

Scripture:

Psalm 119:1-8

Matthew 5:21-37

“The Lord looks at the heart.”

“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”” ----
1 Samuel 16:7.

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

And then there are the words of Jesus --- a little later on in Matthew’s gospel than our passage for today --- from Matthew 18 --- verse 15 ---

“If your brother or sister sins go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.”

“If your brother or sister sins go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.”

The Lord looks at the heart --- and if someone does something hurtful --- go and talk to them about it ---- just the two of you.

The fingerprints of these two sentiments are all over our passage from Matthew’s gospel today.

As we continue in the Sermon on the Mount today --- we find Jesus talking about 4 things --- anger --- adultery --- divorce --- and keeping your word.

And staying true to heart and having integrity are the foundations for what Jesus speaks about.

Anger ---- verses 21 to 26.

Adultery --- verse 27 to 30.

Divorce ---- verse 31 and 32.

And then or keeping your word ----- verses 33 to 37.

And the movement in the sermon has been from we are blessed --- in verses 1 to 12 ----- to --- we are special --- and good --- and capable of great and faithful acts --- verses 13-20 ---- to here are some new ways to think about certain things in life --- today --- with its focus on anger --- fidelity --- authenticity and integrity --- keeping your word and doing what you say you are going to do.

The Sermon on the Mount as a whole ---- is all about the inbreaking of the kingdom of God.

And so Jesus shares with His disciples how the kingdom of God is lived out.

Anger ---- “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.’”

In other words --- anger has many faces --- it can be words actions or both -- - and anger in words can be just as harmful as anger in actions.

And anger in words can be harmful precisely because words hurt.

Jesus goes on to say ---- “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.”

In other words ----- anyone who says --- “You idiot.” --- or --- “Hey stupid.” ---- ‘Raca’ in Aramaic Jesus’ native tongue ---- or “You fool.” ----- really isn’t being faithful to the kingdom of God.

You know the old saying --- “Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me.” --- well it’s just not true.

Names can cause great hurt ---- words can really hurt us.

Physical abuse isn’t the only kind of anger that hurts Jesus is saying here ---- verbal abuse --- verbal anger ---- also hurts.

And it not only hurts those involved but it also hurts the kingdom of God as a whole.

“Anyone who says to a brother or sister --- Raca ---- or --- “You idiot” --- or ---- “Hey stupid” ----- Jesus says ---- is answerable to the court.

And then He says ---- “Anyone who says ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Words matter.

Words can heal --- words can bring joy --- and words can hurt.

And more specifically hurtful words hurt ----- yes sometimes we say perfectly good words that hurt people not because of our own doing but because they are just too fragile or crippled by a past they cannot reconcile.

Jesus cautions against using words like --- “You fool!” --- or --- “You idiot!” --- and “Hey stupid!” ---- which is far different than cautioning against being forthright and truthful in our words.

It’s not that we have to tip toe around words --- it is that we ought to avoid name calling and downright hurtful words.

Sometimes we have to have difficult conversations --- Jesus is all for difficult conversation that may even result in some pain for some people --- sometimes it takes pain to grow --- what Jesus is cautioning against is name calling not truth telling --- and there’s a huge difference.

The point here is -- avoid hurtful and judgmental --- and name calling words.

Moving along ---- Matthew 18 verse 5 ---- “If your brother or sister sins go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.”

And here in Matthew 5 it’s very similar --- in verses 24 and 25 --- it’s go and reconcile with those you are struggling with --- speak the truth ---- settle matters quickly.

The kingdom of God is not about getting angry and calling names.

The kingdom of God --- is about dealing with difficult situations and disagreements like adults --- talking frankly about them eye to eye --- and

directly with those involved --- and actually listening and hearing each other ----- and moving forward in forgiveness and reconciliation.

How many times in life have we had someone come to us and share with us something that has bothered them or angered them or caused them great pain --- without that person ever having gone to the one who has been the cause of the pain or discomfort.

I can tell you I have had far too many people come to me to talk about something that has irked them or bothered them or hurt them that someone else has said without ever having actually gone to the person that actually spoke the words.

And 2 things always come to mind --- 1. ---- “Have you talked to God about it?” ---- and 2 ---- “Have you talked to the person about it?”

“Have you talked to God about it?” ---- and --- “Have you talked to the person about it?”

Here in Matthew 5 --- Jesus is saying to those that come to Him with a challenge ---- or hurt --- “Have you gone and talked to them about it?”

