

Sermon on the Mount – Part 1

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Matthew

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Bible Text: Matthew 5:17-18
Preached On: Monday, August 1, 2022

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This evening, I'm going to take a little personal point of privilege and direct a little different way than I was expecting to. Let me encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Revelation 5. If there is one thing that I am in life, is that I'm a realist, and what I mean by realist is simply this, I understand that in spite of oftentimes our best intentions or our desires, there's this thing called reality that is ever present. And I know, and I'm not, I'm not trying to be self-deprecating, I just know, I know that nobody tomorrow morning is going to wake up repeating the points of this morning or tonight's message. I know that. But most likely more than not, you're going to find yourself in the morning, you know, getting ready to make some coffee, taking a shower, whatever, you're probably going to be humming the chorus that you just heard, not only the words that we heard that are so powerful, but let's be honest when it comes to music the tunes are just catchy and they get us. And I'm going to go ahead and confess as non-musical as I am, I typically wake up every morning singing some verse or chorus of some song, somehow somewhere. And tomorrow morning, when you wake up and you sing that little chorus, "The only scars in heaven," I want you to know that that's not just some hymnology that somebody came up with. In Revelation 5, I want to read verses 1 through 6. It says,

1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? 3 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. 4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. 5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. [And verse 6 is the key,] 6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

When it comes to the person and the story of Jesus Christ, obviously we know the famous scars and marks that were born on Calvary, we know that even the week after his

resurrection, he explained very clearly to Thomas and to the others, "If necessary, touch my hands, touch my side." But oftentimes when we sing antidotes from songs and hymns and such, people often question not the theology of but the biblicalness of. What's interesting about Revelation 5 is it takes place in heaven. In fact, of all the passages in the book Revelation, chapters 4 and 5 are a vision in heaven not just after the resurrection, but after the ascension. And how is it that John the apostle recognized that it was Jesus Christ that took the book as a lamb that had been slain? So tomorrow morning, when you wake up singing that little chorus, you're not just singing some hymnology that somebody wrote, you're actually singing a pretty good musical adaptation of Revelation 5:5.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we continue our study of scripture tonight, what a blessing to know that the songs that are so near and dear to our heart, the theology that we so subscribe to, God it's not just because we want to desire to, or hope to, but it's because your word has said so. And God, tonight may our goal not to be "better people, better Baptists, better this or that," God, may we be biblicist. God, may our lives, our homes, our families, our decisions, our aspirations, our desires, may they revolve around your word and your word alone. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Tonight, we're going to go back into Matthew 5 and if you're new to us, I want to welcome you to a very extensive, very elongated study on what we know as the gospel of Matthew. Now again when I say extensive and elongated, understand that the purpose of this is not just to grasp a view of Jesus through the eyes of the gospel Matthew. I am, and I'm going to make this as quick as possible, I'm a firm believer that if you can get the gospel of Matthew, you can get the totality of scripture. And so tonight as we come to what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, again, several things about this very famous passage. It has been delivered to those individuals who, to the best of their ability, were trying to obey the law. They were trying to bring the right sacrifice at the right time with the right heart in the right means. More than likely these individuals had already met whom we know as John the Baptist who said to bring fruits of repentance. They had gone through this picture of baptism that was mentioned back in Deuteronomy 18, this imagery of coming out of slavery and bondage and into freedom. And here they stood at the feet of Jesus and he begins to instruct them. Of course, what we know as the Sermon on the Mount begins with these famous at beatitudes and then there's this admonition that you're the salt to the earth, you're the light of the world. Last week we talked about how that scripture is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow. It never changes. It is never to be altered. What we know as the real "message" of the Sermon on the Mount begins really in verse 21, but we're going to back it up a little bit in verse 19 and 20 for a part of an introduction.

