

# “Kingdom Come”

Sermon on the Mount Series: Tenth Lesson

## Matthew 5.21-48

### RELATIONSHIP ISSUES

Learning Objectives: Inspiration to conduct ourselves in a radically different way to the world in our relationships with one another and the world

## Introduction

- Missed out **Matt 5.17-20**: my thoughts in the extra podcast/video
- Basic summary:
  - His opponents accuse him of being inconsistent with the Torah etc. He is at pains to emphasise they have the wrong end of the stick. What the Law *is* has now been manifested in him - he is in continuity with the law etc. and fulfils it
  - v19 - the ‘commands’ are either the OT and/or the sermon on the mount kingdom commands.
  - v20 - remember what we learned about righteousness in Matt 5.10-12. It’s about covenantal loyalty.
    - Therefore when he is demanding greater righteousness from his disciples it is not a greater accuracy or comprehensiveness in keeping the rules that he is after, but a changed attitude to obedience to his commands. He is not against the law, but the 'externalism' added to it.

## Part 1 - Raca and reconciliation, 5.21-26

“You have heard ..... But I say .....”

- Not going back on what Torah says, but adding.
- Adding second story to first story of a building.
- Going beyond what OT says.
- Not only anger, but also contempt is forbidden.
- Deut is therefore not God’s last word.
  - 6th of the 10 commandments, Exodus 20:13.

**Murder** is in view here, not 'killing'.

- Murder starts long before the action has been committed.
- Not merely an action but an aspect of character.
- Problem lies in the murderer's view of his victim.
  - “Does not the murderer's wretched anger and spiteful wrath lurk in the black shadows behind the deed itself?” Carson, 45.
- One of the aspects of the Sermon on the Mount that is vital to its understanding is that Jesus is dealing with what lies behind the actions.
  - Jesus doesn't want to simply stop murder (although that would be good!), but he wants to affect a heart-change.
  - This heart change is in the area of relationships.
  - Jesus' focus was so much on restoring relationships to being what they were meant to be.
  - “The God who sees in secret is affronted not only by the fruit, murder, but by the root, hatred.”
  - “These verses make one great point. The Old Testament law forbidding murder must not be thought adequately satisfied when no blood has been shed.” Carson, 46.

The '**council**' was the Sanhedrin, which was the highest court in the land.

- Anyone who used the word 'Raca' would be called before the village council to give account.
- 'raca': 'empty'; 'airhead'; 'brainless'.

- The 'hell of fire' was Gehenna the ever-burning rubbish dump in a ravine south of Jerusalem called the Valley of Hinnom.
- Had been site of human sacrifice by fire to Molech (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31).
- Old Covenant: punishment was execution for murder. Jesus says that judgement is hellfire for what seemed like unimportant words. Higher standard. Greater consequences.

#### Not all **anger** is wrong

- Jesus was angry with people and about situations. He was upset by the traders in the temple (Matthew 21.12ff), with hypocrites (Mark 3.1ff) and religious leaders (Matthew 23.17).
  - The difference with Jesus was that it was not personal. "In none of the cases in which Jesus became angry was his personal ego wrapped up in the issue." Carson, 46.
  - Indeed when he was at the point where ego might have been most involved, he was silent and submissive (1 Peter 2.23, Luke 23.34).
  - Our challenge is that we are prone to be quick to anger when personally offended, but slow to anger when others are maltreated.
  - Even when we are defending others, it is hard for personal ego not to get involved.
- The fact that Jesus is concerned not with anger as a whole but with the anger that arises out of personal relationships is made clear by the examples he uses below.

#### **Leave your gift**

- When to leave your 'gift' (see Mark 11.25; Ephesians 4.26).
  - "Men love to substitute ceremony for integrity, purity and love, but Jesus will have none of it."
  - "Among children of the kingdom, acceptable worship involves repairing relationships."
  - See the peacemaker beatitude, Matthew 5.9.
  - In front of the altar
    - If Jesus speaking in Galilee, illustration involves worshipper travelling 80 miles to Jerusalem (journey of a week or more) for rare trip to the temple, leaving animal at the temple, travelling back to Galilee for a week or more, reconcile, travel back to Jerusalem again to make offering. Really intense!
    - Point being not that this is a good idea, but to be urgent to make sure such a situation does not arise in the first place.

