

Exodus 20:1-2, 13, Matthew 5:21-22, Luke 10:29-37

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 October 2022

Preacher: Benjie Slaton

- [0 : 0 0] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find help more by visiting gracepeacechurch.org. Good morning, Grace and Peace. Our reading will be from Exodus 20, Matthew 5, and Luke 10.
- And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not murder. You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.
- But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable in judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, You fool, will be liable to the hell of fire.
- But he desired to justify himself, saying to Jesus, And who is my neighbor? Jesus replied, A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.
- [1 : 2 4] Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.
- But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.
- Then he sent him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.
- Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, You go and do likewise. This is the word of the Lord.
- Amen. Please take a seat. Let me go ahead and pray for us as we begin.
- [2 : 2 7] Our Father, we pray that you would take these words and that you would sear them onto our hearts. That you would, by the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to see ourselves more clearly, but to see the glory of Jesus and to be drawn to him.
- In repentance and faith. For we ask it in his name. Amen. Okay. We are continuing on in our look this fall at what must be the world's most important piece of ethical literature.
- The Ten Commandments. Right? I made the claim at the beginning of our series looking at the Ten Commandments that the Ten Commandments are essentially answering one important question.
- How do we become good people? It seems obvious that if you're trying to wrestle with what does it mean to become good people, you'd start with, hey, don't kill other people.

That seems to be a pretty obvious one. And so it's a little bit surprising that we don't get to killing people until the Sixth Commandment. I wonder why that is. You know, Moses, well, God gave to Moses the Ten Commandments.

[3 : 38] And so God started with, how are you to worship God? How are you to seek God? And then moved towards seeking to love one another.

We are to, it seems that the foundation of loving our neighbor well means loving God first and foremost. And then Jesus, as Jesus does, he takes that command and he expands on it, builds on it.

In the Sermon on the Mount that Drew just read, he took the idea of not killing someone and he radically expanded it to include not even hating someone. Jesus is saying that what is important in the Ten Commandments is not just the bare minimum of how you cannot be guilty of them, but it's inviting you into this expansive sense of obedience.

See, for Jesus, being a good person means both the not doing certain things, but it also means doing certain things as well.

And that's what I want to look at today. It's really simple. I want to look at the things that Jesus in his teaching condemns for us related to this commandment, but I also want to look at the things that Jesus commands for us.

[4 : 57] And then I want to look at Jesus's character and his actions and how they really answer the question about what it means to be good. So first of all, Jesus condemns. What does Jesus condemn here?

Well, the Hebrew of the Sixth Commandment is, it actually has a lot of nuance to it. It's just the command in Hebrew is only two words.

Low rat shock is what it is. Means no killing. But that term actually includes more than just what we would call murder.

Murder is the intentional premeditated action to kill someone, right? But the word in Hebrew actually includes more than that.

It includes what we might now call man's blood. The unintentional but negligent actions that you take that result in somebody else's death.

[5 : 53] And that was clear throughout the Old Testament that that was something that was included. For instance, in Deuteronomy 22, Moses gives this part of his working out the laws as he gives this direction that, hey, if you're going to build a house and you're going to put a rooftop patio on it, you need to put a rail around it.

Now, rooftop patios were really common because you would have a little ladder that goes up. You'd have a hole in your roof. You'd have a ladder that goes up. And because you could only access it from the inside, it was a place that was safe to store your items.

You would sleep there because it would be a breeze. It's very different from the rooftop patios of a club downtown or something. Different idea. This was a place of safety and security.

And so what Moses says, though, is if you build one and you don't have a rail on it and somebody falls off your rooftop patio, you are guilty before them.

You are condemned because you should have put up a rail to protect someone. You're negligent for that death. So on a simple level, this command, it condemns actual murder as well as the kind of reckless things that people do that result in somebody else's harm.

[7 : 07] And, you know, thankfully, you know, our culture reflects this in our laws. We enforce this kind of thing. I mean, just think about drunk driving, you know, or texting while driving.

I don't know anyone who does that. Certainly not me. Texting while driving or, you know, being responsible to lock up a firearm properly or that we do this with corporations that you cannot make or sell something that is going to be harmful to people or at least the things we say are harmful.

There's plenty of other things, I'm sure. See, because of this law, however, Christians from the earliest times have been people that you could describe as being for life, as being pro-life during the plagues of the Roman Empire, the Roman cities.