But let me share with you what's going to happen not just tonight but in some following studies, is Jesus Christ is going to make this statement, "It is written but I say unto you." Now let me tell you what Jesus is not doing. He's not changing the word of God. He's not twisting it, he's not altering it, he's not going back and saying, because we hear this nowadays, "Well, that was the Old Testament. It's a different day. I'm a New

Testament Christian or this is a new time period." Jesus is not doing away with, in fact, what did he just say? Heaven and earth will pass away but not one jot or one tittle of the word of God will. He's not dismissing, he's not discarding. What he's doing, and we're going to see this very clearly tonight, is he's taking the interpretation that humanity has done to twist and turn these scriptures for their own advantage, and he's re clarifying what the Lord meant in the first place. So again, this isn't anything new, in fact, more than that, he's going back and saying, "This is what God meant this passage to say, not what you've heard it said, twisted and turned throughout the year."

So just as a means of introduction, verses 19 and 20, it says,

19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Interesting that Jesus Christ talks about these "commandments," and when we get to Galatians 3, we discover that the purpose, and this is critical not only to the Sermon on the Mount but the gospel of Matthew, what is the purpose of scripture? What is the purpose of the commandments? What was the intent of the 10 Commandments? The 10 Commandments was not to show them where they were right, the 10 Commandments was to show them where they were in error. They would not have known that they were living improperly or in error if the Lord had not said, "Thou shalt not." And so when he begins in verse 19 and then whoever does the least of these commandments, understand that the purpose of the commandments, the purpose of what Jesus is sharing is not to show us where we're righteous, but to do much the opposite. And there's one thing I'm firmly convinced of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount: it is not a thesis, it's not a description of "Christian living," more importantly, I think it is a thesis of human depravity, where we fall short, where we miss the mark, etc.

And we have somewhat exhausted this concept or idea of what we know as the kingdom of heaven. It's mentioned three times here in two verses. In real simplistic terms, the kingdom of God as laid out primarily in the gospel Mark, Luke, and John, is our personal relationship, our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven physically is that when the Lord is actually reigning, and we'll discuss that later at another time. And then finally, he says to do and to teach, which is interesting because in Galatians 3 it says no man is justified by the law. Again, this introduction of verse 19 and 20 in very hopefully simplistic explanation, Jesus is saying, "Before I clarify some things for you, don't fall into the trap of thinking that this is what makes you holy, this is what makes you righteous, this is somehow what makes you in good standing with God." What he's actually about to show us is how every one of us at some level and in some means has "fallen short."

Beginning in verse 21, we have the first of these items where he says, "It is written but I saying unto you." Verse 21,

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. 26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

Wow, that's quite a way to begin the message, is it not? So what is he saying? "You have heard." This is a direct quotation, again, to the commandments of Exodus 20:13, "Thou shalt not kill," one of the famous "10." "But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother," notice this important phrase, "without a cause." That's important and let me kind of take these passages and break them down really into some unique areas. We have what we call the spiritual application, what does this mean for you and I as believers in Jesus Christ? A doctrinal application, what did this mean to the hearers that were under the law anticipating the Messiah that was standing before them? And then what is so unique about it, here's the spiritual application, Ephesians 4:26 makes this statement, "Be angry and sin not."

Allow how I've explained this to people throughout time. You know, there was a "fad" some years ago, somebody made a whole lot of money off of it, called what would Jesus do? We had books, conferences, bracelets, all kinds of decor and such, and everybody loves to ask that question when it comes to a scenario in our life. "Well, let me just ask you, what would Jesus do?" Can I tell you what one of my favorite responses to that question is? Remember when you ask what would Jesus do, breaking out whips and turning over tables is a viable biblical option. And so oftentimes we kind of couch ourselves behind that kind of that shadow of, "Well, what would Jesus do," and we always use that, it just seems to me as an excuse for passivity, if that makes sense. Last time I checked, Jesus spoke some very harsh words to the Pharisees and the scribes. Don't believe me? When you tell somebody their converts are twice the children of hell as they are, that's pretty harsh. He did overturn the tables. He did break out the whips twice, once in John 2, and then once at the end of his ministry.

