

Real Judgement

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Neil Mancor

[0 : 00] Just as you stand, let's bow our heads. Father God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit whom you poured out upon the church, who inspires us, who gives us gifts and fills us, who brings your Word to life in our hearts, and who convicts us of sin.

So as we gather around your Word, pray that by your Spirit you would open our hearts to your Word and direct our wills that we might do what we need to do as you have directed us.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Please keep your Bibles open to page 4 of the New Testament section, Matthew chapter 5, continuing our series on this wonderful Sermon of the Mount, the Beatitudes from Matthew's Gospel.

So we're looking at the top of page 4, second column, verse 21 and following. I am the youngest child of three children. My brother and sister are 8 and 6 years older than I am.

My mother always said that I was not invited, but very welcome anyways. And during my early years growing up, my brother and sister would play with me downstairs and would often make me cry for one reason or another.

[1 : 21] And the trick then was for me to keep on crying until I made it all the way upstairs to where my mother was so that they could get into big trouble. So what they would do is very quickly upon my weeping would be to try to distract me in some way and make me laugh or smile so that my tears would end and I couldn't get to my mother in time.

Because if you weren't crying, there was no point going and telling on them. They would act very quickly in the face of my childlike tears to resolve the situation. Childlike I mentioned, by the way. Not childish. I was never childish. So they would act very quickly to resolve the situation before more trouble ensued and they were almost always successful.

And that is kind of like what Jesus is telling us to do in our passage this morning from Matthew chapter 5. He is telling us to act quickly in the face of anger.

To act and resolve anger. Relationship breakdowns. Relationship crisis. To quickly act.

[2 : 33] Do something about it. seek reconciliation. But the consequences of not doing so are much greater than crossing my mother.

And let's look at the passage. This brings me to my first point which is verse 21 and 22. Heart problems. Verse 21. Jesus says, You have heard that it was said to the men of old, Do not kill. And whoever kills will be liable to judgment. Literally, you shall not murder. Nothing wrong with that. You might say it's in the Ten Commandments after all. But the problem that Jesus is getting at in, there are six examples in these verses towards the end of the chapter in which Jesus says, You have heard, but I say to you.

He's commenting upon the Pharisaic teaching that they have been receiving. The interpretation of the Old Testament law. The problem that Jesus is getting at in these six examples was the way the Pharisees emptied the Old Testament law of its meaning so that it stopped addressing sin.

It had all become about externals. What I do. What I have not done. So that a Pharisee could look at this law and feel quite justified before God.

[3 : 47] Well, I've never murdered anyone. I'm okay. Or later, I've never committed adultery. I'm fine. See, that's the religion of the Pharisee. It's actually the easy way.

Yes, it's morally upright and pure. But it's focused on the external. The things that I do. The things I do not do. And it ignores the heart.

And we might, in our own lives, say something quite similar. I mean, I've never killed anyone. I'm a nice person. I respect other people's autonomy. Think of the Pharisee in Luke's Gospel who stood up in public and prayed, Lord, I thank you that I am not like this tax collector here.

I tithe. I read my Bible. I go to church every week. I'm okay. It's the kind of religion that ticks the boxes that make me pure and morally upright.

We are a prayer book. We are traditional. I read my Bible. I respect others. Lord, I thank you. I'm not like that evening service with its guitars and endless choruses. You know, that kind of thing. [4 : 55] All of which is just fine as far as it goes. But then Jesus throws this spanner in the works. He says, But I say, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Striking thing for him to say. Judgment. There's that word again. If you have killed someone, if you murder someone, you're liable to judgment. If you're angry with your brother, you're liable to judgment.

Pretty hard to escape that. Jesus is saying two things to us that are related. Anger matters and your heart matters. There are two words for anger in the Greek.

And the one being used here is not sudden passion, but dark, brooding anger in the heart, which is nurtured, worked on, cultivated in your heart.

And it's no accident that Jesus puts murder and anger together in one thought here. He's taking us to two extremes. Murder on the one hand, anger on the other.

[5 : 56] Murder is the end product of anger. It's a sin of the hand. It is a final act. The end product. But it begins in the heart.

It begins with anger. And just as murder is going to result in judgment, yeah, you're going to be hauled before court and sentenced, so too God punishes anger.

Murdering someone is very sinful. But holding on to anger in your heart is also sinful. You see, anger matters. Your heart matters.

You have to look within yourself. We all need to look within ourselves and reflect. How are our hearts today? How is your heart?

