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Honoring Life, Part 1

Mathew 19:16-26

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

We are entitling this series *The Laws of Love*. As we're walking through this, based on those two commandments on which all the commandments and all the prophets of the Old Testament are hung, we've covered the first five, so now we're in the second half of the commandments. The first four teach us about loving God well, and then the last six teach us about loving each other well, in terms of the way we are numbering. If you have learned these in a different order or different numbering scheme, that's because God himself did not number them. Human beings have tried to put numbers to them so we can learn them in an efficient way.

As we continue, now we're on this sixth commandment, and we're looking at these. We might also say that they're not just the laws of love, but Jesus' teaching to us also tells us they lead us down the pathway of life. In Matthew 19, an individual came to him and asked him, what must I do to inherit eternal life—to walk in the life that is everlasting, the life that is truly life? And Jesus said to them, that individual, he said, if you want to enter life, this life beyond the biological life, into the supernatural and spiritual life in the here and now and for all eternity, if you want to enter that life, keep the commandments. They guide you into that life.

So we might call it the laws of life now. It makes sense, then, if these are the laws of life and the laws of love, God would have some restrictions for evil in these commandments. And that's what we see now heading forward from here. God is telling us things that we are not to take part in, things that we are restricted from. And the sixth commandment is a restriction from taking the life of another image bearer. Deuteronomy 5:17: You shall not murder. You shall not murder.

Now, at first glance, you may consider this, like me, an easy commandment to obey, one we might not need to spend too much time on. We can see why this is important for the flourishing of life, and most likely, there is none of us here today plotting in our minds how to go take the life of another person. At least I'm hoping that that's true. No one has plans to do this this afternoon. If you do, I'd like to talk with you after.

To really understand this commandment, though, we need to dig a little deeper. I want us to consider today: one, what is murder to God and how does he feel about it? What does he mean when he says, thou shalt not murder? What is the nature of the first murder as recorded for us in the Bible? And then, after looking at those two things, what does this mean for us personally and our culture here today?

So let's consider first: what is murder to God and how does he feel about it? To understand, I believe, a little sense of how God might feel about murder from the revelation of his word, we need to go back to the very beginning, where God created all things out of the overflow and love of his heart. He created the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth—all of this to display his glory and image himself, to have a sense, all of creation. God's invisible qualities, his divine nature, are clearly seen through what has been created, so human beings are without excuse, the Bible says.

Now, when he was creating this, he came to a point later in his creation where Genesis 1 tells us God said, and let us—plural: God the Father, God the Spirit, the living Word, God the Son, the three-in-one Trinitarian God—said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. So God created mankind in his own image. Notice the emphasis on this: in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God was replicating himself most poignantly in the creation of human beings.

And then God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and send my image around the globe. Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth. You're in charge of it. Subdue it. Rule it. Have dominion over it.

We can see from the very beginning human beings, in God's plan of creation, are the crown of his creation, the *imago Dei*, the most precious part of his creation. When we believe this, we are holding a biblical worldview. We're understanding the world, creation, the earth, human beings, through the lens of what God has revealed to us.

I want to tell you today that in some really good research, we understand that 4% of people in the United States today believe this. Four percent have a biblical worldview. Now, many people believe in the value of human beings, but they don't necessarily see them as the apex of God's creation—the *imago Dei*, the reflection and the image of an unseen God. And this has consequences.

Ninety-two percent of people in the United States today have a worldview which would be described with the word *syncretism*. They just synchronize different ideas into their life that help them feel good about what they're doing. The feel-good country, you might call us. Syncretism: I adopt beliefs that help me feel good about what I'm doing.

But I want you to look at some further illustrations of a biblical worldview. Inspired Christians believe, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God here through the pen of King David several thousands of years ago, when he was describing his worldview under the inspiration of God's Spirit, he penned these words:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angelic beings and crowned them with glory and honor.

David, describing God's heart for human beings: you made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet—all flocks and herds and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, all that swim in the paths of the seas. God said to human beings, you have dominion. You're the crown. You're the top. You're the peak of creation, just under the unseen world.

David said in Psalm 139 of human beings: God created our inmost beings. He knit us each together in our mother's wombs. It was God at work there. Our frames were not hidden from him when he made us in the secret place, when he wove us together in the depths of the earth. God tells us that his eyes saw our unformed bodies before he made them, and all the days ordained for us were written in his book before one of them came to be.

