

The Will To Reconcile

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[0 : 00] Our text today is Matthew chapter 5, verses 21 through 26. This is a hard-hitting text of the Sermon on the Mount, yet I trust you'll see that it is also wonderfully liberating.

And in order for us to rightly understand it or rightly appreciate it, I think we just need to take a moment to remember the original context in which Jesus preached this.

I said in our first study in the sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount that if you separate any of the sayings of the Sermon on the Mount from that original context, those sayings will either become oppressive legalism or frustrating idealism.

And this is one of those texts. If it's divorced from the context in which Jesus preached it, it's either going to feel very legalistic or it's going to feel very idealistic.

So what was that original context in which Jesus first preached it? I've been pointing out that before Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount, He announces the gospel of God.

[1 : 16] Before Jesus takes His disciples up onto the mountain, He has already made that great announcement, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near. Now, I submit to you that we have not yet fully understand what Jesus means by that.

The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near. I was going to put a little diagram up on overhead for you, but instead I was sitting over here watching, looking at this stained glass window. You look at that window and imagine that that window is there and on the other side of it is all of the reality that is being portrayed and all of the colors and symbols.

Just look at that and imagine that for a minute. When Jesus came on the scene, the prophets had told the people to look forward to the coming of the kingdom of God.

And in their minds, that was going to come at a great and terrible day of the Lord, the day when God would radically intervene in history in a cataclysmic final way. And as the prophets looked towards that day, which they thought was way down the road, they could see kind of dimly this great kingdom on the other side.

[2 : 35] The kingdom was all about the forgiveness of sins, about the judgment of the unrighteous, about healing of bodies, healing of creation, and about the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so the people are kind of, so to speak, are looking down this timeline, looking at that wall.

They know on the other side of that is this kingdom. Now, Jesus comes on the scene, see, and one little line says, the time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near.

Those things that you can see in that wall, the fruit of that, all of the blessings of that are beginning now to spill into the present moment in me because I came.

It's like Jesus walking there and getting up against the wall and then coming back and saying, no, no, that future kingdom is breaking in now. And so we see in the life of Jesus, Jesus healing bodies, Jesus restoring relationships, Jesus pouring out the Holy Spirit on his people.

All of those are the things that the prophets thought would come at the end of time, and they're now breaking into the present. And as a result of that breaking into the present, there is emerging then a new kind of humanity all over the place.

[3 : 50] A new kind of humanity that's already beginning to partake of the reality on the other side of that window. Are you following me? Already, what's on the other side there is beginning to be manifested, and when it's manifested in the world, people's lives get changed.

There's a new kind of humanity, and that is what the Sermon on the Mount is about. Jesus is simply describing the character traits and the behavior patterns that begin to emerge in people when the reality on the other side of that window begins to flow into our lives now.

That's what I mean by gospelized humanity. The gospel is the kingdom has come near, and when that gospel gets hold of us, voila, the Sermon on the Mount people appear right in the midst of this

age before we get on the other side of the window.

Now, in light of that, then, we can turn to our text. If it weren't for that, see, this text would become oppressive legalism. If it weren't for that, it would be idealism. But because the kingdom has come, it is not legalism, and it's not idealism.

This is the way to live. All right? Our text is Matthew 5, 21 through 26. If you are able, will you stand for the reading of the word?

[5 : 09] You have heard it was said, You shall not commit murder, and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.

But I say to you, see, now this is this distinction. The way it was was here, and now that the light has broken through, it's going to be different. But I say to you, that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court.

Whoever shall say to his brother, Raka, shall be guilty before the Supreme Court. And whoever shall say, You fool, shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. If, therefore, you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with them on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, the judge to the officer, and you be thrown in prison.

Truly, I say to you, you shall not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. Spirit of the living God, you inspired Matthew to write these words down long ago.

[6 : 21] And now I pray that in your mercy and grace you would cause these words to come alive in us as never before. Grant, dear God, that in these moments together we may experience the nearness and presence of your kingdom.

For we pray in Jesus' name, Amen. Please be seated. Let me say right off that I'm aware of the many but-what-if circumstances of our lives that we could bring to this text and thereby shelter ourselves from the word that this text speaks.