These plagues would sweep through the Roman cities. Christians were known as the people who didn't flee the cities to the countryside. They were also known to be the ones who didn't abandon their families because that was pretty common.

If a plague was going through and nobody had a cure, what do you do if grandma got the plague? Well, had a good run. See ya. We're going to the countryside.

[8 : 24] But the Christians didn't do that. To the risk of themselves, they took care of people. In fact, Emperor Julian, who was a complete pagan, he observed this and he said about the Christians that the Christians care not only for their own poor, but they care for our poor as well, even to the cost of their own lives.

Christians were the first ones who built hospitals. Christians were known to take in orphans who had been abandoned. Christians were the first ones to forbid injustice like sexual slavery and the abuse of women in the ancient world.

Christians have the desire to create the circumstances where life is protected in all the various ways that that happens.

Now, in our current context, we think immediately of practices like abortion, which Christians are against. If you want to talk more about the particular arguments of that, I'm happy to do that.

I'm not going to get into that today, but I'm happy to talk about how that relates to our current political life. if we could do that. But Christians are also against things like euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.

[9 : 41] Why? Well, because we fundamentally, because of the Scriptures, believe that God decides who gets to live or die. That's God's prerogative because He is the Lord of life and of death.

And so we think of things like suicide. You know, it's important for us to say that that is not the unforgivable sin.

It's always, always a tragedy. If you are someone who thinks about that, please come talk to me because we want to be for your life.

So often, in the various forms that that happens, it's because of careless logic or even mental illness. And it's a tragedy. Now, of course, this raises all sorts of questions.

You know, what about war? What about capital punishment? What about self-defense? What about the end-of-life decisions that we often have to make with family members? How do we think about those things?

[10 : 45] And each of those are really good ethical questions that I would love to talk to you about. I have thoughts. I got thoughts on that. I'd be happy to talk about any one of those things that doesn't, that is confusing you.

But I want you to see the principle here and then I want to, I want to tease out the principle. The principle is that we as a people to be faithful to God as Christians, we cannot be casual about death and killing.

That's not something that we have the ability to do. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that treats these things far too lightly. You know, Christians, as Christians, we ought to be concerned about everything that deals with life and the creation of the context by which life can flourish around us.

What that means is we should be just as concerned about the unborn child as we are about the life and the circumstances that that mother finds herself in.

We should be just as concerned about the victim of a crime as we are about the criminal. We should be concerned about a Downs kid as much as we are about a normal kid, quote unquote.

[12 : 06] We should be as concerned about the poor as we are about the wealthy. Every single human life lost is a tragedy because every single human is made in the image of God.

We should, in our culture, have no celebration of the loss of life, even if that loss is justified.

It's always a tragedy. You know, we can't support parts of our culture that want to make violence and death normalized, that want to use it as some sort of like, you know, this marker of manliness to be violent and aggressive or somehow desirable to engage in these kinds of practices that end up with people dying.

That is not a desirable outcome. Sometimes it happens in a fallen world and sometimes it's justified in a fallen world. But what God is teaching here is that every time that a life is snuffed out, it diminishes the whole of us.

It attacks part of the image of God. Jesus condemns killing because He knows that killing one of us hurts all of us. We weren't made for that.

[13 : 30] It's not how this life was made to be. So, it's fairly easy to see what's condemned by this and we can work out lots of the ethical questions and I'm happy to do that in a different context where we can talk a little longer about it.

But I want you to see what Jesus commands, okay? That's what He condemns. What does He command? How does He want us to actually live out this honoring of life that we see in the Ten Commandments?

Well, as you'd expect from Jesus, He tosses this kind of stuff on its head. You know, He's talking to Jewish people when He's preaching His Sermon on the Mount.

They were good religious people. They knew what it meant to honor the sixth commandment, to not murder. But what Jesus does is He deepens and expands it and He blows their minds about what actually that is talking about.

He told the Good Samaritan parable. The Good Samaritan parable that we read a moment ago is a direct application of the sixth commandment. You've got two religious people who ignore this potentially life-threatening situation for the man who was attacked by robbers.

[14 : 44] It's not just mercy. It was his life at stake. And then you have the Samaritan who follows a costly kind of love.

Jesus is expanding the command so that you would see that God's word for us is that we would not only not murder, but that we would be filled with the kind of love that Jesus has.

The kind of costly love that seeks the flourishing and the benefit of our neighbor. It's an active love. And one of the ways Jesus talks about this is that the beginning of that active love is the way that you talk.