See, you can't say, I've never murdered anyone. I'm okay. I go to church. I'm okay. My relationship with God is strong. I'm okay. Fine. But how is your heart? How are your relationships?

[7 : 02] Are you nursing anger? See, again, this isn't losing your temper. This is nursing. You're brooding on anger in your heart. Are you holding on to anger?

See, it's a sin not just of the hand, but of the heart. See, and the point that Jesus is making here is not that if you are angry with someone, you've murdered them. That's not what he's saying. But he is holding before us murder and anger.

Both are sinful. And the one begins with the other. Anger is the seat of murder. You know, a cautionary tale is this tale in Genesis chapter 4 of Cain and Abel.

It says, Cain brought the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground. Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

So, Cain was very angry. The Lord addresses Cain and says, why are you angry? And he goes on, sin is crouching at the door.

[8 : 05] Its desire is for you. You must master it. So, he's saying to Cain in his anger, you've got to get a hold of this, Cain. You've got to get a grip of it. And Cain doesn't.

In verse 8, Cain said to Abel, his brother, let us go out to the field. And when they're in the field, Cain rose up against his brother and killed him. See, Cain nurtured this anger in his heart.

And nurturing that anger led him to murder. Not a murder of passion, but a planned, calculated killing. Now, it's not saying that everybody who's angry with someone is going to end up as a murderer or is a murderer.

But as the people of God, we don't want to be people whose hearts exist in this place of anger. And Jesus looks straight into our hearts this morning, into your heart and mine.

Your heart matters to God. It matters very much to Him. What is on your heart has eternal consequences and significance.

[9 : 12] Now, the audience in Jesus' time should have known that. We need to know that. I mean, the Scriptures they had said this. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

Jeremiah 31, I will put My law within them and I will write it upon their hearts. Ezekiel 36, A new heart I will put within you and I will take out of your flesh a heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and I will put My spirit within you.

You see, what a very different condition is the heart of the man or the woman of God. This is what it means to be an authentic disciple of Jesus. that His spirit infills us, that His word inhabits us, that

we obey our Lord.

What is the condition of your heart before God today? Because it matters. And in fact, Jesus takes this further in verse 22.

He says, whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council and whoever says you fool shall be liable to the hell of fire. I mean, you can help but see just how serious this really is.

[10:27] It's serious stuff. Not just what we think or what we do but what we say. If you insult someone, He says, you're going to be taken to the Sanhedrin, like the highest Jewish court.

So, you know, if you slander someone, you're going to go to Judge Judy. Anybody see that show? You're going to go to Judge Judy. But, if you call someone a fool, He says, you're going to be liable to the hell of fire.

I mean, this has eternal consequences. It's serious. Now, the word here for fool really means you scoundrel. It's to write someone off as bankrupt and worthless.

To throw their reputation on the rubbish heap. Say you're good for nothing. And the word for hell of fire here is Gehenna. The word for the burning, smoldering rubbish tip outside Jerusalem.

And it is serious. Jesus is underlining this in a very serious way. He says, if you rubbish someone, then you're at risk that God is going to rubbish you.

[11:29] And if you cast someone on the rubbish heap with your words, you're at risk that God is going to cast you on the rubbish heap. And this is a striking warning to all of us.

You have to sort it out when anger takes over in your heart. And you say and do things in anger. You've got to sort it out. It's no small thing that Jesus is saying to us.

And it matters. It matters to God. We must not allow angry things that we have said or done, the things we have hurled against people, to stand.

We have to do something about it. How quickly we say, well, I just couldn't help it, or I lost it, or the words just slipped out of my mouth, well, she provoked me, or the things we say behind someone else's back.

No one sees, but God does. You suffer from BSE syndrome? Blame someone else? I sure do. It's not my fault. But Jesus is saying, God has taken note.

[12:36] God does see. God knows. You know, I prefer in these kind of situations to cover it all with a blanket, and forget it ever happened, and get on with my religious life, thinking that I'm okay with God.

But it matters, and God knows about it. You know, I may have said terrible things to someone in anger and in private, or behind their back, hoping no one would listen, but God has been listening, and God has taken account.

You may be nursing anger privately in your heart, and no one knows about it, but God has taken account. Hebrews 4 and verse 13 says, And before God, no creature is hidden, but all are open, and laid bare to the eyes of Him, with whom we have to do.

I think that's a wonderful phrase. God is the one with whom we have to do. Yeah, we do. We all have to face Him. We all in the end have to do business with God.

And friends, this is serious. anger is serious. What we say to and about others is serious. The things that we do, it's serious.

