

Sermon Series: Spurred on to Holiness (and Power) by Immersing Ourselves into the Life of Christ Through the Eyes of the Apostles – A Harmony of All Four Gospels

Sermon Title: Before You Kill Your Brother with Hatred. . .Reconcile.

January 13, 2019

Theme verse: Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (ESV)

Introduction: What does it mean to be “born again”? Isn’t the baby baptism and later confirmation traditions of many churches enough? Shouldn’t we be just as critical of our own traditions of waiting until a person has prayed a prayer before announcing they are true believers when indeed there may be no evidence of any spiritual regeneration?

Main point: Only those who have been born again are able to live out the law in a way that is pleasing to God because they are empowered by transformed hearts.

Context

Exegesis

1. Since the law is eternal and reflects the very heart and nature of God, and since Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, every disciple of Christ is judged on their love for the law. *“Wherefore, he that shall break one of the least of these commandments, and teach men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of heaven; but he that shall practice and teach them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of heaven.*
 - Jesus just got done talking about the weightiness of the law. It will last forever. Only things that are of infinite value last forever. The paper napkin I use to wipe my face after a meal is of little value because it is disposable. Well if the earth itself is actually disposable, how much more valuable is the law which will outlast the earth? And,
 - The law is God in the sense that He informs us through the law who he is and how he acts and what he desires. Truth, and righteousness, kindness and mercy and so on all reflect the person of God. So obeying the law therefore, even down to the smallest seemingly insignificant commandment is important to God so the world may know who he is.
 - The Jews, especially the Pharisees, had decided that there were minor and major laws. Minor ones included whether or not someone tithed their farm produce or not. Weightier laws were those regarding blaspheming God’s name or desecrating the Sabbath Day.

- Jesus said that if a person loves Him enough to love His law to the degree that you practice and encourage others to obey even the least of the law, then you will be considered great in the Kingdom of God. This means that there really will be positions of honor and greater honor in heaven despite what some people say that Jesus will treat all alike no matter how they lived.
 - Is this an impure reason to obey? So that we will get greater honor in heaven more so than others? Think of it this way, does a soldier risk his life and limb to gain medals or because he loves his unit and his country? In the same way we risk and obey because we love our Lord.
 - What will that look like in heaven? Not so sure but degrees of reward and honor are clearly taught. Look at Matthew 16:27 *For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. (ESV)*
 - What we do know is that rewards are elevated positions of authority and rule in the eternal state according to Matthew 25:21 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ (ESV)
2. Only a perfection that exceeds the perfectionism of the Pharisees is good enough to gain admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven. This can only mean one thing. External holiness is not enough. It must be internal righteousness such as that received by Jesus that will be good enough to allow us to gain admission into the heavenly city.
- *Romans 5:17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (ESV)*
 - David knew this. Psalm 51:16–17 *For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (ESV)*
 - What if I don't know what to do? Are there commands I should be following that I am unaware of? Not to worry. Here is what Jesus says about that: Matthew 7:12 *“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (ESV)*
 - Does this mean that all who go through confirmation are saved or not saved, since it is based on an external admission of doctrinal truth? Grave and serious danger here. This is why Baptists do not practice confirmation per se. Biblical instruction is good. Church membership and Christian faith based on completing a class is bad.

Main point: Only those who have been born again are able to live out the law in a way that is pleasing to God because they are empowered by transformed hearts.

3. The first example of internal righteousness is how we deal with those we are angry with. Do we reconcile or do we seek to murder them by falsely accusing them? *“You have heard that it was said to them of old, ‘You shall not murder’, and he commits murder shall be answerable to the court. But I say to you, that anyone who is angry at his brother [without cause] shall be answerable to the court; and anyone who calls his brother ‘emptyhead’ shall be answerable to the Sanhedrin; and he that shall say to him ‘you fool!’ shall be in danger of Gehenna’s fire.*

- Jesus is referring to the sixth commandment where God told Moses to instruct the people not to murder (rasah). The word rasah means premeditated with intent to kill. Does not mean capital punishment, soldiers in war, accidental injury, etc.
- The punishment for murder was in place long before the Mosaic law. It was given by God in Genesis 9:6 *“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. (ESV)*
- Jesus now tells us the original intent of the law. The Pharisees and others probably thought it was O.K. to feel hatred and anger for another but if they actually killed them they would have gone too far. Jesus’ clarification says that the heart is the problem. If you are angry with someone in your heart (“without cause” may not have the best manuscript support but I can see why it is there [for example I bet Paul was angry with Peter when Peter ostracized the Gentiles in Antioch]) then you are attempting to erase them from earth by cutting them off from you and society. The examples of how to do that are:
 - Calling someone Raca (Aramaic for airhead) is stripping a person’s identity from them. This is huge then and today. If you slander a business owner so that he loses his livelihood, are you not starving him to death and are you not depriving him of community? Isn’t this a sense of erasure? A murder without actual death?
 - Calling someone a moron is even worse because now you have not only said they were stupid and couldn’t serve mankind in any useful way but you are implying the same immoral character trait to them that Solomon did. Fools visit prostitutes. Fools commit adultery with other men’s wives. Proverbs 10:23 *Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding. (ESV)* This has the same effect as above (erasure from society) but making it happen quicker and broader. No one wants to associate with an immoral man.
 - Those who destroy people by slander are guilty of financial punishment by the Sanhedrin or worse, eternal death by God’s justice.

- Gehenna is an Aramaic transliteration of the Hebrew Valley of Ben Hinnom. This is where Ahaz and Mannaseh burned children to the God Molech. In 4 Ezra 7:36 it says this valley was the entrance to hell and by the time of Jesus it was a synonym for hell itself.
4. The opposite of anger is reconciliation. *“Wherefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and remember while there that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go away—first make reconciliation with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift. And “And why also do you not of yourselves judge what is right? For when you are going with your accuser before a magistrate, give diligence even while on the way with him to bring about a settlement quickly; lest he drag you the judge, and the judge commit you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. Verily I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last fraction of a cent!*
- Reconciliation is the responsibility of the one who has wronged his brother. Later Jesus will give instruction about what to do if you are the offended in Matthew 18, but here he makes it plain that if your conscience is bothering you while you are attempting to worship, you might as well stop worshipping until you have gotten it right with your fellow believer.
 - This is rarely practiced today. How many Christians admit that they can’t take communion for example until they have made things right with the people they have hurt? In our Heartbeats, we make it very clear. True repentance has not yet occurred until restitution has been attempted and apologies offered.

Application

1. Stop gossiping. Gossip is the first rung on the ladder of murder according to Jesus or better yet the first gash that will eventually become a slashing knife wound to kill the reputation and personhood of another. How dare we utter a word that takes the glory away from another? We want the world around us to see Jesus in each of us not the devil. Our careless words have grave consequences.
2. Take communion seriously. If you have wronged someone by being angry without cause or if they are angry with you for something you did, be bold. Stay in your seat. Make it a statement that you intend to go and get it right. Be even bolder. Leave the worship service and text the person you need to speak with to make an appointment. Wow. Wouldn’t that be radical?