I'm aware of the fact that many of us have tried to reconcile but are not making progress. And there are all these what-ifs or but-what-ifs.

What if the other person will not answer my phone call? What if the other person will not acknowledge that there's a problem? What if the other person has moved away? What if the other person has even died?

I know all those but-what-ifs. And they're important and Jesus speaks to those in other parts of Scripture. But for today, let's set aside those but-what-ifs and let Jesus' hard-hitting words come right in our face.

[7 : 43] I have a number of relationships that are broken. And I have tried to do what this text calls me to do and I have not yet found the fulfillment of them. I have a number of relationships that are strained and I've done a lot but apparently I've not done enough and I'm afraid to do more.

I'm afraid to do more because I'm afraid of the explosion of anger that might come in my face if I try to do more. So I'm aware of all of that. But today, I just need this text to come right at me and get in my face.

And I invite you to do the same thing. Let me make four observations that I think can help us understand what Jesus is getting at in this text. The first has to do with this phrase in verse 22, anyone who is angry with his brother.

Anyone who is angry with his brother. There are two Greek words which are translated into the English language as angry. The first is thumos, T-H-U-M-O-S.

William Barclay notes that to the Greeks, thumos is like the flame which comes from dried straw. That is, it's easily ignited and just as easily extinguished.

[8 : 57] Thumos, up and down quickly. The other word is orge, O-R-G-E. And about this word, William Barclay writes, anger, this is anger that becomes inveterate.

Long-lived anger. The anger of the man who nurses his wrath to keep it warm. It's this second word that Jesus uses here in this text.

Actually, it's the verb form of orge that he uses. And it is in the present tense participial form referring not to a moment of anger but to being angry, carrying anger, nursing anger.

Now, this is important to know in this text. For Jesus is not saying that anger is always wrong. There is a place for thumos. There are good reasons to really be angry.

Jesus himself got angry many times, right, in the Gospels. It is what we do with our anger that is at stake here. Jesus is talking about the kind of anger that is allowed to stew.

[10:04] What he's talking about here, then, is holding a grudge. The Apostle Paul understands this distinction. In Ephesians 4, verses 26 and 27, he says, Be angry, but do not sin.

Be angry and do not sin? How, Paul? He goes on in the next line, Do not let the sun go down on your anger. The person, Jesus says in this text, is subject to judgment is the person who is allowing his or her anger to linger past the setting of the sun.

He's speaking about that inner decision to let anger stew and fester within the soul. The second observation has to do with the word raka in verse 22.

It is likely related to the Aramaic word which means empty. And so, other translations render this word as empty-headed or idiot or stupid.

And what we need to know is that to use the word raka of another person is to call into question that person's mental competency. It's to insult that person's intelligence.

[11:17] The third observation has to do with the phrase, you fool. The Greek word here is the word more, from which we get the English word moron. It has both religious and moral overtones.

It's used in the Old Testament of those who denied the existence of God and lived an immoral life. Some scholars suggest that it's related to the Hebrew word which means rebel or outcast.

And what we need to know is that to use this word more of another person is to call into question the person's moral competence, to insult the person's character. Nineteenth century New Testament scholar A.B. Bruce put it this way, raka expresses contempt for a man's head, you stupid.

Moray expresses contempt for a man's heart, you scoundrel. Okay? The fourth observation then ties those other three together. There is an escalation in Jesus' words in this text.

There is an escalation moving from the serious to the more serious. He starts with the decision to nurse anger and then moves to the casual sarcastic remark, raka, and then moves to the deliberate public insult, you fool.

[12:39] Isn't that how it usually goes? Jesus is a very keen observer of the human condition here. Nursing anger, that leads to the casual sarcastic remark, that leads to the public word of insult.

Now, along with this escalating of seriousness, there is an escalation of consequences. That is, an escalating in the degree of judgment for those different acts.

Jesus says that staying angry is subject to judgment before the civil court. expressing occasional sarcastic words is subject to judgment before the supreme court.

And speaking the flagrant public insult of another human being is risking judgment of the fires of hell. Now, I think we can better understand what Jesus is getting at in this hard-hitting text.

What he is doing is drawing out the original intent of the sixth commandment, you shall not murder. As we said last week, Earl Palmer looks at the original commandment as this arc that is drawn.

