anger quickly turns to something more evil. It includes thoughts of making a painful impression on others, whether physically, verbally, or emotionally.

Jesus says, we shouldn't even allow ourselves to become angry enough to consider harming someone in any way (feelings too), because then we've already committed murder in our hearts.

Anger is as serious as murder in the heart. It's also dangerous..

2. The Second Stage of Anger...Contempt

Also in verse 22 Jesus says, "Again anyone who says to his brother 'Raca,' is

answerable to the Sanhedrin."

"Raca" - an expression of contempt Raca - means "empty head."

The word may have originated from the sound a person makes in clearing the throat in preparation to spit. Rrraaaacah! That's what I think of you!

Jesus said this is a greater evil than just anger. In anger, we want to hurt someone. In contempt, we don't care if that someone gets hurt or not.

Instead of Raca, today we might use dork, nerd, bonehead or something worse - perhaps a sexual, racial or cultural term. But the intent is always the same. It's meant to cast someone aside - like spitting on them - and saying you don't belong. Sometimes these words hurt so bad that murder would almost be a mercy.

Jesus said that people who express contempt are guilty enough to be judged by the Sanhedrin - The highest court in the land - the Supreme Court.

3. The Third Stage of Anger...Malice

"But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

"Fool" was an expression of malice

In high school I wouldn't dare call anyone a "fool" because Jesus said not to. However, I used all sorts of other R-rated words. Somehow I must have thought I was still acceptable to God because I didn't say "fool."

Fool, as such, no longer captures what Jesus had in mind. For us, fool is more like Raca - empty head. No, fool isn't so cutting, but we sure have plenty of other terminology that allows us to go ahead and do exactly what Jesus was condemning without using the word "fool."

Do you think it's possible you and I could ever keep God's rules but overlook His intentions? That's what the Pharisees did.

The Pharisees would never commit murder. Yet they were angry enough at

Jesus to have him killed. But they got someone else to do it. Keeping the rules - but overlooking the intentions. So if someone at work misses a deadline, someone cuts us off in traffic and we shout, "You brainless idiot!" Even with those words, we've already gone way too far. We've gone beyond the intention of the commandment to not murder.

To brand someone with words like that is a violation of the soul so devastating it justifies a person who said it of being severely punished.

Jesus reminds us, it is not possible for people with such attitudes toward others to be thought of as truly good, or righteous. People who think this way are out of harmony with God's kingdom.

Some might think at this point, "So, I'm going to go to Hell for calling someone a nerd?" No. Jesus isn't saying that. He's illustrating the fact that the Kingdom heart is a heart of love. A heart that values relationships, and doesn't just want to get by with the rules, and say, "Well, at least I've never killed anyone."

That kind of heart values other people.

From Jesus' perspective, we can see why this is so serious. He already knows what kind of death awaits him at the cross. So reading between the lines we can hear him say, "Hey, you people who cut others down with your words. I'm here to give my life for them and for you. That guy you just called an idiot? I love him. He's so valuable to me that even if he was the only person in the world, I'd still die for him. And you're making him sound worthless and insignificant? What's that say about my mission to die for him? How dare you? That's not the kind of heart inside a person who is truly good - inside a person who follows me."

Jesus is operating at heart level - where anger grows. Anger embraced and allowed to grow through these two stages is dangerous and serious.

Don't go the route of anger. Don't embrace it. Don't harbor it. Don't nurse

it. Don't befriend it. Don't play with it in your mind. Crush it while you still can. It's so serious it can cut you off from God. So dangerous it can crush you.

AVOID ANGER, TAKE ACTION IMMEDIATELY (v. 23-26)

So what should we do?

Jesus sets the scene at the altar - one of the holiest moments in life. READ Matt 5:23-24

23"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Settle things with others before attempting to worship

We might think of a wedding, ordination, baptism, communion.

Right then you remember- someone is angry with me. I am at odds with someone. My actions have knowingly hurt someone else. Jesus says, go! Settle matters - now! He says it is far more important to be reconciled to someone than it is to engage in religious activity.

Worship becomes a sham if we've behaved so poorly prior to coming to worship that we've knowingly hurt someone.

Jesus says, this is urgent business.

Anger can turn you into a hypocrite - Anger can land you in jail. So settle matters quickly. Jesus says, "Right now! if you wait, it could turn out to be disastrous."

Go and settle any dispute you might have.

Ask God to forgive me for the harsh words spoken against someone.

Give my anger to Jesus, instead of embracing it.

What if the person refuses to be reconciled?

We might wonder, Am I never to go to church again? Ask ourselves these questions:

Does our heart long for reconciliation? Have we done all that we can?

(Honestly) Do we act lovingly toward the person?

Do we mourn for the harm that the person's anger is doing toward his own soul, to us, and to the others around us?

If so, then we are showing the kind of heart that has no desire to live at odds with anyone. This is the kind of heart Jesus wants us to have.

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