But what does it say? "Without a cause." There is a biblical phrase called righteous indignation. It means to be angry, to be frustrated with a valid biblical read. Listen, so how do we apply this to our life? Unfortunately, there's two sides of the proverbial cliff that I think people fall off of. There's one side that says, "Oh, I'm never to show any

emotion, never to be any anger," and so therefore we let anybody and everybody just run over us as believers. There's another side that says, "Well, if it doesn't line up with what I like, I can just fume and just get after it." No, the truth is somewhere in the middle because it says "whoever is angry with his brother without cause." The Bible says in Ephesians 4 it is okay to express anger but we cannot express anger "in sin." That is not a viable option.

So what did this mean to his hearers? Do you find it fascinating that in verse 25 he says that if one falls into this trap, if one goes down this road, there is the fear that they'll be cast into prison. That's a pretty extreme result or consequence of simply being upset or being angry with somebody even "within their heart." And their uniqueness, verse 25 and 26, really is how much of the "old covenant items" are being mentioned here? He mentions being brought before the council, take your gift that is at the altar, the judge, the officer. In fact, one of the things you discover about this unique section here is Jesus is basically saying that every single one of us has fallen into the following trap, we have come with a heartfelt expectation of worshiping the Lord with purity of soul. In their context, there are major feasts such as Passover, Pentecost, etc. that they would have made a very expensive and a long journey, and there they would have brought those turtledoves, that lamb, whatever the requirement for that specific sacrifice, and the picture that we get here is that here they are trying to be right with God, righteous, they're trying to leave in a better place and what does the Lord do? Reveals to them that within their heart they have transgressed, they have sinned against a brother, sinned against a sister. So what does he say? That if you just go ahead and give the gift with sin in your heart, it's as if you've nullified it. It's of no use.

Now, why is this important? Because, you know and I know that every single one of us, let me put it in today's context, has come to church with ill motives and expectations. Why? Because I've been where you are. If you're here to tell me that every time you get up on Sunday morning, there is peace in your house, you are a liar. We've all been fighting and fussing, and sometimes even cussing in our home. But boy, we put on a pretty face when we get to church, do we not? But if you think about in the Old Testament, one's relationship with the Lord, one's standing with God was based on the acceptance of that gift. Why is he speaking to this? Because from the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, now there may have been those there that were pious and somewhat spiritually arrogant, so to speak, but I would daresay anybody who really had a heart for the Lord would immediately raise their hand and say, "Oh, I'm guilty of that." You see, from the very beginning what we know as the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is not showing us how righteous we are but much the opposite.

Verses 27 through 30, just in the event that maybe somehow somebody passed that test, he goes to the next one. He says,

27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: 28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. 29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from

thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. 30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

When he says "you have heard," this is actually a quotation again from Exodus 20:14, "Thou shall not commit adultery." "But I say to you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust 'in his heart.'" It's almost as if the Lord is raising the stakes. He says, "You know, maybe you've come to the altar, maybe you've come to the synagogue, maybe you've come to the temple and you've never held something against somebody else." But then in this one he says, "but have you ever had within your heart that which is ill, that which is contrary, that was in error according to scripture, even if you've never acted out on it in 'your flesh'?" What is the spiritual application for this? What we know, the biblical word is fornication. It means any sexual activity that is contrary to the way, the will, the word of God and is not according to his design and plan, that every fornication is not merely just a flesh issue, that though that's how it's manifested, but it is an issue of the heart. It's interesting in 1 Corinthians 6, there's this incredible statement, are you ready? "Flee fornication." Now I don't know about you, but that don't need a whole lot of interpretation and/or explanation does it? It says if there's any time in our life where our flesh takes us down the wrong direction, even if it's never realized but within our heart, we should flee from it. We should remove ourselves from it. We should have nothing to do with.

