

Sermon - Sunday 2nd August 2020

Title - Examine Yourself

Reading - Matthew 5: 1-12; 21-26

WELCOME

Thank you for joining us this Lord's Day morning here at Kings Norton Baptist Church.

Let us pray. The Psalmist says - 'Your word is a lamp unto my path and a light unto my way'. As we gather round your word this morning, I pray that our Hearts and Minds will be open to the truth of your word. I ask that the power of the Holy Spirit will help us to apply those truths in our lives. To the glory of your name, Amen.

Anyone who intends to preach from the Word of God, it is vitally important that they preach to themselves as well as the congregation. But even before they step into the pulpit and open their mouths they need to examine themselves. Preachers are not perfect, they are sinners like everyone else, with the caveat, a sinner but saved by grace.

I have entitled this morning's sermon 'Examine Yourself'. The subject is 'Relationships' but more specifically 'Healthy Relationships'. I pray that by the end we will have a number of steps to help us renew and build healthy relationships.

So before get into the detail of this week's message, let's look at what we know so far.

Over my last three sermons we have looked at Jesus' sermon on the Mount. We can recall, Jesus was teaching his disciples, but the crowds had followed Him and were listening in as well.

Jesus started by describing the internal heart condition that would be necessary to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Beatitudes - 'BE OF THIS ATTITUDE.'

Then He moves on to talking about our being Salt and Light. These are our external behaviours, our function and purpose in this life. SALT is to make a difference in the world and LIGHT is our witness to the greatest light - the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the next section Jesus talks about His role in fulfilling the law and our relationship to the Law. Jesus acknowledges that people are keeping the Law on paper but are neglecting the spirit of the Law.

Let me share a modern day example. In cricket, if the bowler has bowled the ball and the batsman ends up out of his crease, a fielder can throw the ball at the stumps, and providing they hit them, the batsman can be run out.

During an Ashes match with Australia, Jeff Thompson, a demon fast bowler, bowled a bouncer at one of the English batsman, in the days before helmets, and hit him on the head. The batsman fell over, outside his crease. While the batsman was coming to his senses, Jeff Thompson, in his follow through, hit the wicket with the ball and appealed to the umpire.

Jeff Thompson was keeping the law, but neglecting the spirit of the laws of cricket. He was quoted after the game, saying that he liked hitting batsmen more than bowling them, he liked to see blood on the pitch!

Jesus was quite emphatic that the listener's righteousness needs to be greater than the Pharisees. They needed to keep the spirit of the law as well. One might have thought Jesus was correcting the Law of Moses, what He is actually saying is,

"I am interpreting the Law of Moses to you and MY interpretation is true and not the interpretation of the Scribes and Pharisees."

Martyn Lloyd-Jones states that, 'Jesus is the Son of God in the flesh presenting the truth of God.

So this brings us to our passage this morning.

It is one part of several sections dealing with a variety of topics including murder, adultery, and divorce. Each of these sections are linked by Jesus' uses of the phrase, 'You have heard it said...' or 'it has been said...'

So let's have a look at what Jesus says.

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, (KJV - Kill) and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

Here, and in the following sections, Jesus is contrasting the OT Law to what the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law have said and the people have heard. If you go back to the OT you won't find the phrase 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' because these are the words of the Pharisees.

These are the 'teachings' that the Pharisees are putting forward. They are their own interpretations, adding bits that the people would accept as true.

If you go back to the days, in this country, when the Bible was still in Latin, and the only people who could read it, understand it and preach from it were the priests. The people were kept very much in the dark, the church hierarchy were afraid that the churches influence would be diminished if everyone could read the Bible for themselves. We have the likes of Miles Coverdale, John Wycliffe and the Protestant Reformation to thank for the English language Bible.

Before we go on let us be clear what the definition of murder / kill is. The KJV uses the word 'KILL' and most others 'MURDER'. We are talking about premeditated murder, killing with clear intent.

This is not accidental killing which the OT law made provision for. In Numbers 35:11 and elsewhere Moses is told..

'select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee.'

Today we have extremely controversial issues including Abortion and Euthanasia, which are murder -

In relation to murder, God told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 19:13..

'Show no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you.'

Virtually every country in the World has a Law regarding murder. And murder, the taking of an innocent life is serious. Genesis 9:6 states that

"Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

John Stott says in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount that,

'The scribes and Pharisees were evidently seeking to resist the application of the sixth commandment to the deed of murder alone, to the act of spilling human blood in homicide. If they refrain from this, they considered that they had kept the commandment. And this apparently is what the rabbis taught to the people. But Jesus disagreed with them. The true application of the prohibition was

much wider, he maintained. It included thoughts and words as well as deeds; anger and insults along with murder.'