It's your speech that shows your love. And then it moves out from there. Let me read again from Matthew 5. You've heard that it was said of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you that everyone who's angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. Whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire.

[15 : 59] Jen Wilkin is a writer who I've referenced a number of times. Her book on the Ten Commandments, it's on the website. It's fabulous. But she says this. I'm going to read a couple of things from her. She writes this about this passage.

She says, the exclamation, you fool, is the Hebrew word raka, which some of your translations may have. If you've got an NIV, they use raka there. And that is the ancient equivalent of our most derogatory language.

It's the kind of language that requires beeping out. It's a term of extreme contempt. Yet Jesus used it to make the point. She goes on to describe this kind of pattern that I think is familiar to all of us.

It starts with us being hurt in some way, being wounded, and then moving out towards our anger, a natural response to being wounded and hurt, a natural emotion, negative emotion.

And then that goes, though, to contempt. And then that turns into violence. She says this. People who murder have embraced contempt to the point that they believe another image bearer to be so worthless as to not deserve to live.

[17 : 14] People who embrace contempt have indulged anger to the point where they believe their injury, their hurt, merits the greater injury of another. People who indulge their anger and their wounds have made a conscious decision of the will to nurture their negative emotions into a seedling of contempt, a seedling which, over time, yields a bloody harvest.

What she's saying is is that it's a natural emotion to have anger in response to the ways that we've been hurt in the world, the wounds that we have. But then, when we fertilize that natural anger with this contempt, it grows up into a tree of violence.

And each step on that hurt, anger, contempt, violence track, we cultivate and nurture these wounds instead of finding the healing that can be found in Jesus.

Yeah. It's completely relatable. This, we've all been hurt. We've all been angry. We've all cultivated this sense of aggrievement and of injury.

We've all found ourselves with this contempt for our enemies and for people who have hurt us. And so, murder seems to be, this killing is just the logical extension of that.

[18 : 41] You know, and we see it in all kinds of ways. You see it in road rage violence. You see it in Little League parent fights. Where does that come from? You see it in the gun violence that we see around.

You even see this in the way that our politicians are trying to buy your votes through your outrage. But these words of contempt actually, they contribute to the violence.

In Rwanda, in 1994, there was a genocide. You may have heard of that. A hundred days where the ruling, the ruling party or the ruling tribe, the Hutus, they killed as many as 600,000 of their fellow Tutsi, the minority tribe, the Tutsi minority tribe, but their fellow country people.

Now, there was already tension and anger and past wounds between these two tribal leaders and colonialization and all kinds of things contributed to this. But one of the things that played into the way that that genocide happened was that there was a really large presence over the radio and over media speaking to the ruling Hutu tribesmen.

And in fact, one of the things that they did was they coined the Tutsis as cockroaches. And when things reached their kind of fomenting point, one of the key things that happened was over the radio, the leaders of the Hutu tribes started calling out that they were to crush the cockroaches.

[20 : 23] Crush the cockroaches. Crush the cockroaches. And that was one of the triggers that sent people out into these killing sprees with machetes and homemade tools. See, there is such contempt in the way that we speak in our public life right now that is absolutely not justified by the wrongs that we see.

Even the dangerous people in our world should not be treated with the sin of contempt. And we as Christians can't fall into this.

This can't be the way that we live. We can't call out raka to these people. Dallas Willard, he says, contempt is a kind of studied degradation of another.

It's more pervasive in life than anger even is. It's never justifiable or good. In contempt, I don't care if you are hurt, degraded, excluded, or isolated.

What he's saying is is that more dangerous than actual violence is the contempt that leads to violence. Martin Luther said that the sixth commandment requires a pure heart as well as pure hands because we can kill with any part of our body.

[21 : 47] And that is not just talking about, you know, speaking words of truth. Like that, there is a deep contempt that is underneath so much of the public conversation we have out there.

And it begs the question, I think for us, as I've wrestled with this, one of the questions that I've asked myself is, is there something, is there something of a killer inside of me in my responses to my own hurts and wounds?

You know, the question is, are you harboring contempt at other people? How about this? Would your children or your wife say that your anger sits just below the surface ready to burst out at any moment?

Are the words that you speak or type or think, are they words that are used to bless and honor or to dishonor and condemn?