Now again, this is the second illustration that Jesus has used, and there may be some even here tonight that would say, "Man, I've never gone to church with ill motives. I've never gone with anything against my family or friend. I always come for the right reasons every single time." Yet I can promise you there's not a one of us, male or female, who can escape this one because we've all had ill thoughts, we've all had impure thoughts, we've all "lusted of the heart," even if we've never "acted in the flesh." So here we are in the second illustration in chapter 5 and all of us realize we have an issue here. We have a sin condition. We have a depravity. But here's an interesting doctrinal application. Now remember, he's talked about the kingdom of heaven which, again, that when you lay that out in the totality of scripture, particularly in light of the book of Revelation, this is the reign of Christ on the earth, okay? And he makes this interesting statement that if you have lusted in your heart it is better for you to pluck out your eye than go to hell. It is better for you to cut off your hand than go to hell. Can we just agree that's a pretty extreme measure, is it not?

But can I take you to the book of Revelation for a moment? In fact, if you would turn with me to Revelation 13 because I do not believe that Jesus Christ uses random, coincidental illustrations. In fact, in John 1 and Colossians 1, it says nothing exists apart from him. I believe he's not only the one who voiced, you know, let there be light, etc., but he also spoke what you and I know as scripture. Revelation 13. If you're not familiar with this famous passage, we're in the context of a character known as the Antichrist. According to book Revelation, he's referred to as the beast, and here in verses 16 through

18 is probably one of the most famous concepts in all of scripture. We hear about it all the time, both within the body of Christ and even without. It's the famous "mark of the beast." Now tonight we're not here to discuss the famous mark of the beast, but I want to read this passage and then I want to go back into Matthew 5 for a moment. Beginning in verse 16,

16 And he [that is, the beast or the Antichrist] he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

Again, tonight is not the time to discuss the nuances of this "mark of the beast," but I do want you to notice the two locations of which scripture alludes to: the right eye, the forehead, and the right arm.

Now go back to Matthew 5. Here's what's fascinating about this passage. In verse 29, "and if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out." Now again, I'm not trying to be overly transparent with you tonight, I think all I'm going to do is publicly testify to what you have experienced in your own life. It's not just my right eye that lusted, it's my left eye too because I don't have ill thoughts or concepts while closing one eye and holding the other open. Do you find it interesting that Jesus didn't mention, "Well, if your left eye offends you, pluck it out"? He says your right eye. And then he says if your right hand offends you, cut it off. Well I, I'm sure there are many people that even within the flesh have committed the sin that Jesus has spoken of on the left side of their body, not just their right side as well. You say why is this so significant? Why is this so important? I think this is critical for understanding that Jesus Christ was saying that if you could somehow earn, if somehow you could purchase, if somehow you could validate your worthiness to God with your own endeavors, your own religiosity, your own deeds and such, if you really believed that, then when you realized that you had committed a sin of any type, you would make sure to never do or never have the opportunity to do such again, so much so you would pluck out your eye or cut off your hand if you knew that's what was going to send you to hell. And yet I promise you, outside of a natural occurrence, a serious accident or some ill fate of life, everybody in the audience that day would have been guilty of what Jesus Christ was speaking of, and I'm sure that most of them had access to their right eye, as well as their right hand.

It's interesting that not only did Jesus reveal to them this depravity, this sinful condition, of which I'm sure by this point everybody would have stood and/or sat guilty as charged, but think about the Old Testament covenant, think about the law, the commandments in the system. These were individuals that made claims that they did everything they knew to do to ensure that they were right with God and he says, yet I'm looking at a lot of right eyes and I'm seeing a lot of right hands. And I know there's the allusion to the book of Revelation, and I find that fascinating, but yet the very hands or the very tongues, the

very ears, and the very limbs that had sinned against others and God himself, every one of them rightfully pridefully utilized to get to the very place where Jesus was teaching them that night.

