

The Purpose Of Christs Revolution

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[0 : 00] After a brief interruption through various other activities we've been involved in, I want to take up again the Sermon on the Mount, and to do that I would very much appreciate it if you could turn to the fifth chapter of Matthew, of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, beginning at the 21st verse.

Matthew chapter 5, verse 21, and this is found on page 4 of the New Testament section of your pew Bible. You have heard that it was said to the men of old, you shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.

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

So if you are offering your gifts at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Make friends quickly with your accuser when 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 in prison.

[1 : 38] Truly I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny. Now you may remember that I was suggesting to you that in preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was laying the basis for a radical revolution, the kind of revolution by which the kingdoms of this world would give way to the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

And this radical revolution is so revolutionary that it's not going to be taken up by men with bombs and guns and fought for.

It's a revolution that is going to touch deeply into the hearts and lives of each one of us. And as he builds this Sermon on the Mount, you will see how he does that.

It's not as we learned last time, and if you look back in chapter 5, you see how he said last time that it wasn't a matter of abolishing the law and the prophets.

This revolution is not going to be developed by bypassing the law and the prophets, but by fulfilling them in a way which had never been dreamt of.

[3 : 00] Nor is it going to be in any way a superficial relationship with God, which means that your relationship with men will no longer matter. And he says to them very clearly, except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the law of the scribes and the Pharisees.

So that what Jesus is doing is establishing not a more superficial law that we can overlook, but a more profound law that is going to penetrate into the depths of our hearts.

So you get the picture of the law. If you were to turn in Deuteronomy chapter 19 and verse 19, you would see one picture of the administration of the law.

And it's a very hard picture indeed. But I think you have to understand that courts and police and moral and ethical teachers and armies and guns and laws and bylaws and constitutions and all this paraphernalia of modern society is to help restrain us so that not having in ourselves these restraints, they can be graciously imposed upon us by our society.

I was moderately shocked to hear that the leader of the biggest union in Canada, as it was reported over the news, promises that there will be strife and there will be turmoil and there will be all sorts of upheaval in our society in Canada unless the government does something about inflation and about unemployment, which is a beautiful picture of man restrained by high levels of employment and high levels of material wealth.

[5 : 03] But if that's taken away, who man really is, is going to break out onto the headlines in the form of announcements of civil rebellion of one kind and another.

So it's very much in keeping with the hard reality of the law, which is the means by which we restrain ourselves from destroying each other by submitting to the law of our land. And there is no question that it needs to be imposed upon us. And the authority and the power with which law needs to be imposed, I suppose, is one of the measures of our society. In verse 19 of chapter 19 of Deuteronomy, it says, if a malicious witness rises against any man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges. Isn't that interesting? The Lord is present along with the priests and judges. It's a good concept of a law court if you want one, right there.

[6 : 19] The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother.

So you shall purge the evil from the midst of you. And that's the function of law, to purge the evil from the midst of our society. The rest shall hear and fear and shall never again commit any evil among you.

So the violence with which this false witness is dealt with is to be an example to set fear in the hearts of all who observe it. And in verse 21 it adds, Your eye shall not pity, it shall be light for light, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

And so the force and strength of the law is established. That's the way it's going to work. And there's going to be no escape from that within the society which is set up in the book of Deuteronomy.

But Jesus dismisses all that in one way and says, The law of the kingdom of God is going to go much deeper than that.

[7 : 45] And he uses these illustrations and if you look back at chapter 5, at verse 27, you will see, You have heard that it was said.

If you look at verse 33, You have heard that it was said. If you look at verse 38, You have heard that it was said. If you look at verse 43, You have heard that it was said.

So he's going to pick up all these illustrations of the law and make application to them, not as they are maintained by the old order, but as they will be established by the new order, which he has come to establish among his disciples, which will form the basis of the kingdom of God and a new relationship between people.

This is the revolution that he is establishing. So in the first instance, in verse 21, he says, You have heard that it was said, You shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to the judgment.

Well, the kind of killing he's referring to there is the killing which comes from the passion of our hearts, the explosive nature of hate, anger, resentment, frustration, which can tolerate the restraints you put on it no longer, and it breaks out, and you kill.

[9 : 21] Now, it should be obvious to you, and to me, I guess, that killing is something that's entirely possible. We're not meant to create a climate of innocence in which it is unimaginable that nice people like you and I could kill.

What we're supposed to recognize is that nice people like you and I can kill. That that kind of explosive hatred which we have within our hearts can break out.

Now, on the west coast of Canada, amidst all the prosperity that we enjoy, it may be unimaginable to you, but if you went to many parts of the world, the frustration which leads men to kill would be something that you would totally comprehend.