“Have you spoken to them about it?” --- if not --- please do so --- Jesus says.

And further Jesus models --- talking to God about it as well --- praying about it.

“Have you talked to God about it?” ---- and ---- “Have you talked to the person about it?” --- Jesus says.

Jesus refused to be entangled I triangulation.

Someone coming to Him instead of the person --- and entangling three people up instead of just going directly to the person and talking about it directly.

If we're upset --- if we're frustrated ---- if we're hurt --- or angry --- talk to God --- and talk to the person who has caused our anger hurt or pain --- yes sometimes it may require a bit more than this --- but this is always where to

start if we want to build the kingdom of God ----- talk to God --- and talk to the person.

Words can hurt --- and words can heal --- don't entangle someone else by hoping they will go and speak the words that you need to speak.

If you have a challenge with another go and speak with them --- this is kingdom of God behaviour 101 according to Jesus.

And then it's adultery.

Jesus has spoken about anger --- and now He moves to adultery --- harmful desires left unchecked.

If you're married ----- and it's not your wife or your husband ---- then don't have sex with the person ---- it's that simple.

Pretty basic right ---- but Jesus also nuances this bit saying ---- not only don't do it --- but cut off any less than faithful thought or desire right at the source and right away--- don't let it get too far along or it will become a problem.

“You have heard it said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman or man lustfully has already committed adultery in his --- or her --- heart.”

In other words just because you didn't sleep with someone doesn't necessarily mean you haven't veered off course a little.

The man or woman who never sleeps with his co-worker ----- but flirts with them all the time --- thinks about them all the time --- is goes down a dangerous road.

When Jesus says --- “If you're right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ----- and when He says ----- “And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.”

Part of what he means is --- if you look lustfully at another person ---- if you flirt away a bit with another person who isn't your partner --- cut it out ---

right then and there ---- don't think you can let that go and then manage it as your walking down the hallway to the bedroom --- it may be too late then --- cut it off cut it out now right now --- right away and at the source --- as soon as it surfaces.

Cut things off at the source --- right then and there --- it's always better to cut it off then and there than it is to let it go.

Adultery begins with a thought ---- Jesus is saying here ----- a thought that left unchecked just may lead to an act.

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Betrayal of the heart can be just as ugly as betrayal of the body --- sometimes even worse.

Cut things off at the source --- don't let them gain momentum.

No one ever just suddenly betrayed someone else --- there are steps along the way --- what Jesus is saying here is your thoughts influence and define who you are ---- precisely because your thoughts will also weigh in heavily on your actions.

Anyone that thinks Christians are soft or weak minded frail ---- should get their head out from under the rocks and listen to what Jesus teaches --- because among other things --- Jesus is the greatest of teachers.

He takes the difficult stuff and faces it head on --- anger --- betrayal --- trust --- integrity.

So Jesus goes on to say --- you've all heard the teaching about divorce but now listen to me --- picking it up at verse 31 --- ”It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

What He's talking about here is an approach to life that lacks authenticity and instead is far more concerned with posturing and legalism.

Married men who wanted to get what they wanted ---- were simply cutting women divorce papers left and right --- doing what was legally required --- getting the right legal papers without actually addressing the moral failure --- or root of the problem --- and so Jesus said hey wait a minute this is just wrong.

In other words ---- don't just do what is right by the letter of the law ---- and think that corrects errors or mistakes or shortcomings.

Legal cover doesn't mask a moral failure or a character flaw.

Cutting a woman a divorce paper to get rid of her --- remember women were essentially property ---- cutting her a --- "Go away" --- paper --- just because you changed your mind about something wasn't right Jesus says --- sure it was perfectly legal --- women may have been similar to property --- but it wasn't right Jesus says --- immorality --- poor treatment of human beings is never resolved in paper work ----- more on this when we consider an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth likely next week.

But for now --- this one goes back to ----

"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

And it goes right back to ----

"If your brother or sister sins go and point out their fault, just between the two of you."

Be honest --- talk about the problem that is leading to your break up or disagreement --- God knows your heart --- don't hide behind legal papers --- don't pretend you did what was right and good by appearances if you know in your heart it was wrong --- unfaithful ---- contrary to kingdom of God kind of behaviour.

So it's-----

Words hurt --- anger in words can be just as harmful as anger in action.

Go and talk to the one who caused you hurt.

