

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

MATTHEW 5

²¹“You have heard that it was said to people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²²But I tell you that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be subject to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, ‘*Raca*,’ will have to answer to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of hell fire.

²³“So if you are about to offer your gift at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift.

²⁵“If someone accuses you, reach an agreement with him quickly, while you are with him on the way. Otherwise your accuser may bring you to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶Amen I tell you: You will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ²⁸but I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to fall into sin, pluck it out and throw it away from you. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰If your right hand causes you to fall into sin, cut it off and throw it away from you. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

³¹“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³²But I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to be regarded as an adulteress. And whoever marries the divorced woman is regarded as an adulterer.

³³“Again you have heard that it was said to people long ago, ‘Do not break your oaths, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ ³⁴But I tell you, do not swear at all: not by heaven, because it is God’s throne; ³⁵and not by earth, because it is his footstool; and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your own head, since you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷Instead, let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes,’ or ‘No, no.’ Whatever goes beyond these is from the Evil One.



What are the best excuses for skipping church? Thom Rainier is a well-known church leader who asked ministers and churchgoers to share the best excuses for skipping.

- “Our whole family still smelled like bacon.”
- “Someone called me ‘brother’ instead of using my real name.”
- “The church is too close to drive and too far to walk.”
- “Both of my girlfriends attend church there.”
- “The pastor stays in his Bible too much.”

I think the last reason is the truest of all. It’s possible we complicate the issue. The simple fact may be that people just don’t like what God has to say today.

But I’ll offer a little secret. I don’t like what Jesus has to say today. I am a little nervous about hearing these words again. My sinful nature bristled and chafed all through the translation and text study of these lessons Jesus offers. While it’s a very kind thing for Jesus to pull back the shade and tell us exactly how God feels, you may have noticed that it’s not easy.

That is because Jesus refuses to treat us like robots. He wants us to be human. He wants to give us God’s commandments with clear expectations. He wants us to bear with Him and grapple with our hearts, our own hearts. And when we are tempted to believe that we know how to love our God and our neighbor, we learn about a God who is greater than our hearts. We learn that ...

JESUS PUTS THE HEART OF GOD INTO THE LAW

1. He reveals sin spiritually

This discourse continues the famed “sermon on the mount.” Jesus invited the crowds with beautifully, encouraging words like, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God,” and, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Jesus followed that up by explaining how different His believers are, that they are the salt and light of the world. Then Jesus began to open up the Law of God and describe what sin is. He reveals it not just in action, but in thoughts and words. He explains it spiritually as only Jesus, not Moses, could do.

Jesus begins at the heart of the commandments, “You shall not murder,” the 5th commandment. Jesus goes on to elaborate spiritually about the 8th, 6th, and 2nd commandments. These are commands about taking one another to court, about

committing adultery, about divorce, and about swearing needlessly.

We would not have known what each commandment means unless each commandment had a heart. Each commandment is there, not haphazardly, not accidentally, not arbitrarily, not to control us; but each commandment has purpose. “You shall not murder” is the commandment that safeguards God’s gift of life. “You shall not commit adultery” is a commandment that safeguards God’s gift of marriage. “You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor” is a commandment that safeguards the reputation of a fellow human being. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” is a commandment that safeguards the privilege of calling upon God. So each commandment is given with love. And so each commandment is given with the heart of God.

In this way each commandment reveals our hearts. Are we so innocent and loving? If we haven’t broken the ten commandments on the face of it, have we really kept them? You may not be a murderer, or a perjurer in the courtroom, or someone who has separated from your spouse. But Jesus says those extreme actions are not the only warnings that come with God’s Law. Jesus did not come to deny the commandments, but heightens the level of God’s commandments by instructing us. The problem begins in the heart. You have already broken the commandments with thoughts of anger and hatred; the problem begins in the heart. You’ve broken the commandments by calling names and using bad words for someone else, even mild words like “blockhead” or “fool”; the problem begins in the heart. By sabotaging a marriage with lovelessness and loveless words; the problem begins in the heart. By saying “I swear” in a passing matter or without any need; the problem begins in the heart. If you notice, it sure seems like God incriminates people for the smallest, most hidden sins.

The trouble with all of this, is that Jesus was supposed to make us better, wasn’t He? Some of us perhaps come to church to hear that Jesus came to deny the Law or dismiss the commandments so we don’t have to worry about being bad. Maybe we can overcome the world by gathering up all our courage and simply trying harder this time. Maybe Jesus came to be our buddy or someone who agrees with us all the time. But then in Moses’ writings the Bible plainly says the thoughts and inclinations of the heart are only evil from childhood. Jeremiah tells us that the heart is deceitful beyond cure. David explains that surely we were sinful at birth, from the time we were conceived. What hope does the human heart have? The hope that the human heart has is this:

2. Jesus takes God's Law into His own hands

We must remember who is speaking these words. This is true God, but also true man. He is the one who must live by these commands, and He was sent to be born under Law. These strictest of commands all must apply to Him, the Lamb without blemish. So Jesus not only convicts us; He not only means to curb our evil desire; but Jesus plans to fulfill this Law for us. He plans to take the Law into His own hands and do what we could not. He desires to fulfill all our missed chances and make no excuse about it.

We could never enumerate the good things we didn't do. The Psalmist says, "*Who can discern all his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.*" However, we can take our crushed, contrite, dashed-to-pieces hearts and present them before a God who knows our hearts. This God is a Redeemer and Atoner of sins. He loves our contrite hearts enough to show us His heart and how He loves us. He loves us enough to draw us to His cross and show us His sacrifice. He loves us enough to be our Substitute in suffering, yet also in living and rising. He loves us enough to open His empty tomb and declare us just and right. He approves us at His mercy seat and introduces us to new life, approved in Jesus Christ.

What does the difficulty of defeating sin say about our Savior? If you see yourself as a little sinner, you will see Jesus as a little Savior. However, if you see yourself as less-than-ideal, if you see yourself as weak and powerless with God's commandments; if you see in yourself a gross sinner with multitudes of wrongs on record; then you will see in Jesus a Savior of all saviors. You will see in Him the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Without this Way there is no going; without this Truth there is no knowing; and without this Life there is no living. But in Jesus there is all of safety and safe-keeping, salvation and rescue, forgiveness and the power to forgive one another.

What are the best reasons for attending church? It is here that we encourage one another. It is here that we remind one another that there is a day approaching, whether our death or the return of our Lord. It is here that we learn how to put our sinful nature to death and rise again in the waters of baptism. It is here that we learn God's will and follow it, cooperating in acts of love out of thanks for Jesus' sacrifice. ***Today, I tell you to use these laws and joyfully live by them.*** It is here that we know and trust the heart of God; in Jesus' name, Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.