#### **Swift settling with adversary**

- Previous example about taking initiative. This one about when have an opponent.
  - Once in jail there was no way you could raise money to pay the debt so you were reliant on the generosity of friends and family to get you out.
  - It's kingdom or prison - take your choice!
  - This is not a set of guidelines for legal disputes. Focus is urgency of resolving personal reconciliation.
- This example confirms the kind of anger Jesus is condemning. It is not so much anger at injustice as personal animosity.

## **Part 2 - Vows, 5.27-37**

#### **Lust**

- Reference to seventh commandment - Exodus 20:14.
- "This is not a prohibition of the normal attraction which exists between men and women, but of the deep-seated lust which consumes and devours, which in imagination attacks and rapes, which mentally contemplates and commits adultery." Carson, 49.
- Not 'notices'. Not about sexual attraction, but intentional viewing aimed ultimately (even if only in fantasy) with consummating sex with another man's wife. See David, 2 Samuel 11:2-4.

#### **Adultery**

- Jesus ties together the seventh and tenth commandments - adultery and covetousness.

- He takes it deeper than the act - which was God's intent all along.
- Our purity and transformation of heart is at stake here.
- Simple adherence to a rule of not committing physical adultery should not fill us with pride.
- Jesus is saying something here that is in stark contrast to the direction the world is moving.
- Adultery is becoming more acceptable - as is lust.
- But Jesus would drag us in the opposite direction.

### **Gouge...cut**

- Origen (A.D. 185-254) castrated himself.
- The first issue is honesty. If we are honest we are reminded of our poverty of spirit that brings us such an amazing blessing.
- Literal interpretation of this command is not appropriate because obeying it would not solve the problem. A blinded person is perfectly capable of lust.
- The point is to be severe with our sin. "We must not pamper it, flirt with it, enjoy nibbling a little of it around the edges. We are to hate it, crush it, dig it out." Carson, 49. See Colossians 3.5-6.
- We take sin so seriously because it causes so much pain. This is one reason we mourn, Matthew 5.4.

### **Divorce**

- Jesus not dealing with all issues regarding divorce and possible grounds for its permissibility (that is not his point here), but to question whether divorce should be acceptable in the first place. Does Jesus permit divorce only for adultery? See Matt 19.3ff.
- The quote is not complete. See Deut 24:1-4.
  - "Displeasing" has only one other use in the OT - in connection with defecation. The exact meaning of the word in this passage is uncertain.
  - By Jesus' time it had come to mean anything the husband found displeasing - even burning the dinner!
- The conservative school of Shammai restricted divorce to unchastity, while Hillel's school was liberal. It seems that Hillel won the day.
- The point Jesus is getting at is that they had lost the original emphasis of the Deuteronomy passage - that of remarriage to one's previously divorced wife. He wants to rescue the true teaching of that passage and teach his disciples the heart of the issue - that divorce is a hugely serious thing and should be a last resort.
- If Moses permitted divorce, considering God's hatred of it (Malachi 2.16), it must only have been because of an incredible hardness of heart on the part of sinful men.
  - God intended one man and one woman for life. Even divorce does not break this bond.
  - Therefore the wife marrying again is committing adultery because she is still married in the eyes of God to her original husband. Also the man marrying her is having sex with another man's wife - even if they are technically divorced. The exception is sexual misconduct. Even here, it is a concession that the man may divorce his wife - not a command.
  - God's desire is that couples work it out if possible.
- "Love has become a mixture of physical desire and vague sentimentality; marriage has become a provisional sexual union to be terminated when this pathetic, pygmy love dissolves." Carson, 51.
- God's plan is so different.
  - The passion of love is preserved, nurtured, refined by the challenges of working through difficult times in marriage.
  - "Chrysostom delightfully links this passage with the Beatitudes. 'For he that is meek, and a peacemaker, and poor in spirit, and merciful, how shall he cast out his wife? He that is used to reconcile others, how shall he be at variance with her who is his own?'"

### **Sexual immorality**

- Could be any form of sexual irregularity, not necessarily only adultery. e.g. discovery that they wife had sex before marriage.
- Perhaps, if the point Jesus is making is one of rectifying a loose understanding of divorce and commitment to marriage, the issue is not so much that divorce is only permissible for adultery, as that it is only permissible for the most extreme of circumstances. Can this be a justified position?

## Overview

1. Jesus correcting false view.
2. Deuteronomy passage dealing with situation already broken.
3. Whilst sexual immorality gives grounds for divorce, Jesus is not legislating divorce for situation of adultery.
4. The woman is to be protected i.e., not a victim of adultery by a man who puts her aside and has sex with another woman thereby committing adultery. Or forces her into another marriage where her new husband is effectively committing adultery.
5. If husband divorced his wife for anything other than adultery he is effectively not ending the marriage. The original marriage is intact. In the eyes of God marriage is only broken by adultery. Therefore, if he “divorces” her and she marries someone else, she and the new husband are committing adultery. She is the victim of what her first husband has done to her.