Do you excuse others as they diminish God's image by simply saying, well, you know, they're telling the truth or they're tough but fair or that person deserves it?

[23 : 05] I think that's the realm with our words that so many of us deal with with this particular commandment. But it actually goes deeper because our words as Jesus is saying it, our words are the things that we can easily see but there is a depth of hatred and violence that exists in many of us and many of us have even other more powerful, more powerful relating to this commandment.

I was, years ago, I have a pastor friend, he's a mentor, he's a couple years older than me and we spent a lot of time together maybe 15 years ago and we were talking about some deep things and he, we were confessing some of the worst things we'd ever done, frankly.

And one of the things he said was, I want to tell you a story. He said, when I was growing up, in high school I was dating this girl and we were kind of getting ready for college and she got pregnant and I encouraged her to have an abortion and, and then, you know, thinking that this would be helpful for our relationship, that it would be helpful in the town they grew up in and, and he said then, you know, as often happens, college happened and one of us went off to the other and we kind of became distant and we lost, you know, we broke up and our lives have moved on in these different places and, you know, now he's a guy who's got, you know, married kids, he's got, you know, he's a pastor, he's got his own family and that's a long ago thing but one of the things he said was, he said, I still carry around the realization that, that I took a life.

Now, look, if, if that, where you fall politically on things, that's fine. I'm, I, you need to know, if you disagree with that politically, you need to know that a lot of Christians, that's how they experience abortion and a lot of these other cultural things.

There's a, the numbers will tell you that even sitting in a room like this, there are perhaps a dozen of us who have either, who have had an experience like this and we sit around and we, we take these things and they're often silently accusing us and there's a guilt and a shame that is associated with this and, and I say that as a way of saying that there are things that each of you are carrying around that condemn you when we look at these, at these, commandments.

[25 : 54] Some of you have dealt with these, these things that surround death in such a profound way and I want you to know that not only does God see and know what you have experienced and what you have done but he has, he hasn't turned away from you.

Don't think I'm harsh for bringing this up. What I want you to see is the, the reason God brings this up for us and that I'm bringing it up is because he offers us healing for those things.

The worst things that you have done are things that God has come to heal and put right again. God hasn't turned away from us but he's, he's showing us this to save us.

All of God's laws, there are three reasons why God gives us laws. The first one is it's, it's like a fence for us, right? The law tells us, okay, what are the boundaries here? If I, if I don't obey this boundary, thing, you know, there's going to be consequences, right?

It's a fence, it binds us in. The second thing that the law does though is it, it acts like, well, it acts like a school teacher. It tells us, it tells us what we are to do, not just what we shouldn't do, it tells us what we should do, it teaches us, it shows us how to obey.

[27 : 14] But the third thing that the law does is it acts like a mirror. When we read God's law, it exposes us, it shows us who we really are.

we begin to see the ways that, that not have, not only have we maybe not murdered, but our hatred and contempt is so deep.

The anger within us, the way that we cover over for our own woundedness and lash out at other people. You know, I asked the question at the beginning, you know, these are about how do you, how are you a good person?

Well, I hope what you're seeing is we're all in the same boat. Not one of us is a good person. Not one of us can live up to this command. That's why Jesus gave, that's why Jesus expanded this, was to say, not only do you not have to not take the life of someone else, but you have to actually be about the flourishing of life for your neighbor.

You are called to love your neighbor as yourself. And to the extent that all of us have failed in that, in greater or lesser degrees of ways, we are all condemned by this.

[28 : 33] You know, I think as Christians, we have to own up to the reality that we are condemned by this. Even if you may think that you vote in this pro-life way, there is not one of us who consistently seeks the life of our neighbor.

It's not to diminish very real concerns. So what do we do? Well, we look to Jesus. Right? Because there is only one who has lived up to this command.

Jesus, by his character and his actions, makes the sixth commandment and what it should be, visible. He shows us what it looks like. See, Peter Lighthouse is a theologian and he writes this.

I'm just going to quote it because it's beautiful. He says this, Jesus doesn't ever assault the image of God. He only restores it. Jesus does not wound, but he heals.

Jesus does not take life, but he gives it abundantly. Jesus doesn't oppress, but Jesus liberates. Jesus' words, even his harshest words, are words of life.

[29 : 50] Jesus has every cause to defend himself and seek vengeance. He has legions of angels at his command, and yet, Jesus gives of himself silent in his, he suffers in silent patience and love, and he asks forgiveness for his executors.

