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Honoring Life, Part 2

Mathew 5:17-24

“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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 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. 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 and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

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: God has entrusted the state, or the rulers in nations, with the power of the sword to punish evil and to protect people.

So what does this mean? Murder.

I want to turn to King David's words, and then the Apostle Paul's words, and then the words of Jesus, to get at maybe what God thinks is murder. King David penned these words in Proverbs six. He said there are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and now these three in the middle, I think, hint at God's idea of murder—hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, or feet that are quick to rush into evil. And then he ends with a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in a community.

King David wrote those words. Paul wrote these words under the inspiration of God, now moving towards the positive instruction in the Bible: Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with all people of any status. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Do not take revenge. Leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, it is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary, you as people here: if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will reap burning coals on their head. You cannot overcome evil with more evil.

And now Jesus' words: You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, you shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you—here's God—anyone who is angry with a brother or a sister will be subject to judgment. Again, emphasizing it: anyone who says to a brother or sister, Raqqa, which is “fool,” they're answerable in the court. And he says it again: anyone who says “you fool” will be in danger of the fire of hell. Some people think Jesus never talked about hell. I guess he did.

Right there.

What is murder to God? Perhaps murder in the heart of human beings is much deeper than just the act of taking a human life, but it's an attitude that starts right here, of disdain and contempt for a fellow image bearer that God made. When you and I nurse in our hearts the violent emotion of anger with evil intentions, ruminations that lead to bitterness and rage, maybe we're committing murder in our hearts already. And perhaps this is what the Sixth Commandment is about.

Clearly anger itself is an emotion that's not wrong. The Bible says that we are allowed to be angry, but we're to be very careful when we're angry. Ephesians 4:26: be angry, but do not sin, and don't nurse the anger. Don't ruminate on it. Release it, and bring grace and forgiveness as soon as you can. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath, because anger leads to problems. A person's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires, Paul went on to say.

So maybe murder is more than an act. Let's look at the first murder in the Bible. Adam made love to his wife Eve. She became pregnant and gave birth to an image bearer of God and named him Cain. She said, with the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man. Later she gave birth to another, his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time, Cain brought some fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. Abel also brought an offering, fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. Abel was honoring God with his best. Cain was just dragging in some of his fruit. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, whose heart was darkened, he did not look with favor. So the Bible says Cain was very angry, jealous, screaming, and feeling unjust before God—that God was not being just. His face was downcast. Murder is beginning in his heart.

The Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you,

but you must rule over it. Murder has begun in the heart of Cain. God is warning him that it's there. It's crouching at his door. It's going to have you. You have to master it. You have to let it go. You have to release it.

But Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field. And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel, and the word “killed” here is synonymous with “slayed him.”

Then the Lord said to Cain, where is your brother Abel? I don't know, he replied. Am I my brother's keeper? The Lord said, what have you done? Listen, your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth. The punishment for the crime.

Perhaps murder begins with just a little seed of contempt or disdain for another human being. What does this mean for our culture in our lives? I don't know. I don't know. I do know this. There are some human laws that allow things that God Himself does not approve of. At the very least, I believe it means this: the idea of murder—to take another's life or to wish someone else's death based on contempt or disdain for them, or out of jealousy or vengeance or rage, or to snuff out a life for our own convenience or ease or comfort. Jesus said whoever relaxes one of these commands will not be celebrated in the kingdom. And so I have to share with you what I believe here as a teacher of the word, that at the very least I believe, from studying scripture:

Contempt or disdain for another human being in our heart violates this law. Jealousy in our heart that would cause us to want to have vengeance or rage, or do something evil towards them, or snuffing out a life for our own convenience or ease or comfort, violates this law from conception to natural death. And I can only say that when we think about God looking on our nation, His heart must break. And if you are like me and you sense that maybe you've broken the sixth commandment, or maybe you know you have, either in your heart or actually snuffed out a life, I want to take you to one more murder—the murder of Jesus.

Who came on the earth and walked as the only innocent human being, also God child, to walk the earth. And because he was pure and righteous and powerful, he could feed 5000 men and others with just a little bit of food. He could perform miracles. And he was confronting many of the ideologies of the day. Because of that, because he was so perfect, so pure, so powerful, so loving, many people became jealous of him, threatened by him. And so they decided to plot in their own hearts to murder him. Little did they know that God's restraint of evil and allowing of the evil one to operate was operating in them to accomplish something for you and I that we couldn't accomplish for ourselves.

Knowing the penalty for breaking God's law is death, and knowing that if we paid that, none of us would exist, none of us could live, God sent his son, born of a virgin, born under the law, to pay the penalty for all of us lawbreakers so that we might live. If you've broken—can any of these commandments, the sixth commandment—there is grace and mercy for you. Like we confessed earlier at the cross, we're celebrating the Reformation today, and it was a return to our understanding of the revelation of the Bible

that you and I are saved by grace alone. Grace alone through our faith alone, not by works of righteousness can anyone be saved, through Christ alone. And Lord, have mercy on our nation that more and more people could find their way into the life that is truly life.

If you're here today and you've never opened your heart to Christ, this would be a great time to open your heart to him and say, God, I confess to you I'm a sinner. I've broken your law. Would you forgive my sin and welcome me into your eternal family? And in a moment he will forgive your sin because of the cross and welcome you into his family as a son or daughter of his.

Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for your word, which teaches us without error. We believe it teaches us what to believe and how to live. And Father, we believe that these laws come from your hand. They're laws of love to guide us in our world and our lives. And I want to confess on behalf of our nation the insanity that we have around the sanctity of life. Many in our midst here, and I'm sure in our nation, have wanted someone else to not exist. We see this with political leaders. We see this with friends and neighbors. And Father, this is wrong before you.

So forgive us. Forgive the vitriol and the evil and the hatred that exists in the human hearts in this nation. And then, Father, heal us. Draw us to yourself. Father, you have said if your people will humble themselves and pray and seek your face, you will heal their land. And Father, it's only by a work of your hand and your kindness that conviction could come across our nation and repentance could return to the heart of our soul as a nation, and we could be healed.

So, Father, in your mercy and your kindness, convict us of our sin. Bring us to our knees before you in repentance and remorse so that we could more fully, as a nation, find life in you by your Spirit through the work of your Son Jesus.

It's in his name that we pray. Amen.