Again, there are four more of these illustrations just here in chapter 5, and we're going to discover next time we gather, it's almost as if Jesus is going to turn up the heat because this is what humanity does, humanity is very guilty of doing the following: not acknowledging where we fall short but highlighting where we think that we succeed. We are quick to fall into what I call comparison theology. I know this would never happen in a Baptist church, but I know it happened on the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began by talking about hating with one's heart and killing with one's desires not just with one hands, and I guarantee you there is somebody, I see this, and by the way, one of these days I'm going to write a book called "View from the Pulpit." Now don't get nervous. Don't sit scared. I'm going to change all the names and all the locations, okay? But here's what I see. I see this all the time. I will reference something about life that we need to alter and we need to change and I will see spouses nudge each other. I'll see parents go forward and look at their children. I've seen all kinds of things. I've seen some of you, and I know this is, you know, hard to visualize but I've seen some of you, I want you to imagine, I'm sitting just like you facing, doing good time, and I'll say something and one of y'all will go.... because you know where So-and-so sits.

How quick we are to find these errors and faults in everybody else and yet when Jesus gathers this crowd, he says, "Let's talk about you." There's not a one of us tonight who can say they've never hated in their heart. There's not a one of us tonight who can honestly say they've never lusted in their heart." And yet we showed up, we've got our right eyes, we've got our right hands, and we go about our business. And what Jesus by default was explaining so very clearly is whether we admit it or not, we know deep down inside we can't fix this. We can't solve this. Why? Because if we could, we would remove the tongue by which we lie, the hand by which we steal, and the feet by which take us to places we have no business going. But we don't, do we? The reason we don't is because we know deep down inside no matter what we give or how much we do, it's not going to fix it, and it's not going to solve it.

You see, the Sermon on the Mount is not so much Jesus showing us or telling us where we're in the right, it's really where he's showing as much the opposite. And we're only two illustrations into three chapters and every single one of us tonight, whether here in person or online, stands condemned. That is why the person of Jesus Christ, that is why the blood of Calvary, and the empty tomb is so important because Jesus showed them in the other day, "There's no way you can solve this yourself." What makes us think that we're any smarter or any better? We've got the same problem, and we actually respond the same way.

Let's pray with their heads bowed and our eyes closed. Tonight as we come to our time of decision, this isn't an evening about "confessing of one's sins publicly," but it is an evening of being honest with God. I would daresay there's not one of us tonight who honestly can sit here, watch or listen going, "Oh, I'm good on those." No, we're not and

that's why the story, and that's why the truth in the person of Jesus Christ is so critical in our lives, to realize that we can never be good enough, to realize we can never give enough to somehow rectify and to fix. So tonight we're not gathered around a mountain area, we're not outside in the heat of the day as Jesus spoke these words, but he made it clear that heaven and earth will pass away but his words will not. Maybe tonight it's not about even these specific issues that have been brought up, but it's really about the issue that there are none of us that are without sin. We all, as the word of God says, are as filthy rags even on our best days. Maybe tonight is that time where you do as Romans 10 says, you call in the name of the Lord to be saved. We welcome that. We're excited about the opportunity to discuss that, to pray with you, and pray through that. But maybe you're already a believer. Maybe some of you have been a believer for years or even decades. You know, one of the problems with years and years and decades of walking with Jesus is sometimes we forget how wretched a sinner that we were and continue to be, and maybe tonight it's just one of those reality checks realizing how good and how graceful the Lord Jesus has been to us when we realize that hardly a day, an hour, or moment can pass without us somehow within our heart, violating the way, the will, and the word of God.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, what a humbling moment in our lives to realize that even in our best endeavors and our best efforts we haven't even covered our sin very well, much less kept ourselves from it. Lord, we need you and we need you desperately. We thank you tonight for your mercy, for your love, for your grace and your goodness. Lord, if need be, we believe, allow us the privilege if needing just to walk in your goodness and faith, Lord, give us the strength to do so. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.