It wouldn't deceive you for a moment, and your pretended innocence wouldn't last for very long. We are, by our society, restrained from doing it, but it's not possible for total restraint to take place, and the passion can burn within our hearts.

Now, I quoted this recently, but I want to quote it again, and it's the beginning of Joy Davidman's book on the Ten Commandments. It says, There is a tale told of a missionary in a dark corner of Africa where the men had a habit of filing their teeth to sharp points.

[11 : 07] The missionary was hard at work trying to convert a native chief. Now, the chief was very old, and the missionary was very Old Testament.

His version of Christianity leaned very heavily on Thou Shalt Not. The savage listened patiently. I do not understand, he said at last.

You tell me that I must not take my neighbor's wife. That's right, said the missionary. Or his ivory or his oxen. Quite right.

And that I must not dance the war dance and then ambush him on the trail and kill him. Absolutely right. But I cannot do any of these things, said the savage regretfully. I'm too old. To be old and to be Christian, are they the same thing? Well, the, the, the, the, there's a lot of people who might think that.

[12:17] But, the way, the way to understand it is if you have gone to see Golden Pond, and Golden Pond, which is a, a very popular current movie featuring Henry Fonda, cussing and swearing his way through his old age, you will see that even though your body may lose the power to trespass against the law, your heart doesn't lose the rage.

And that's one of the tragedies of old age. When that hate is still burning, and the anger and resentment is still there, and your body is powerless to do anything about it. That's real frustration. And so you can see it perfectly exemplified in Henry Fonda, the poor old feeble man with his rage still burning in him, but without the strength to do anything about it except to be very sarcastic and very cynical and do a lot of cussing.

It's a pathetic kind of picture. But it does point to what Jesus is pointing to in this passage. And the way Jesus points to it and what it means thou shalt not kill in the new kingdom is to give you three illustrations.

The first illustration is partnership or brotherhood. Now what we do usually is try and keep enough distance between us and people that no friction takes place.

[14:04] But when you go into a business partnership and hard times come, partnerships begin to suffer. And when you enter into that classical partnership, which is the basis of our society called marriage and hard times come, partnerships begin to rub and to hurt and to cause considerable offense to one another.

And when you come within the community of the church of Jesus Christ and find that every man is your brother, then you begin to see why brothers all through the Bible hate each other.

Because coming up too close to somebody is very hard indeed. And the thing that makes it hard is that it reveals the anger and the hostility and the self-centeredness of our own hearts.

And so Jesus said, thou shalt not kill, you can take that as said. But in the kingdom that I want to establish, in the kinds of personal relationships that you enter into, and you call your brother a fool or ignore him or violate his dignity in any way, then you are as bad as a murderer because the murderer exists in the heart even though the hand may be too frail to carry it out or the heart may lack the courage to do it, you're still quivering with the hate.

And that expresses itself. And that's what makes, in a sense, old age a much more fruitful time perhaps for you to come to terms with the kingdom of God.

[16:05] As frailty increases, but anger and malice and hatred go on and on and on and take possession of you.

So, he gives this picture of the two brothers and what happens. Now, in the second picture which he gives, it's a picture of worship.

What happens when you come to worship? And he gives that, if you see it, when he describes in verse 23 of chapter 5, so if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, go, first be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.

And so, in this new kingdom, there is going to be no possibility for the hypocrisy which most religious observances are full of.

He's attacking formal religious observance and says, when you have offended your brother, when he has cause against you, the priority is not to go to church, the priority is to go to your brother and be reconciled to him.

[17:31] That's the thing that must take priority because unless that is done, bringing your gift to the altar becomes meaningless. Now, lots of people say that religion is only important on Sundays, but if you're to take that seriously, it gives you six days to prepare for each Sunday by this ministry of reconciliation to your brother.

to your partner. And it's not to go to him and say to him that you're sorry, but it, I think, has to go even deeper than that, and it's got to be the confession that the thing that is wrong is wrong with you, not with him.

And that's the thing you have to tell him. And it's wrong with you to the extent that you're not going to go and present your gift at the altar to take part in worship until you've done it.

Now, you don't have to scratch very many people very deeply to find what a tremendous burden of unresolved relationships they live among within their family, within their business associates, within their extended family.

There's a tremendous amount of work to be done. And that work needs to be done because if you're going to take your religion, the worship of God, seriously, then this other work has to have priority over it.

[19 : 17] When you've done that, then come and bring your offering. And that's what it says. And there's no way around it. Now, I want to come back to one of my favorite niggling points.

And that is that in this congregation, when it says the peace, the peace of the Lord be with you, and you reply graciously to me, and also with you, that we really should turn around and do it to one another.

