

# The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Much And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”  
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”  
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

## Anger

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Matthew 5:21-26

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I'd invite you to open it now to Matthew chapter 5:21. I mentioned last week that the original hearers of this sermon would have heard it all in one chunk, so for them, last week's passage was really just an introduction to the next 6 sections in Matthew 5. Last week we talked about the relationship of Jesus to the Old Testament Law and Prophets. Jesus said very clearly:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17 ESV)

Jesus didn't come to contradict or overturn the Law and the Prophets, rather he came to fulfill them. Certain functions of the Law and the Prophets were fulfilled the moment John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 ESV)

Other functions of the Law and the Prophets carry on in the person and ministry of Christ. He is the Prophet, he is the Teacher, he is Lord – and that is exactly what Jesus now begins to demonstrate in these next 6 sections of the Sermon on the Mount. In each of the next 6 sections

Jesus will acknowledge the outer boundaries of the law – and then he will take his disciples DEEPER and FURTHER into the ultimate MEANING and correct APPLICATION of the text.

That’s what is going on here. This is Jesus saying: “I haven’t come to ABOLISH THE LAW – I have come to teach you what the Law is really all about!”

Hopefully you have your Bibles open now to Matthew 5:21-26; hear now the Word of the Lord:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.<sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.<sup>25</sup> Come to terms 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 in prison.<sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.” (Matthew 5:21–26 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Before we get into the actual WORDS of this text, I want to zoom out for a moment and make some forest level observations.

### **Two Big Picture Observations**

Open your Bible wide in front of you and just lay it out on your lap and look at the picture as a whole. In 6 consecutive paragraphs Jesus says something like this:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old ... But I say to you...” (Matthew 5:21–22 ESV)

He says that or something very much like that in verses 21, 27, 31, 33, 38 and 43.

You have heard it said!! Your teachers are telling you this!! There is a long standing tradition of saying such and such – BUT I AM TELLING YOU SOMETHING ELSE.

What in the world are we to make of that?

I would argue that the point is clearly this: Jesus is saying that:

**1. The Bible is authoritative – but false interpretations of the Bible are not**

In each of these situations, Jesus is making the point that the BIBLE ITSELF is perfectly fine – more than fine! The Bible is good, true, beautiful and helpful – but the interpretations of the Bible that had become commonplace in the covenant community WERE DECIDEDLY NOT good, NOT true, NOT beautiful and NOT helpful – and that is the problem that Jesus is addressing here.

And that is very important for us to see!

We need to understand that INTERPRETATIONS of the Bible and TRADITIONS that we develop around the Bible are not necessarily true, enduring, beautiful or in any way worth defending.

The Bible is true. The Bible is enduring. The Bible is beautiful and the Bible is always worth defending – but much of what we get agitated about in the covenant community is not. It is opinion. It is interpretation. It is application. And such things can be erroneous.

What Jesus is doing here is going back to the text and saying: “Is the text saying what you are saying?” “Is the text really about what you are saying it is really about?” “Does your application of this text accurately reflect the original intention of this text?”

My friends – those are really good questions!! Evangelicalism is at its BEST when it is asking those questions! That’s how we got evangelicals – that’s how we got Protestants! But when evangelicals – when Protestants – build a fence around THEIR interpretations and THEIR

traditions and THEIR applications and refuse to submit them to the scrutiny of the actual TEXT – then we are no better than the people we were originally protesting.

Everything we believe. Everything we practice. Every tradition. Every application. Absolutely EVERYTHING in here must be submitted REGULARLY to the scrutiny of Holy Scripture. Can you say amen to that?

Amen.

Amen – and thank God for the example of Jesus – because that is exactly what he is modelling for us here.

The second big picture observation here – and flowing obviously and logically from the first, is that:

## **2. Jesus is the final and authoritative interpreter of Holy Scripture**

Remember, Jesus didn't come to abolish or contradict the Old Testament – he came to fulfil it. Now, he chose that word on purpose because it can mean a variety of things. The relationship of Jesus to the Old Testament is complex – it isn't about ABOLISHING or CONTRADICTING – but it is about realizing, embodying and furthering – and that's what we see him doing here. It is sometimes said that the Old Testament is like a cave that is dimly lit. It contains all manner of precious treasure, but it takes the light of Christ for us to see those things in all their intended glory.