## Keeping promises

- Not a direct OT quote, but summary of several passages such as Exodus 20.7, Lev 19.12, Num 30.2-3, Deut 23.21-24.
- Jesus, as usual, is about to take things a step higher.

## Do not swear an oath

- Is Jesus saying we cannot take an oath in a courtroom etc.?
  - Does his acquiescence to the question at his trial while 'under oath' indicate that it is OK to take an oath in this circumstance (Matthew 26.63-64)?
  - The OT does permit the taking of oaths - even in the name of God (Deut 10.20).
  - Paul uses them (Rom 1.9, 2 Cor 1.23, 1 Thess 2.5, 10, Phil 1.8).
  - God does it (Gen 9.9-11, 22.16, Lk 1.68, 73, Ps 16.10, Acts 2.27-31, Heb 6.17).
  - “The Mosaic code forbade only false or irreverent oaths, which must be regarded as profaning God's name.” Carson, 52.
  - In Jesus' day the Mishnah had distinguished between oaths that were binding and those that were not in minute detail.
  - “For example, one rabbi says that if you swear by Jerusalem you are not bound by your vow; but if you swear toward Jerusalem then you are bound by your vow.” Carson, 53
  - “Any oath which succeeded in avoiding the name of God was not absolutely binding.”
  - Jesus will have none of this since it destroys the point of oaths - truthfulness.
  - The whole thing becomes a game of working out how to make an oath that one does not have to keep to if one makes it in the 'right' way.
  - If this is the case with oaths, from Jesus' point of view, let's do away with them altogether!
  - Jesus relates all the oaths here to God to make the point that truthfulness is always to do with God.
  - “No oath is trivial ...all oaths are solemn pledges to speak the truth.”
  - Jesus got very upset about this issue later - Matt 23.16-22.
  - The church took note - James 5.12.
  - We claim to have the truth and follow him who is the truth (John 14.6). Woe to us if we are not men and women of scrupulous truth.
- If we live like Christ, expressing the beatitudes, we will never need an oath.

## Part 3 - Love in the extreme, 5.38-48

### Eye for an eye

- This comes from Exodus 21, Leviticus 24, Deuteronomy 19.
- This was a limiting law not a permissive one. By restricting the retaliation it prevented escalation of violence.
- Also the law was given to Israel as a nation and was to be administered by the correct legal authorities. This was not for individuals to engage in.
- In the time of Jesus this heart of the law was being abused.

- Bitterness and vengeance, malice and hatred were resulting from personal vendettas. People were looking for their pound of flesh rather than a way of settling disputes that would lead to peace and justice. The law limited retribution and allowed for it, but it did not legislate it. The offended could still take the approach Jesus described here.

### **Do not resist**

- Jesus does resist the Pharisees. And yet he does not resist those who crucify him.
- Does this apply only to Christians? Is this a case for pacifism? What if the evil is being done to a third person? Jesus does not say we cannot resist an evil person who is attacking another person. In other words, rescuing someone from danger using strength is at least by implication permitted.
- It seems to be more about taking matters into our own hands violently to right what we consider to be a wrong.
- Jesus is not giving us a way for laws to be formulated, but for his followers to behave.
- It does not seem to be about soldiers and policemen, but everyday Christians. Is this not about personal sacrifice and personal abuse?
- The slap on the cheek is "a gross insult".
- The cloak was not something that the law allowed to be taken from a man (Ex 22.26ff).
- "What the opponent could not have dared to claim, the disciple is to offer freely, even at the cost of leaving himself with nothing to wear or to keep warm with. Cf. Paul's exhortation to be wronged and defrauded rather than to institute a law-suit (1 Cor 6:7)." France, R. T. The Gospel of Matthew. NICNT.
- The Roman soldier had the right to commandeer a civilian to carry his luggage. How should we respond? Presumably with a Christ-like spirit. Joyful, not grumpy!

