

Sermon on Matthew 5:21-30 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

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This week I was lamenting the loss of buffets at my men's Bible study. How the pandemic has likely taken from us the smorgasbord. The all-you-can-eat plethora of processed food... with gravy and soft-serve ice cream. No sneeze guard can protect Golden Corral!

If we reason about it however it is probably okay. Buffets are really nothing more than the opportunity for over-indulgence. If we are invested in the experience we might even get angry when the biscuits are gone, or the only slice of pizza left is veggie, or some shark has taken the last of the bacon bits as Souplantation. Or, we can't stop the ice cream machine from filling the cup as we are mesmerized by its beauty of plenty. It is not that those things are responsible for our actions but our desire for them that forms our behavior.

All this to say, what is inside of us shapes us. And when we are bumped out of the line, those things can come out. With this in mind we turn back to the Sermon on the Mount.

With an increasingly popular ministry unfolding, Jesus takes his followers to a mountain and sits down to teach them. He describes their character as those approved by God. How they influence the world around them.

He is casting the vision of the Kingdom.

"The kingdom is not just a static entity that we join. It's not like a club. It's a powerful movement, the movement of God in the Earth, and being part of that kingdom means getting swept up in that movement. The kingdom means God taking his throne and beginning to set the world right, and being in his kingdom means that God works through us to set things right. These instructions are not just membership qualifications. They are redemptive commandments, and Jesus

is laying out the specifics of the redemptive righteousness that surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees." Leithart

Jesus speaks of the law as something deeper than expected and something that is counter-cultural. And he brings us back into alignment with his way. He kicks off this clarifying of the Law with two outwardly experienced sins that are inwardly motivated. Ramping up the law to take it deeper.

For our purposes this morning we want to recognize these Issues of the Heart, resolve to Guard our Heart, and find something more in Satisfied Hearts.

1) Issues of the Heart

Don't murder and don't commit adultery... the sixth and seventh commandments. Straight forward and agreed upon (at least they used to be). But these are bigger commands than we think. Jesus brings us deeper.

"You have heard that it was said... "You shall not murder..." "You shall not commit adultery..." But I say..."

It is not just the expression of anger that is sin only when it results in death... but the harboring of anger in our heart that brings judgment. Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother in anger will be liable to the council. And whoever says "You fool!" will be liable to the hell of fire.

Now, we have all been angry. Maybe you are angry right now. Things don't go our way and we boil. We take up some offense from someone or the kid doesn't do what we tell them. The government enacts some rule that attacks my self-sovereignty. The followers of Jesus have always been acquainted with anger... those sitting with Jesus as much as us.

But he takes the gulf between being angry and cutting people down and closes it. He, like a surgeon, calls for the removal of the stewing, corrupting reality of anger as sin.

Now there is space for righteous anger. It is what leads Jesus to overturn tables in the temple courts. It is what should motivate us against injustice, the disregard of

the least. It is what should fuel us for the war on our own sin. But it is the toxic nature of anger he elevates as a violation of the sixth commandment.

Ephesians 4:26–27 “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil.” (ESV)

"In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is speaking of unrighteous anger, and his words leave no doubt about what he means. We are quick to get angry at personal affront but slow to become angry with sin and injustice, and we need to take our Lord's words to heart." Hughes

We don't surrender it to personality. We don't relent to a whataboutism that says "everyone is angry." We don't shift blame to those that "made" us angry.

If I kill someone in my mind it is the same as doing it with my hands. In the Kingdom, there is no safe place for the harboring of anger or any sin.

We can feel the weight of this. Most of us have not nor will we ever commit murder... but the day won't end before we are tempted to anger. Hearing our King announce, "but I say" and we can't dismiss it.

He also takes on adultery by saying the sin is lust. The acted-upon desire for something you are not supposed to have.

You have heard it said that you shall not commit adultery, but I say, looking at another with "lustful intent" means you have already committed adultery. It is not the act but the heart that shapes the behavior.

This isn't just for men, it is for all of us. Desiring what you are not intended to have, exploiting others for pleasure's sake. It can be on the street, on the screen, all in your mind.

This is why the heart is so important in relationship to Christ. It is why over and over again in the Prophets God tells his people it is not their sacrifice or worship he wants but their hearts. Our hearts shape our behavior. And while we might be good at hiding it and keeping up appearances, Jesus says we have violated the law.

And the toxicity knows no end. Like anger, lust ferments and spreads if it is given the run of our hearts and minds.

Both of these escalations give us pause. Because it applies to our hearts. "It should instill within us a poverty of spirit and a humility that realizes we are spiritually bankrupt and make us amazed that God loves us as he does."

And to counteract these, Jesus calls us to be who he says we are and strongly war against sin.

2) Guard Your Heart

Aggressively act against the poison of the heart.

How he tells us to fight is by owning the beatitudes.

For anger, become a reconciler, a peacemaker. If you are angry, stop what you are doing and make it right. He has given us the ministry of reconciliation and it starts with us. If you are coming in to worship, Jesus says it is more important for you to go to your brother or sister that has something against you, or that you have something against and be reconciled.