In verse 22 we read this

'But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Being angry! - well I'm fairly sure that we don't have murderers in our midst BUT being angry!!! I would be surprised if someone said they never got angry in thought or deed. I get angry, not as much as I used to, but angry nevertheless.

In the AV the phrase 'angry without a cause' is used but not in more modern versions. John Stott writes,

Nevertheless, there is every reason to believe that the addition correctly interprets what Jesus must have meant. Not all anger is evil, as is evident from the wrath of God, which is always holy and pure. And even fallen human beings may sometimes feel righteous anger, although being fallen we should ensure that even this is slow to rise and quick to die down.

Jesus specifically mentions calling people names or insulting people. 'Raca' - seems to be an insult of a person's intelligence. It is closely linked to English equivalents of 'nitwit', 'numskull' or 'idiot'. I can imagine that there are many more modern names that you have heard of along these lines.

On the other hand, 'you fool' is insulting a person's spiritual status.

Psalm 14:1 tells us, 'The fool says in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt: they do vile deeds.'

Proverbs 1:7 says, 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.'

These things that Jesus mentions - anger and insults - may never lead to the ultimate act of murder, but in the sight of God they are the same.

1 John 3:15 states, 'Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.'

Look what happened to Cain and Abel in Genesis chapter 4. Cain was angry because his brother's offering was acceptable to God and very quickly after murder took place.

Verses 23-26 Jesus gives an example of what we should do. Let's read that again

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,

24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Back in OT times, bringing offerings and sacrifices to the altar was the recognised way of worshipping God. These verses might be said like this today...

If you are attending church to worship God and there is something that needs to be resolved between you and, effectively, anyone else - get it sorted! Don't leave it, it will only get worse.

You can see this in the two examples Jesus gives. The first is a brother or sister in Church and in fellowship and worship together. How can you praise God and worship Him, if there is resentment, angry, upset between God's people?

The second is with an enemy, someone you own money to. The enemy will take you to court and the outcome does not get better the longer you take to resolve it. The debt, the interest, the court fees, if not paid, will have you behind bars. And you won't get out until it's all paid off.

So let's now look at how we can build steps healthy relationships.

Firstly, we need to **recognise** unhealthy relationships.

This may mean looking at who you associate with, the friend that entices you to stay out late on a Saturday night and you're then too tired to attend church on Sunday morning.

It may mean examining your habits and goals, your desires and attitudes and to check that your relationship is right with God. Before communion Paul exhorts us to 'Examine ourselves.' But why wait?

It could also mean sorting out an issue you have had with someone, maybe a family member, or possibly a member in the fellowship. You know you have said or done something that has upset someone. Deal with it! Go and sort it out!

Secondly, we need to **restore** the relationships back to health.

Our scripture says 'Go and reconcile ...'

This is not easy, pride is always likely to be a contributory factor. Admitting we are wrong, confessing that you spoke out of turn or acted out of anger or spite, is hard.

However, if you are committed to sorting the issue out, lay it before the Lord. He is unlikely to tell you to forget it or 'don't worry about it', but He is willing and able to forgive. He is also prepared to stand with you as you put it right.

Be careful though, if someone has upset you or angered you. Don't go to them and tell them what they have done to upset you, it could make it ten times worse. Commit to the Lord in prayer and he will show you the way forward.

I confess I am no expert on resolving situations ask my wife! My usual pattern of behaviour would be to bottle it, stoic, stiff upper lip, and her words ... sulk.

During lockdown I have been watching a Sci-Fi series called 'Marvel's Agents of Shield', 'Boys Own Stuff'. One of the characters 'Skye' has a power that causes things to vibrate, destructively. An amazing power, but while she was honing her skills to control it she thought it was triggered by anger and stress. Her friends and colleagues tried to help her in 'bottling it up' - internalising it - trying to keep her pulse rate under control. Stay calm.

Of course a time comes when she couldn't keep control of her anger and became super destructive BUT not just towards the things on the outside, buildings, cars, BUT on the inside as well, they discovered that by bottling it up her bones were breaking.

We can't just ignore the hurt that someone has caused, bottling it up is a poor solution. Take steps to renew those relationships now.

Third and finally, the restoration is required **rapidly**. At once, straight away, without delay. Paul in Ephesians 4:26, quoting from the Psalms says,

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

The longer you leave it the harder it gets. And if you don't get it dealt with who knows where it will end. We, as Christians, know that Jesus is coming again and then there will be judgement. If we don't sort things out now we will have a lot of answering to do, not to those who are estranged from us, but to the judge of all the world, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So to conclude. What are we to do, and when are we going to do it?

1. Recognise our relationships with others **AND** with God.
2. Renew those relationship where necessary **AND** with GOD.
3. Rapidly. Do it now, do it quickly, before it's too late!

If you haven't got that intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, can you ignore His calling? Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow might be too late. Call on Him today - He is ready and able and WILLING to save.