### **Give to the one who asks**

- Presumably this cannot be the command in every situation? For example, if someone begs money from me so that he can indulge in evil, should I give to him?
- The issue is not foolish giving, but joyful generosity.
  - "The burden of the passage is this: Christ will not tolerate a mercenary, tight-fisted, penny-pinching attitude which is the financial counterpart to a legalistic understanding of 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'...Don't be asking yourself all the time, 'What's in it for me? What can I get out of it?' Carson, 57.
- There is much focus on 'rights' these days.
  - The Christian is someone who characteristically forgoes his or her rights.
  - They are not someone who is hung up on whether they are getting their rights or not, but looking for opportunities to bless others and demonstrate Christ-like self-sacrifice.
- "As so often in this Sermon, we are hearing only Part 2 of the deal: Part 1 is God's generosity in ever making us members of his kingdom; Part 2 is the way we reflect that generosity in our lifestyle."
- For wisdom and folly in lending see Proverbs 11:15; 17:18; 22:26.

### **Love your enemy, Matt. 5:43**

- Love is the pinnacle of these sayings / commands, because love is what God is all about and what should motivate us.
- This is not an Old Testament command.
  - The instruction to 'love your neighbour' is there (Lev 19.18) and probably some people had taken this to mean 'love only your neighbours' and by implication to hate your enemies.
  - Perhaps also God's treatment of some of Israel's enemies might have induced them to conclude that they were to be hated.
  - This, however, is a selective reading of the OT since there are many other places where God speaks kindly and with hope for the nations that opposed his people.
  - Sometimes we create imaginary enemies. For example, politicians with whom we disagree. Creates unnecessary anxiety and fear and prevents us from spiritual activities such as praying for kings and all those in authority (! Timothy 2.2). It's bad enough to have enemies without creating new imaginary ones.
- Matt. 5:44
  - 'Revenge is a confession of pain': LATIN PROVERB
  - 'An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind': MAHATMA GHANDI
  - 'While seeking revenge, dig 2 graves-one for yourself' : DOUGLAS HORTON

- We know that the issue of 'who is my neighbour?' was a live one in Jesus' day - witness the question he is asked in Luke 10.29ff and the parable he told that shocked his hearers but perfectly illustrates the teaching of this passage.
- Jesus prayed for his enemies - even on the cross! (Luke 23.34).
- This leads us to reflect on the fact that the very things which seem to be presenting us with the biggest problem may be our biggest opportunity for "evangelism".
- Matt. 5:45
  - God is one who loves his enemies (John 3.16, Romans 5.8) and so his followers must have the same character.
  - God's enemies are valuable to him, so they should be to his followers. It must be as natural to God to love his enemies as his friends. Part of his character. We know he feels pain caused by evil and malevolence. Therefore, what should we pray for? That it will become as natural for us to love our enemies as our friends.
  - Loving our enemies is not the same as accommodating our abusers. Loving them does not mean spending time with them, giving into them, agreeing with them, allowing them to continue to harm us. This is where being meek is significant. We can be strong and resist harm, but without pride or hatred.
  - "To be persecuted because of righteousness is to align oneself with the prophets (5.12); but to bless and pray for those who persecute us is to align oneself with the character of God." Carson, 58.
- Matt. 5:46
  - Even though tax collectors were so reviled they still had friends - even if it was only other tax collectors!
  - Jesus deliberately uses as an example the very people that his hearers would have had a hard time loving!
- Matt. 5:47
  - Do I hold back from being friendly to any group of people? This is un-Christ-like.

## Conclusion, Matthew 5.48

"**teleios**" - complete.

- A word used of spiritual maturity: 1 Cor 2:6; 14:20; Phil 3:15 and frequently in Hebrews.
- Gives hope - because we cannot make ourselves perfect, but we can hunger to grow. We can have the necessary humility to grow. We know it is time to repent when we lose the hunger.
- This appears to summarise the chapter.
  - The standard is God's standard, and that is derived from his character/nature. The admonitions of chapter 5 are not just rules, they are the outworking of the implications of following a holy, pure God.
  - If we expect to see him, be comforted by him, inherit what he has promised, enter His kingdom, receive his blessings, be identified as his followers and children, then we must live these standards.
- "The emphasis on transparent purity and unaffected holiness, on imitating the Father's perfection, utterly precludes all religious hypocrisy, all spiritual sham, all paraded righteousness, all ostentatiously performed religious duties." Carson, 60.
- Jesus is centre-stage in this chapter in more ways than one. He is the authority. As he re-interprets and clarifies the Old Testament teachings we see an authority that goes way beyond past prophets and rabbis. He is revealing his divinity since only divinity could re-interpret the divinely-given law. Rabbis never said, "but I tell you" since they knew they were not inspired. By taking this phrase Jesus indicates he is inspired.