If you notice that something is causing you to veer off course a bit ---- address it right away --- cut it off right away --- gouge it out right away --- don't wait because it will only get worse.

Get the rotten apple out of the barrel as soon as you know its there don't wait or you'll be fishing out a whole lot more than just one apple.

And don't hide behind legalism --- don't ever think that just because you do what looks right when you know it isn't right is ever good enough ----- legal cover may work in this world ----- but in the kingdom of God legal cover ---- - what is required instead of also what is true and faithful and just never masks a moral failure or a character flaw.

The kingdom of God is about what truly matters and what is just in God's eyes --- not what appears to matter or what appears to be right.

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

And then finally for today ---- keeping our word --- oaths.

Picking it up at verse 33 ---

“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

This one's pretty simpler and straightforward.

Don't swear on this or on that --- simply say yes or no --- and then follow through on whatever it is that you said.

Put another way --- don't manipulate words to get what you want or to get out of things.

Just say what you mean and do what you say.

“I swear on my mother’s grave that I’ll be there.”

Or “I swear on the Bible that I’ll pay you back when I get the money.” -----
are useless --- evil even according to Jesus.

“All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes
from the evil one.”

Just say I’ll be there ----- and then be there.

Just say I’ll pay you back and then pay them back.

Forget about fancy promises --- swearing to or on this or that ----- just say it
and then just do it.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today is all about how people of the
kingdom of God might live.

The kingdom of God works this way Jesus says:

Words hurt --- not just acts but words too ---- so don’t use hurtful words.

At the same time sometimes even when we use good and thoughtful words
people still get hurt --- and so when you’re hurt by words --- go the person
who hurt you and talk to them about it --- don’t wait --- don’t go and talk
with others --- go to the person and talk with them and resolve it.

And --- also --- if you feel things going a little sideways --- if you find
yourself veering off track --- stop then and there and set it straight --- get
right back on track without hesitation.

Cut things off at the source ---- if you notice you’re doing something not so
good ---- don’t think it will self correct --- cut it out now --- fix it now ---
change it now --- dig through the barrel for the bad apple as soon as you
know its there --- don’t wait.

And --- oh yeah --- by the way --- don’t just do what appears right --- or
what looks good --- do what is actually good and right and just in God’s eyes

----- because that's what truly matters ----- not what others think not what looks right --- but what is right.

And say what you mean and then do it.

Don't dress thing up all fancy --- thinking that will help you to follow through.

Say what you are going to do and then do it.

Don't manipulate words to get your way --- and don't manipulate words to get out of things you fell short on.

Say what you mean --- and do what you say you're going to do.

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

“If your brother or sister sins go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.”

These are what the kingdom of God are all about.

And The Sermon on the Mount is all about the inbreaking of the kingdom of God.

Appearances mean far less than content.

Jesus was about content far more than He ever was about appearance.

By appearances he was a failure ---- 12 or so faithful followers --- a whole pile of people who vehemently disliked Him --- and eventually killed Him.

The kingdom of God is all about authenticity ---- truthfulness --- and integrity.

Doing the right thing --- saying the right thing ----- having the necessary conversations --- having the difficult conversations ---- not shying away or hiding behind or brushing it under the carpet.

That's what Matthew 5 21-37 is all about at its heart.

People are more clearly defined by the way they handle challenges than they are by the challenges themselves.

How we handle the challenges we face matters more than the challenge itself.

Churches are most clearly defined by the way they deal with challenges than the nature of the challenges.

How we as Christians deal with difficulty is far more important than the fact that we find ourselves in difficulty.

Jesus in Matthew 5 today is helping us to find ways to deal with difficulty in human relations in faithful ways.

He's showing us ways to relate and live side by side faithfully.

God looks into our hearts --- deep inside --- to what really matters ---- to who we really are.

No matter what He still loves us and forgives us.

And that is exactly how we are to approach each other.

See past some of the mishaps and faults ---- look into who people really are - --- children of God.

The kingdom of God is all about --- integrity --- intent --- honesty ---- authenticity.

We are already saved --- that's taken care of by Jesus.

People of the kingdom of God are all about ---- reconciliation --- forgiveness --- and grace.

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

May we have hearts that are full of grace --- and not judgement.

May we have hearts that look to reconcile --- not prove that we are right so they must be wrong.

And may we have forgiving hearts ----- hearts of love and not hate or fear.

May our hearts take in new information ---- see the face of Christ in everyone we meet ----- and get on board with the kingdom of God.

Amen.