[13:48] And what Jesus does here is he takes this arc and he draws it all the way around so that he fulfills the circle that was intended. Many have called the sixth commandment, you shall not murder, God's protest against inhumanity.

I like that. Thou shalt not murder is God's protest against inhumanity. In Jesus' words here, he is fulfilling this protest.

He is extending it. He is broadening it. He is deepening it. He is heightening this protest. You have heard the ancients were told you shall not murder, but I say to you something more about inhumanity.

Now, Jesus is not saying here as is often said and I have preached before that nursing anger and uttering sarcasm and public insults are murder. Anger is not murder.

Sarcasm is not murder. Insults are not murder. Yes, as John Stott says, anger and insults are ugly symptoms of a desire to get rid of someone who's in the way.

[14:54] And yes, sarcasm and insult are forms of character assassination. And yes, as the Jewish Tolmok points out, when someone is shamed in public, the color in his or her face recedes and like a dying person, they look pale.

But Jesus is not making a one-to-one correspondence between anger, sarcasm, insult, and murder. What he's doing is drawing this arc into its full circle.

And what he's telling us is that behind, beneath, prior to, the act of murder is the act of nursing anger, which spills over in sarcastic remarks and words of insult.

He's telling us that homicide, the ultimate act of inhumanity, comes out of a deep reservoir of unresolved anger. But that is not all that he is saying.

He goes deeper in this text. And this is where it's hard hitting. Jesus is saying that nursing anger is just as displeasing to God, just as damaging to relationships, and just as deserving of judgment as murder.

[16:10] Jesus is saying that uttering the casual, sarcastic remark is just as displeasing to God, just as damaging to relationship, and just as deserving of judgment as murder.

Jesus is saying that the public insult of a brother or sister is just as displeasing to God, just as damaging of relationship, and just as deserving of judgment as murder.

Sticks and stones will break my bones and names will never hurt me. I never understood as a kid why we said that. Did you? Names always hurt.

They always hurt deeply. I think Dietrich Bonhoeffer gets at it best. He says that the ancient law tells us that another person's life is a boundary which we dare not cross.

In this text, Jesus the lawgiver is saying that even anger oversteps that boundary. Still more, the casual, sarcastic word, raka, and most of all the deliberate word of insult, you fool.

[17:19] It steps over the boundary of another person's life. It's a hard-hitting word. Spoken to fulfill the law. Spoken to protect and enhance human relationships.

You shall not murder. Murder clearly displeases God and breaks the relationship and is deserving of judgment. But just as displeasing to God, just as damaging of a relationship, and just as deserving of judgment is the nursing of anger, the uttering of the casual, sarcastic remark, and the public insult of another human being created in the image of God.

Well, Jesus has leveled us all in this text, has He not? As He will in the other five, you have heard it was said, but I say unto you. But thankfully, He does not leave us on the floor.

He brings us down in order to bring us up. And so He says in verse 23, therefore, therefore, therefore. And what does He go on to do in this text?

He goes on to give a short course on how to control your temper, right? He goes on to give clues on how to justify your anger, right? He goes on to give us little tips on how to stuff anger, right?

[18:42] Not. Rather, what He does is He takes two examples from real life, both of them teaching the one way, the one and only way to deal with anger.

And what is it? Deal with it. Or more particularly, deal with the person with whom I am angry or who is angry at me.

More succinctly, Jesus calls us to will, to reconcile. The first example comes from the religious realm. The second comes from the secular realm.

And both of them teach the same thing. Get it right and do it now. Listen again to the first example. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.

First go, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Note the phrase, your brother has something against you. The word something in Greek is, it's a little word ti, ti, a little word to make a big point.

[19:51] If there is something, however little, between you and your brother or sister, go be reconciled. For the fact of the matter is, it is the little things which if allowed to fester, which finally caused the rupture in the relationship.

Dale Bruner puts it this way. The ti may be anything. It may even be something for which we are not to blame. The source, the cause, the nature of the thing is not at all in Jesus' view.

All that is important is that something is wrong. If therefore you are giving your altar, you are giving your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you.

Let me pause for a moment here, a little sidebar if you will, and ask, why would you remember something before the altar? You are before the altar of God and there you remember something your brother has against you.