Here, you're getting a bit of the heart of God in the creation of every single human being, designed to reflect his image as the apex of his creation. Now, I'm sure most of you are aware that this worldview was operating heavily in the minds of our forefathers in a very profound way when they were writing out our founding documents, and the biblical worldview was far more predominant in that time. This was shaping the way they were thinking about the formation of a nation and the formation of its laws.

And so, in the Declaration of Independence, at the very near beginning of it, they wrote these words: we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Where did they get these truths from—that people are created? From the scriptures. Where did they get the idea of unalienable rights? From the scriptures. The right of life. The right of liberty. God is pro-freedom all through the scriptures. The right of the pursuit, and I think happiness is a weak word, but the freedom of pursuit—actually for happiness or joy or God himself.

You may know that they were all, for the most part, majoritively working with a biblical idea about humanity, but not all of them. Did you know that before these words were accepted in the near last draft of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson originally wrote, we hold these truths to be sacred—sacred and undeniable? He got that from the revelation of the Bible. But in a compromise, Benjamin Franklin—who was one who grew up in a biblical worldview but became skewed in his journey, and I don't know what exactly happened to him—but he became a deist. And he replaced

Jefferson's wording with the words self-evident, as if human beings come to this on their own, that it's obvious to human beings that all men are created equal.

But if you look at human history, you see this is not self-evident to human beings. We don't accept this intrinsically. Many human beings down through history have put different values on different races and different stages of life and all of this stuff. And so Benjamin Franklin changed the word sacred to self-evident to align the document more with his philosophy of human enlightenment, as if we're getting smarter and smarter and smarter down through history. And it points at a man-centered idea of goodness, and it points away from the idea that we need divine revelation and divine authority in our lives.

I just share that with you so you'll know sort of the hubris of it all, the arrogance of thinking that human beings can come to true realities on their own. But at least they got the basic revelation right.

Under God's economy, all people are created equal by him from before they enter the womb until they die. So what is murder to God and how does he feel about it? The word God used here in the Hebrew for murder is *rathsack*. It's *rathsack*. Thou shalt not—the actual command is *lo ratzach*: no murder, no murder. As opposed to the English word for kill, which in the Hebrew is *qatel*. He did not say thou shalt not kill. He said, thou shalt not murder.

We need this distinction because God is not saying in a fallen world that all killing is wrong. Otherwise, killing a plant—we would be confused. He is describing something more specific. We see this throughout other Old Testament laws. For example, in Exodus 22, God tells us this: if a thief is caught breaking into a home at night and you strike him with a fatal blow and kill him, the defender—the person who gave him the blow—is not guilty of bloodshed. God is hinting here at the idea that killing in self-defense, in some cases, is not murder. You would not be guilty before God for defending your home from an intruder at night, based on fear and protection of your family and your life.

But it says if this happens after sunrise, and you're in your home—is the insinuation here—and you can see the man entering or the woman entering, and you could have done something else, like tackle them or maim them, and you didn't have to kill them, well, then you might be guilty of over-punishing them if you killed them when you didn't have to. So God is describing here some sort of just laws for the community of Israel when he's talking about killing in self-defense and how these laws might work.

Genesis 9 verse 6 describes something like this as well, when God said, whoever sheds the blood of a man, by man shall his blood be shed also, for God made man in his own image. He's hinting at the fact here that the punishment ought to fit the crime. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life—no more, no less. God is a just God, and he wants punishment to fit the crime.

So then, in Exodus 21, we read something more specific. Yet if a man has a bull who gores another man or woman to death in a fallen and broken world that's filled with violence, notice that killing is allowed. The bull is to be stoned to death, but its meat must not be eaten. The owner of the bull will not be held responsible.

Now we have two deaths. But it was an animal that went wild, so the owner will not be held responsible. If, however, the bull has had a habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up, and then it kills a man or woman, the bull is to be stoned and its owner is to be put to death. May sound extreme, but this is God's instruction for the Israelite nation.

So not all killing is wrong. If a bull that you own has been a little wild and you've been warned about it, and it kills another human being, not only would the bull be put to death, but now you're in danger of being put to death. However, there's an exception. God said if payment is demanded by the family that lost a loved one, the owner may redeem his or her life by actually paying some sort of other penalty, if they work it out with the family, litigate it in some way.

So you're seeing here not all killing is wrong. In a broken and fallen world that's filled with evil, we read in the Old Testament that a lot of death in some just laws is okay. We also read in Romans 13 that God has entrusted the state, or the rulers in nations, with the power of the sword to punish evil and to protect people.