He doesn't kill, but he dies, the victim of murder himself. And in so doing, he becomes the only one who can give us life.

You see, we serve a God who not only gave us his law, but he came to us in Christ Jesus, not only commanding that we do these good things, but he actually provides the way by which we might accomplish those good things.

He provides us Jesus. See, Jesus is worthy of us worshiping and following and obeying, not because Jesus has great teachings that make a lot of sense to us, not because Jesus is a miracle being God and man, not because he could do miraculous things, but fundamentally, we follow Jesus because he is, without question, in everything that he does, in every action of his entire life, is perfectly and unswervingly good.

He is good. There is nothing about him that is not good. And he's worthy of our worship because of that.

[31 : 21] You see, the mission of the church is not to make you good people. The mission of the church is to invite you to experience the goodness of Jesus that has been provided for us by faith in him.

That God has provided his goodness. That when we talk about the gospel, when we talk about the cross, what we mean is, is that on the cross, Jesus took the shame of your sin, the worst that you have done.

You know, my pastor friend, he said in a very real way, I am a murderer. I have committed this sin.

That's what my sin is. And yet, what he says is, Jesus has taken that identity marker, that sinful marker of identity upon himself.

And he has paid the penalty for it. And it's not just that it has freed me from that, but he has actually provided me with his goodness. I am no longer known by my sin and failure.

[32 : 32] I am known by his goodness that in him, I am perfectly righteous. I am perfectly good. I am honoring to God.

He died a death that I could not die so that I could become a person I could never be on my own. How in the world does that work? Well, you know, if you feel good about the football game last night, then you understand how this works.

Unless I'm mistaken, not a one of you played football at Neyland Stadium last night. And yet, you sense yourself to be a victor.

You sense that on your behalf, this thing has been done that has somehow shaped you. That's what the gospel of Jesus does. Jesus himself is the victor and in him we are victorious as well.

You see, to be a Christian means that we take his law so seriously that it absolutely destroys us.

[33 : 40] That it condemns us because we are not afraid to look ourselves in the eyes and say, this is how I have fallen short of God's law. We don't excuse it away. We look at it in the face because what we see is that in that mirror is reflected Christ and his work.

It drives us to him so that we might find forgiveness and grace in Christ and him alone. That's the good news of the gospel.

What if we were the kind of church, if we were the kind of people that were so committed to providing a life for our neighbor that not only were we able to speak out where we don't see that in our culture but that we were the first people to repent and to turn away from all the ways where we participate in the life-stealing parts of our culture and our community.

If we were the first people to get our hands dirty in serving our neighbor even at the cost of ourselves, if we were the first people to say we cannot live up to this but Jesus has and we give Jesus to everyone we can.

I want to be a part of a church with people like that. I don't need to find perfect people because I won't. If you think in here you're going to find perfect people, you're wrong.

[35 : 17] I'm sorry to disabuse you of that but what we can find is we can find the Jesus that makes us righteous in Him and that's where hope is.

That's why we come to this table. This table is us coming forward saying I cannot feed myself. I'm like a deer that longs for something that I cannot provide for myself and yet what God says is I'm going to provide for you.

I will make you what you cannot be on your own. all that is necessary for you is faith. It's to believe and to trust in Him.

We come with open hands in faith. That's why I have you get up out of your seats to walk forward. It's because you need to be reminded that you just can't sit there and just like you know no big deal.

You actually have to take an active movement of turning your heart towards God. So here's what I want to do. I'm going to close us in prayer and then I'm going to give you a couple of minutes or maybe just a minute of silence.

[36 : 25] I'm going to open us in prayer. We'll have about a minute of silence and then I'm going to have Walt come and pray and close us in this time in prayer. If you want to see there are a couple of questions in your program, application questions, discussion questions, there may be things that I brought up that you want to think about.

If there are things that you want, if there are things you want to talk about, please find me, email me.

I'd love to sit and talk with you about these things. Let me pray for us. Our God, as we close our time in your word, I don't know about anyone else, but I do so with a great sense of my own frailty, my own need for you.

This seems like the easiest of the commandments to follow and yet what I find is that the anger and the contempt and the woundedness that sits in my soul condemns me.

My hatred condemns me and I long for you to come for me. Lord, I pray that you would open the hearts of your people as they pour them out to you right now in these quiet moments.

[37 : 47] Hear our prayers, Lord. together. Amen.