That's what Jesus is doing here – and that's why you have to learn to read your Bible backwards!

I'm not saying that you start at Revelation and work your way backwards toward Genesis – I am saying that you have to learn to read the Bible through the interpretive LENS of the person and work of Christ.

So when you come to a passage like Isaiah 53:3-5 which says:

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3–5 ESV)

People in the Old Testament wondered what that meant! They wondered who the suffering servant spoken of here WAS. Some said it was Israel as a whole, others said it was the prophet Isaiah speaking of himself – both of those INTERPRETIVE THREADS are grammatically and linguistically possible - both of those interpretive threads are active in the Jewish community still today – but for us as believers, we know exactly who that text is talking about now don't we? It's talking about Jesus! We can't help but see that, because we know how this story ends! That's what I mean by reading the Bible backwards. Brothers and sisters, don't ever read the Old Testament as if the New Testament hadn't been written. Take the light that you discover there back with you into the darker and more shadowy passages in the Old Testament and they will yield their treasures to you.

Jesus is our GUIDE to the entirety of Holy Scripture. Through him – through the lens of his PERSON and through the prism of his TEACHING – we are able to see much further and delve much deeper into the text.

And that's what is happening here. The covenant community in Jesus' day had become satisfied with a very superficial understanding and application of this text. They thought it was saying that as long as they didn't KILL their neighbours in cold blood, then God was pleased with them.

No!!! Jesus says. That is just the doorway, that is just the beginning of what this command intends to teach you.

So this is Jesus taking us deeper – and that's what Jesus does!

Jesus can take us all the way to the heart of the matter, because Jesus alone knows the heart of the matter! He is the Word of God – he is the Spirit of prophesy, for crying out loud – so when the Author of the Book tells you what a passage in the Book means to communicate, you can call off the debate because the matter is now decisively settled – amen?

Amen!

Jesus is the final and authoritative interpreter of Holy Scripture – there will be absolutely NO AVOIDING that conclusion as we make our way through the next 6 sections of this sermon.

Alright, having surveyed the FOREST, let's drop down now to ground level so as to draw some observations and applications directly out of the text.

## **Two Observations From The Text**

The first thing I think we want to notice in this section of the Sermon on the Mount is this: Jesus is saying very clearly here that murder is ultimately a matter of the heart.

### **1. Murder is a matter of the heart**

The scribes and the Pharisees were advocating for a very superficial reading of this text. They were saying that if you've never murdered anyone in cold blood, then you have obeyed the sum and substance of this commandment.

But that's not true, Jesus says, you can't separate ROOT from FRUIT.

Murder begins as HATE and CONTEMPT in the human heart. That's the well – that's the source – that's the root – and you can't live the life you were created to live as an image bearer of Almighty God unless you address that fundamental contamination. Jesus talked about this all the time. He said:

“what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.<sup>19</sup> For **out of the heart** come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” (Matthew 15:18–19 ESV)

You see, the whole SYSTEM matters to God. Not just the fruit at the absolute end of the branch – but most importantly, the root poison in the depths of the human heart. If you feel anger, if you feel CONTEMPT toward other human beings in your HEART – then there is a poison there that threatens to condemn your soul.

And you need to understand that – and it does not appear that you do, Jesus says. You have been misled.

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’” (Matthew 5:21 ESV)

Your teachers have taught you that you will be liable to judgment – you will have to answer to God – if you murder someone, but I am telling you friends, the bar is far higher than that. In verse 22 he says:

“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” (Matthew 5:22 ESV)

You are going to have to answer for EVERYTHING, Jesus says, from ROOT to FRUIT – none of it is beyond God’s scrutiny and if any of it is poisoned by anger and contempt, you will be liable to the hell of fire.