Why would you remember it there? Well the answer is part of the dynamic of worship. The one we seek to worship is the great reconciling God whose passion for reconciliation took him all the way to the cross and his spirit will cause us to remember because he does not want any little thing to come between a brother and a sister.

[21 : 15] Have you ever had this experience in worship before? You're singing your heart out in one of these songs and all of a sudden someone with whom you have tension comes across your mind. Have you ever had that experience? Now I used to think I used to think that what was going on in that experience was that the evil one was bringing that person to mind to divert me from worship.

A friend of mine Gary Sweeten some of you know him has helped me see that what is more likely going on is that the spirit of the reconciling God is making me face what I want to run from.

If you are at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you leave first be reconciled and then come back and offer your gift.

Leave? Leave the worship service? Is not worship the greatest of human acts? What is the chief end of humanity but to glorify God and enjoy him forever?

Can anything however noble come in between worshiped that would cause me to leave the worship service? Leave. First go be reconciled to your brother and then come back. Why? Why leave?

[22 : 33] Because as long as we are not willing to reconcile the key word is willing as long as we are not willing to reconcile nothing is happening in the worship service anyway.

Not nothing. I shouldn't say it that strong. Grace is happening. We're remembering. You see Jesus here is unfolding the mystery of our relationship with the living God.

This is what makes this text so hard hitting. He's reminding us that our relationship with God is profoundly intertwined with our relationship with other human beings. Isn't that the point of the fifth clause of the Lord's Prayer?

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. If I will not will to reconcile with you I am injuring not only the relationship between you and me but I am injuring the relationship between me and the living God.

If I am not willing to reconcile I am erecting a barrier not only between you and me but between me and the living God. Dale Bruner says it well again. The Lord does not want to talk with a disciple who does not want to talk to a brother or sister.

[23 : 49] The Lord does not want to talk to a disciple who is not willing to talk to a brother or a sister. If therefore you are at the altar and there remember.

Listen again to the second example Jesus gives. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still on the way or he may hand you over to the judge the judge will hand you to the officer and you will be thrown into prison and I tell you the truth you will not get out until you have paid every last penny.

Yikes. The key word in this text is the adverb quickly. Quickly. Settle matters quickly while still on the way.

Jesus is telling us here to do everything we can to seek reconciliation before we go to court. He is telling us to go to great lengths to find settlement before we have to bring a judge into the picture. I think he is also warning us that if we expect God to help us in the courtroom we better have done everything we can outside the courtroom first. It is better to humble oneself on the steps of the courtroom than to be humiliated in the court is what he is saying.

[25 : 05] Quickly. Do it quickly. William Barclay is right. When personal relationships go wrong in nine cases out of ten immediate action would have mended them.

Anglican pastor John Claypool tells the story of two identical twins who learned the hard way the lesson of not acting quickly. From the earliest stages of life they were inseparable.

They went to the same school together, wore the same clothes, all the same activities. In fact, they were so close neither of them married. When their father died they took over the family business and their relationship was held out through the community as a model of creative collaboration.

One morning a customer came into the store and made a small purchase. The brother who waited on the customer put the dollar bill on top of the cash register and walked to the front door with the man.

Some time later he remembered what he had done and he went back to the cash register only to find the dollar bill gone. He asked his brother if he had seen the bill and put it in the register.

[26 : 10] The brother said he didn't know anything about this. That's funny said the other. I distinctly remember placing the bill here on the register and no one else has been in the store since I did that.

Now had the matter been settled there then nothing would have come of it. However, a few hours later this time with a noticeable hint of suspicion in his voice the brother again asked are you sure you didn't see the dollar bill and put it in the register?

The other brother picking up this note of accusation flared back in defensive anger and thus began a serious breach in the relationship which grew wider and wider and wider.

New charges and counter charges were thrown in until it got so bad that the two had to dissolve their relationship. They built this huge partition down the middle of the store started two different stores and started into a 20 year angry competition.

That war of course spilled over into the community as each brother tried to solicit friends onto his side. Then one day a car with an out of state license on it drove up in front of the store.

[27 : 18] A well dressed man got out went into one side of the building inquired how long this merchant had been doing business on this side of the building. When he found out that it had been over 20 years the stranger said then you are the person with whom I must settle a score.

