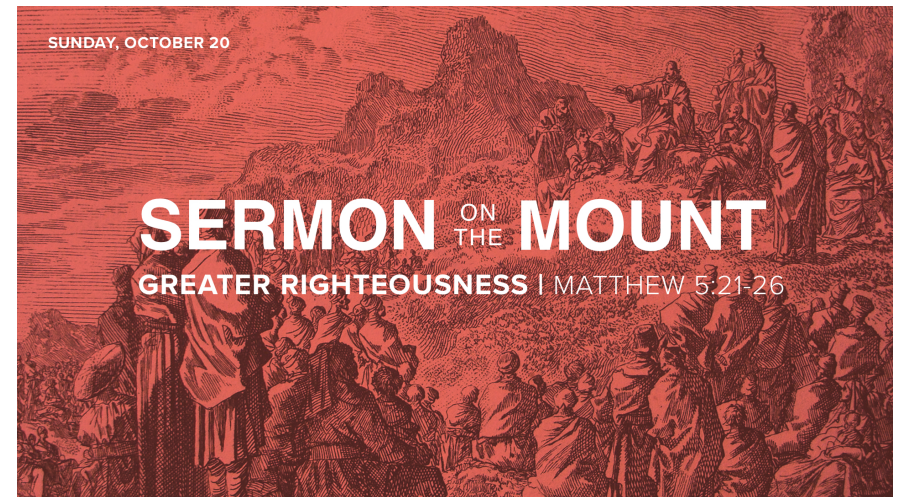


ANOTHER PRACTICAL APPLICATION (vv. 25-26)

Jesus' second practical application (or illustration) is drawn from the law court. The emphasis is on our relationship with non-believers. Again, Jesus refuses to assign fault, he simply urges us to settle matters quickly.

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.

1. Why is it essential that we settle matters quickly?
2. Do you think Jesus' interest is simply to avoid lawsuits or is there more at stake?
3. What are the consequences of failing to settle our differences with non-believers?
4. Who is our ultimate judge?



The heart of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' claim, "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)." He follows with a word of caution, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20)."

The remainder of chapter 5 offers six examples of how Jesus fulfills the Law and describes the kind of righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees. Jesus introduces each of his examples with the striking phrase, "You have heard it said..., but I say unto you." He brings the chapter to a close with a stunning admonition. "Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48)."

The first of Jesus' examples comes from the ten commandments. "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 that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment (Matthew 5:21-22)."

Jesus does not congratulate us for not committing murder. He challenges us to look into our hearts and to see the seeds of murder in our anger and our tendency to belittle others.

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A SURPRISING CONTRAST (vv. 21-22)

Jesus begins with a shocking contrast. While most of us would agree that murder is worthy of judgment, very few of us would consider name-calling worthy of the fire of hell. Jesus warns us that if we are willing to diminish our brother or sister in any way, we already have the seeds of murder in our hearts.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder,'^e and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² 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.

1. Jesus begins with a bold declaration, "You have heard it that it was said to the people long ago... but I tell you (Matthew 5:21-22)." While contemporary rabbis may have employed a similar phrase to contrast their teaching with that of another rabbi, Jesus is contrasting his own teaching with that of the Old Testament. He is claiming to be a higher authority than Scripture and the final arbiter of Scripture.
 - a. What does Jesus' claim tell us about Jesus?
 - b. What does it tell us about how we should read Scripture?
2. The Old Testament injunction against murder is built on a foundational theological principle. We are not to take the life of another human being because we will never look eyes with another person who has not been lovingly created in the image of God (Genesis 9:6). Any assault on another person is an assault on God. Jesus describes three ways we can disparage the image of God in a fellow human being that stop short of murder.
 - a. What are they?
 - b. What does each of these have in common with murder?
3. The phrase, "anyone who is angry" is in the present tense in Greek. It does not prohibit "anger" per se, but the idea of harboring anger, nursing a grudge or cultivating resentment. It carries the same idea Paul expresses when he warns us, "In your anger do not sin (Ephesians 4:26). Paul quickly adds, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold (vv. 26, 27)."
 - a. When and why should we be angry?

- b. When and how does anger become toxic?
- c. How can we avoid toxic anger?

4. Jesus tells us, "anyone who is angry... or says to a brother or sister 'raca'... or you fool" is "subject to judgment, ...answerable to the court, ...and in danger of the fire of hell." Jesus actually speaks of judgment more than any other New Testament figure.
 - a. Why are these attitudes worthy of judgment?
 - b. How do we square the concept of "judgement" with "mercy and grace?"
 - c. How should the fact that our actions and attitudes are worthy of judgment impact our attitude toward sin?

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION (vv. 23-24)

Jesus offers two practical applications (or illustrations). The first is drawn from Israel's religious life. The emphasis is on relationships with other believers. It was no small matter to travel to Jerusalem to offer a gift on the altar. It involved the preparation of the sacrifice, a pilgrimage to the Holy City, and the involvement of a priest. Jesus takes us to the decisive moment before the sacrifice is offered and urges us to leave our gift at the altar to be reconciled to a brother or sister.

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.

1. Why do you think it is more important to Jesus for us to be reconciled to a brother or sister than it is to offer a gift on the altar?
2. Notice that Jesus does not assign fault. Why is it essential for us to seek reconciliation regardless of who is at fault?