So the stakes are high, obviously, and so we want to make sure we have understood these terms. The key word here, I imagine, for most of us, is the word “fool”. That translates the Aramaic word “*Raca*” which means roughly “worthless one”. It is not the word used by Jesus in Matthew 23:17 or the other word used by Jesus in Luke 11:40. All three of those words – one Aramaic and two Greek - are translated into English as “fool” but this word here in Matthew 5:22 is a term of CONTEMPT. So I think we are dealing with anger, insults and expressions that flow from a root of contempt.

It's not a sin to think that some thing or some person is unwise. If it was, then the entire Book of Proverbs would be a sin – but that's not the issue. The Bible calls all kinds of things – and all kinds of people unwise and foolish, but according to Jesus if you allow yourself to feel CONTEMPT for another human being, then you are liable to the hell of fire.

Contempt is the opposite of love.

You can love people you think are unwise. You can love people you think are wrong. You can love people you think are evil. You can love people who are mean, cruel and unkind.

Jesus did.

When a group of very unwise, misguided, ignorant, mean, cruel, wicked, evil men were nailing him to a cross he said:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34 ESV)

He never lashed out. He never swore at them. He never gnashed his teeth at them. He never despised them in his heart.

There was no hatred, no contempt – ever - for human beings in the well of Jesus' heart. And there can't be any hatred or any contempt for human beings in the well of your heart, because according to Jesus, those are the waters that will be tested by God on the Day of Judgment. That takes us to our second observation from the text. According to Jesus:

## **2. All grievances will be reviewed at the Final Judgment**

As we read in verse 22:

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:22 ESV)



The final judgment is going to be far more extensive than most people realize. According to Jesus, you will have to give an account for cold blooded murder, of course, but you will also have to give account for any anger, insult or contempt that you have in your heart towards another human being.

Are you prepared for that?

I think a lot of Christians give themselves a pass on anger because they can point to a handful of times in the New Testament when Jesus was angry.

“What about that time when Jesus turned over the tables in the court of the temple?”

“What about that time when Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees ‘blind guides for the blind’? Obviously Jesus got angry and called people out, and therefore, SO MAY WE.”

D.A. Carson addresses that tendency and that danger head on, he says:

“Indeed there is a place for burning with anger at sin and injustice. Our problem is that we burn with indignation and anger, not at sin and injustice, but at offense to ourselves. In none of the cases in which Jesus became angry was his personal ego wrapped up in the issue.”<sup>1</sup>

So Jesus could answer for his anger – the question you need to be asking is whether or not you can. On Judgment Day if your anger is scrutinized will it be found to be directed only towards sin and injustice – which is entirely justifiable – or will it be more personal in nature? Will it be found to flow from CONTEMPT toward another human being?

If so, according to Jesus, you will liable to the hell of fire.

Listen, as your pastor, let me just encourage you to meditate on the general principle here. Very often in the Bible, there is a general principle and then a few recognized exceptions.

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 42.

The Bible says that in general we should be subject to our civil authorities – as per Romans 13 – but the Bible also says that if the Magistrate commands us to do what God forbids or forbids us to do what God commands, then we may in good conscience disobey.

General principle. Recognized exception.

The Bible says do not bear false testimony – as per the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment – but the Bible also commends the Hebrew midwives for lying to Pharaoh so as to thwart his attempts at genocide.

So again – general principle. Recognized exception.

And so here.

The general principle is that ANGER is a danger to your immortal soul. The Apostle Paul said:

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (Ephesians 4:26–27 NIV11)

If you hold on to anger, you open yourself to demonic influence.

So don't do that.

Now, are there a few recognized exceptions to that general rule?

Sure. If you see religious leaders attempting to turn a means of grace into a means of financial gain – then by all means get angry about that – as per Jesus in the temple.

And if you see religious leaders acting and teaching in a way that actually pushes people further away from the Kingdom of God – then by all means get angry about that – as per Jesus in Matthew 23:13.

But apart from that – there is a pretty broad general principle here that all of us would be wise to attend to: anger is a danger to your eternal soul. If there is anger, hatred or contempt for a human being in your heart on Judgment Day then you will be liable to the hell of fire.