But everybody knows that being West Coasters, being conservative, having the kind of pattern of life that we're used to, that that would really be a betrayal of who we are as persons to actually do that.

So we think it, but we don't do it. Now, I wonder if it doesn't come in that place in the service, because that's the point at which we could be specifically obedient to this and leave our gift and go and be reconciled to our brother, then come and get our gift and come to the communion table to offer to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

And I'm wondering if we're protecting ourselves from a deeply meaningful spiritual transaction and hiding behind our natural British conservatism, well, we have to look at that.

[20 : 53] I'm not going to impose the practice on you, but if there was a considerable demand, I would see that it was instituted. But I really think that it illustrates that point in a very personal way.

And you see how if that kind of thing happened, what a tremendous reduction there would be in the sort of quiet thing that goes on in church where we look around and compare ourselves to others and do all sorts of weird, self-vindicating things to say that I'm better than most people here at least. and I'm surprised that some even have the face to be here, that instead of that attitude, there would be the realization that there are those here to whom I am bound to go and be reconciled.

And that the business of the week is to make sure that I don't come next Sunday without having done it. Now, I don't think that that is a duty that can be enforced.

I don't think you can do that to people. I don't think there's any use in my saying, do this before you come again, because you can't do it anyway. I mean, it's impossibly idealistic in so many ways.

[22 : 28] But yet, there is for us in the reality of the kingdom, not only the model which says we should do it, there also has to be the grace to enable us to do it.

So it's not me trying to persuade you to do it, it's the grace of God showing you that the most logical and reasonable thing for you to do is to be reconciled to your brother.

And thus, so much of our formal religion would be rid of the kind of self-centered hypocrisy that destroys it for us and for everybody else.

And then, having dealt with our worship, Jesus goes on to talk about the law courts. And he says, what happens when your brother takes you to the law court?

And you will find this in verse 25. And this is the third picture. first, the partnership, second, the picture of the man coming to worship, and thirdly, the picture of the man being dragged off to court.

[23 : 41] Well, it says in verse 25, make friends quickly with your accuser while you're going with him to the court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, the judge to the guard, you be put in prison.

Truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny. You know, you don't need to go to court to find out you're guilty.

All you've got to do is question your own heart. And when you're guilty, say so. The courts do a tremendous amount of damage in our society, not willfully, certainly, but by being forced in the course of fulfilling their traditional duties, declaring guilty people innocent.

It happened. And you know how if we were willing and ready to acknowledge our guilt, to acknowledge our indebtedness, we'd wipe the courts out in a week.

There wouldn't be any backlogs anymore because we would be enabled, by this grace of God, to acknowledge the guilt that lies at our own heart, to acknowledge the debts that we have, to acknowledge what we've done.

[25 : 07] And if you're lying to your own heart, and then hoping that the court will reinforce the lie, then you're abusing yourself, and you're abusing the court.

And so Jesus says, when you're on your way to court, make haste to make peace with your neighbor, right there and then to acknowledge what the court of your own heart, reinforced by the Spirit of God, makes you aware of.

Then you don't waste everybody's time. I think there must be hundreds and hundreds of people in our society whose lies have been vindicated by a court which was dedicated to trying to do justice. And having been told to go free, they can't. Simply because in the court of their own heart and conscience they know themselves to be guilty.

though we may have observed the law of the land, we have spiritually destroyed somebody.

[26 : 26] They've destroyed themselves by using a court to reinforce what they knew to be a lie. And that's easy for us to do.

Well, Jesus gives those three revolutionary pictures of what the kingdom of God is life. And by it, as I suggest, he would vastly diminish the work of the courts.

He would vastly change the nature of formal hypocritical worship, which we use to reinforce our self-image rather than to worship God.

love. And he would make it possible for people to live in harmony with one another as partners, as man and wife, as friends, because that partnership would be based on truth, the acknowledgement of the hate and the anger that comes from our own hearts and which he is prepared to deal with.

And that's the nature of the very simple revolution which Jesus wants to establish. It's very different from a kingdom which is set up with the command, thou shalt not kill, because soldiers can't enforce the laws of the kingdom, courts can't enforce it, formal religion can't hide you from it, the reality of it has got to be the central reality of your life.

[28 : 15] And it's that to which Christ calls us. It's that kind of radical revolution in our own hearts and lives to which he calls us.

our offertory hymn parts one and two of hymn 237. Thank you. to rad ■■■■ on the 2if as we shall bestaring the Word of God, the Lord■■■■■ is calling me for a good love.

tutti noi per Bunde è la guerra della redenle rima, His son, and come to a Edgar King.

Christine's son are a man. Welcome to the Father's Son.

Amen. HCI SORCE