He went on to say some 20 years ago I was out of work drifting from place to place I happened to get off the train in your town I had no money not even and I hadn't eaten for three days as I was walking down the alley behind your store I looked in I saw a dollar bill on the top of the cash register everyone else was in front of the store I'd never stolen anything before but I was so hungry that morning I gave in to the temptation I slipped in through the back door I took the dollar bill and went out.

That act has weighed on my conscience ever since I've come back to make amends would you let me replace the money and I will pay any damages that have been accrued. Well the stranger was surprised to see the elderly gentleman standing in front of him shaking his head in dismay and beginning to weep.

He then turned to the stranger and said will you go on the other side of the partition and repeat your story. The stranger did only this time now there are two older men who look very much alike both weeping uncontrollably.

Twenty years of recrimination and hostility for nothing. I came from a church in Sacramento this tape's going to get back there I'm hesitating saying this I came from a church where for four and a half years I tried to get different parties to reconcile and made no progress.

[29 : 01] There were two men who represented two of the major groups in that church they come to worship together just sit in different parts of the worship service. They haven't talked to each other these two groups for thirty to forty years.

I got to know a representative from each one of those groups one of the men I'll call him Bob his name is not Bob he said to me one day I will never forgive those people and that man for what he did and I said to Bob Bob that's the most dangerous thing you can ever say.

Do you realize what happens to your heart when you say that? You don't want to say that. I had the privilege of going to a conference with him for about a week and we bunked together and we got to talk about a lot of different things and I started to talk to Bob about you know you can't you can't go on like this.

You've got to forgive this guy. Well his heart melted a little bit more and went throughout the week and finally towards the end of the week I said by the way what did this other person in this group do to you in this group 40 years ago?

His answer was I don't remember. And the next thing he said was but I will never forgive them. very sarcastic man.

[30 : 22] Likes to insult people. Where did the sarcasm and insult come from? He's very angry with me now that I left to come here. Won't talk.

Which means he's got another rock in his soul. and he's going to die. Quickly says Jesus.

You've got to do it quickly. Before the sun goes down on your anger says Paul as far as you are able you've got to settle the matters quickly.

Otherwise your heart becomes a poisoned pool of unresolved anger out of which comes sarcastic remarks and insulting words which are just as displeasing to God, just as damaging of relationships and just as deserving of judgment as is murder.

So what do we do today? in response to this hard hitting text. Some in this room need to stand up, walk across the room, and extend a hand of reconciliation.

[31 : 47] If you're one of those persons and you do it, rest assured no one will look down on you. We will rejoice and bless you for your obedience. Quickly, says Jesus.

Some in this room need to get up and leave the building. And go and find that brother or sister and extend the hand of reconciliation. Quickly, says Jesus. If you do that, rest assured we will not look down on you.

We will rejoice and we will bless you for your obedience. Some in this room want to get up but they can't afford a plane ticket to fly to that offended brother or sister.

Others want to get up and do something but there are so many strained relationships they don't know where to begin. Still others want to get up but the person with whom they need to reconcile has already gone ahead to glory.

May I suggest then a couple of things we can do right now. First of all, of all those relationships with where you are angry or someone is angry at you, ask the Lord to put his finger on the one you can do something about today.

[33 : 01] Lord, of all those relationships, which one do you want me to address? Second, tell the Lord you are afraid to be the first one to take the step.

I'm known around the place as a peacemaker. Let me tell you, I'm afraid to make the first step. I'm afraid, Lord, that I'm going to get such anger thrown at me that I'll cry.

Or I'm afraid that I'm going to be humiliated. Or I'm afraid that I'm going to be put down and rejected. Tell the Lord you're afraid to be the first one.

Third, tell the Lord I will to reconcile. I don't know what it looks like. But Lord Jesus, as an act of my will, I will to reconcile.

If you can't say that much, at least say this. I will to will to will to reconcile. And then fourth, ask the Lord to give help to do whatever it is you need to do.

[34 : 15] If we will will to will to reconcile, Jesus will give us the grace to do it. you see, we're living in a whole new context because of the coming of Jesus Christ.

The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. And when it does, there is will to reconcile. I will to reconcile. Quickly. Don't let the sun go down one more time.