[13:52] Suddenly, the words, well, I've never murdered anyone, that kind of rings hollow in the light of what Jesus is teaching us. But, wonderfully, Jesus gives us a remedy.

He gives us a way out of the situation. That's the second part of the passage, verses 23 and 24. I think it's the most marvelous thing that Jesus does. Having shown us sin and highlighted this area, he now shows us how we can get out, how we can seek reconciliation, what we can do that's right. And so he says, he gives us this remedy, and the remedy is very simple, first go, and then come. First go, then come.

Therefore, he says, verse 23, if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.

Now you'll notice a shift here because verse 21 to 22 dealt with anger in me. Now Jesus turns it around to deal with if your brother is angry with you. So if you know that there is a problem between you and a brother or sister in the Lord, if you have somehow offended or hurt someone, if a relationship has gone cool, been broken, what is the first thing we have to do?

[15:16] First go, then come. First go be reconciled, then come to church. You see, Jesus places this instruction in the context of temple worship, and that's very important.

You see, Pharisee, I've never murdered anyone, man, go to the temple, I do my religious duty, and then I go home happy in my personal righteousness.

But in the backdrop of my life, I may be living disobediently and sinfully. You see, it's very easy for us to hide behind a veneer of religious observance and close our eyes to the sin that we commit, close our eyes to the broken relationships, to the anger, the angry words, which may be going on in the backdrop of our lives.

And Jesus is saying, this matters. It matters to the true disciple. Relationships matter. This may be the only time a preacher encourages his congregation to get up and go before the end of the service.

It might be appropriate for you. If as you sit here, you realize that there is a relationship you need to repair, and it's urgent, it might be you have to go out and get up from this place, and go, be reconciled.

[16:35] Maybe you have to go out to the narthex and use your mobile phone and make a phone call. See, the remedy is first go, be reconciled, then come to church.

Sort it out. There is no negotiation here. If there is a problem, we have to sort it out with the person. Jesus is not allowing us here to hide behind a covering of church going and singing hymns.

We love being here together, singing the hymns, listening to the choir and the organ in this wonderful building, and all of that is good, but what is happening in the backdrop of your life?

Because if there is sin there, and if there is disobedience there, it needs to be dealt with. If there is brokenness in relationship, it needs to be dealt with.

First go, then come. See, we have to act on this. It is urgent. Christ commands it. This really is what it means for us as Christians.

[17:38] This is where the rubber hits the road. If being a Christian means anything in our lives, surely this is it. That we who have been reconciled to God in Christ seek reconciliation in our own relationships.

And then Jesus tells us at the very end why this needs to be acted on now in verse 25 and to the end. He says, make friends quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard and you be put into prison. Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. Just as we close this wonderful proverb almost from Jesus that pulls the whole thing together.

There is a lot you could say about these verses but I am out of time now so I am going to say one thing. Jesus is telling us to put things right quickly because the consequences could be so dire.

You don't want to end up on Texas Justice. Anyone seen that show? It is another one of these court shows. Texas Justice is a bit like a cross between people's court and Jerry Springer. You know, everybody is screaming at each other in this courtroom on TV.

[18:51] But it is sad and terrible, isn't it? The way human relationships can spiral out of control. Often something that begins very small becomes huge down the road. Families not speaking to each other.

Friendships broken. People leaving churches. Isn't that sad? But you know, there is nothing more wonderful than brothers and sisters who have been estranged finding grace and coming together. In the case here, you see, it is impossibly dire. This person can't pay off the debt from prison. It is too difficult. Jesus is saying, put it right and do it now.

The authentic disciple takes every opportunity to make relationships right. Do you see how seriously Jesus takes relationships amongst his people?

We act. We do. Ours is not the way of self-justification. Ours is not the way of self-defense. The authentic Christian recognizes their fault, confesses it to God, seeks forgiveness, and then acts to put it right.

[19:58] Now, we are not responsible for how the other person responds. But we act. And as I close, I have three things you may need to do.

The first is reflect. Reflect upon the state of your heart. How is your heart before God today? Are you nursing anger?

Second, repent. Repent of anger or sin against others in word and deed and thought. And finally, repair.

Repair any broken or damaged relationships. Reflect, repent, repair. Repair. I'm sorry.
Because we are those who have been reconciled to God. As we rebelled against Him, God did not meet our sin with anger, but reached out to us in love.

[21 : 01] He who is perfect made the first move towards we who are sinful. For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. that is what He did.

That is what He calls us to. We must follow Him. Let us act. Let us act. Let us act.

Let us act. Let us act. Let us act. Let us act.

Let us act.