So be very careful about appealing to exceptions that almost certainly have nothing to do with the case at hand. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones puts it very simply here, he says:

“Anger in the heart towards any human being, and especially to those who belong to the household of faith, is, according to our Lord, something that is as reprehensible in the sight of God as murder.”<sup>2</sup>

That’s what Jesus is saying – very plainly and very authoritatively in this passage. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

And let him, or her, make urgent application as well.

## One Urgent Application

It is always helpful when the application to a set of principles comes from no less an authority than Christ himself and we have that in this passage. In verse 23 Jesus says:

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23–24 ESV)

The instruction here is pretty straightforward: Jesus is telling his disciples to make reconciliation their first priority.

### 1. Make reconciliation your first priority

There is no point in singing songs in church; there is no point in praying a passionate, heartfelt prayer in church; there is no point in putting a generous donation in the offering plate – if you are harbouring hatred and contempt for another human being in your heart.

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<sup>2</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 197.

Spurgeon said:

“I would anxiously desire to be at peace with all men before I attempt to worship God, lest I present to God the sacrifice of fools.”<sup>3</sup>

Listen, brothers and sisters, do everything you need to do to be at peace with other people BEFORE you come in here to worship – and before you stand before God at the final judgment. And the one is intended to foreshadow the other – that is why we give you a few minutes to review the state of your heart before we serve communion. We are doing that to HIGHLIGHT THE CONNECTION between our audience with God here and our audience with God THERE. In both cases, you want to come before the Lord in a state of peace.

So do what you need to do to get yourself into that state of peace. Reach out. Send an email. Make a phone call. Extend an olive branch. No matter what it costs you.

Lloyd Jones again is helpful here, he says:

“I must humble myself, make a fool of myself as it were, and let the other person gloat over me if necessary, as long as I have done everything I can to remove the barrier and the obstacle.”<sup>4</sup>

Have you done that?

Do it before the next communion – do it before the final judgment.

Now, to be clear, your efforts will not always be successful. I’ve had to do this myself many times and I have to be honest with you, the results I’ve experienced have been mixed. A few months ago I sent an email to a guy who just seems to be offended by everything I say and do. And so I just reached out and attempted to make peace, and I took the first step – but my efforts were not appreciated or reciprocated and that will happen sometimes.

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<sup>3</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *Commentary On Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 45.

<sup>4</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 202.

On the plus side, as I was writing this sermon, I took a break and sent an email to someone I felt I had been inappropriately angry with – and that went very well. Forgiveness was extended and peace was restored. So I can't guarantee the outcome – but I know that the effort matters. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:18:

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” (Romans 12:18 ESV)

Sometimes it is not possible – sometimes you are going to reach out and you are going to get nothing in return.

That's ok!

You do what you need to do. Even if it is 80% their fault – you go first. You can apologize for your 20%. Start with that. And do it quick, my friend, because it is better to make a lopsided settlement here than to have to answer for an unresolved grievance there. If there is hatred and contempt in your heart on that day, if you have unaddressed grievances in your heart on that day - it will be submitted as evidence of your unconversion. Do you understand how DAMNING that is? That's why Jesus said:

Come to terms 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 in prison.<sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:25–26 ESV)

My friends, that metaphor is not terribly hard to penetrate. I think the meaning here is pretty close to the surface. Jesus is saying: “This is serious business. Get it done. Handle it. Write the letter. Make the call. Take the first step. Do it today.”

Come to terms quickly with your accuser! Don't let the sun go down on your anger – don't open the door to the devil's further presence in your life. Forgive. Reconcile. Be at peace.

This is life and death stuff, brothers and sisters! This is IN or OUT! This is the Jesus Way – you're either walking in it or not. Oh God, help! Let's pray together.

*Note to Worship Leader:*

*I may ask people to stand before I pray if they have some business to do with respect to a personal grievance. The emphasis of the prayer will be on asking the Lord to send generous supplies of the Spirit to replace any lingering anger, malice or contempt in our hearts. The worship team should NOT move from their seats or come up on to the stage until the end of my prayer. Thanks!*