It takes ownership of our anger and repentance of it. Surrender to each other to forge deeper relationships shaped by Christ. Come to terms quickly with your accuser... don't let anger run its course and devastate you and others.

For lust, it is guarding our heart as to be those pure in heart. Jesus uses hyperbole to prove the point. It is better for you to take out your good eye and cut off your good hand than give your whole self to hell. Fight on the levels of image and action.

"it is better to forgo some experiences this life offers in order to enter the life which is life indeed; it is better to accept some cultural amputation in this world than risk final destruction in the next."

Drastic measures are always appropriate in order to protect one's spiritual health! Halfway measures will never do the job! How this strikes against our

desire to seek the middle road, to never be too extreme either way. But it is Christ's advice, and some of us need to take some extreme measures today!

What Jesus is doing is warning against bondage. To the captivity to sin which is located in our hearts. He refuses to let us stay as slaves to sin where we are supposed to be slaves to righteousness.

This call is the continual exhortation to us in the NT.

1 Peter 2:1–3 “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. [2] Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—[3] if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (ESV)

1 Peter 2:11 “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” (ESV)

Ephesians 5:3–4 “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. [4] Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.” (ESV)

1 Corinthians 6:18–20 “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (ESV)

Sin to be avoided is not just the external terminal acts, it goes deeper, to what forms your heart.

"The point here is that those whose hearts have been transformed by the gospel should be willing to make significant sacrifices in order to avoid becoming ensnared by sin that will do them greater damage in spiritual terms" GTB

And it is never too late to take Jesus at his word and go to battle against sin. It is what makes citizens of the Kingdom distinct. Living for something different, something deeper.

What we really need is something more than just the warning and the agreement that anger and lust corrupt and ruin us. We need what is better to take their place.

3) Satisfied Heart

Before we come to anger and lust it is likely we are familiar with dissatisfaction.

"Dissatisfaction in life is near the root of all kinds of sin. Why do people cheat on their spouse, abuse drugs and alcohol, mindlessly binge-watch ridiculous amounts of television, scroll endlessly on Facebook and Twitter, steal, [lash out in anger] or commit suicide? All of these things and more happen because people haven't found happiness.

At the root of our dissatisfaction is a never-ending thirst that nothing in this world can satisfy. We've been duped into thinking that a better job, more money, cooler friends, another spouse, or a new life is really what we need. And if we can't obtain any of these things, or when they leave us dissatisfied, we resort to drug abuse, sexual immorality, or senseless entertainment." Philip Holmes

Dissatisfied with situations, seasons, and ultimately with our Savior. It is rampant but it is not a new idea.

In the garden, it was the fear of missing out, of being dissatisfied that made the fruit look appealing. It was dissatisfaction with a lack of influence or perceived power that led Judah to pledge allegiance to foreign powers in rejection of God. It is dissatisfaction in any number of things that leads the lampstand in Ephesus to be in jeopardy if the church did not reclaim their first love.

I want to take us to an old story to show how deep the dragon goes in our hearts. Let me set the scene. Israel had been in slavery in Egypt for generations, bondage. And God redeems them, brings them out into his promise. But the journey is made longer because of dissatisfaction.

God had given them water miraculously. He had provided daily bread for them as manna, exactly enough for them, what they needed to thrive. But the people

began to crave other things, what they were used to in slavery. And their lust drives them to lash out in anger toward God.

Numbers 11:4–6 “Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! [5] We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. [6] But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.” (ESV)

Moses, hearing the lament from every tent in the camp, goes to God and complains, because he can’t provide meat, and it stirs the anger of the Lord.

Numbers 11:18–20 “And say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was better for us in Egypt.” Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. [19] You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, [20] but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, “Why did we come out of Egypt?”’” (ESV) **Numbers 11:23** “And the LORD said to Moses, “Is the LORD’s hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.” (ESV)

Denying the provision of God, rejecting him, the ache for something else. They let dissatisfaction take root and desired what wasn’t good for them because they wanted something better to “look at” and consume.

Numbers 11:31–34 “Then a wind from the LORD sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits above the ground. [32] And the people rose all that day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail. Those who gathered least gathered ten homers. And they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. [33] While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague. [34] Therefore the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving.” (ESV)

Kibroth-hattavah: graves of craving, graves of lust.

To see the provision of God and reject it by craving more, this is the root of our anger and lust. This is why Jesus tells us to be so aggressive against it in our hearts.

Fast forward to after Jesus' sermon and another story of miraculous food. The people crave more from him and Jesus says he is the place of their satisfaction.

John 6:35 “Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (ESV)

Like those in the wilderness or those on the plain with Jesus, we can see his grace, see him and be satisfied or reject him with a fleshly dissatisfaction and turn to our anger and lust and be liable to the hell of fire.

This is why we lean into his grace, why we look to Him for all things in all of life. We are made to see that our only hope is Christ who fulfilled all righteousness and offers it to us as a free gift. Jesus' radical demands are meant to drive us to him for grace.

We guard our hearts best by having our hearts reshaped by Jesus and satisfied in him. And real satisfaction is his promise to us. That we would taste and see that the Lord is good.

Psalm 107:9 “For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.” (ESV)

Psalm 16:9–11 “Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. [10] For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. [11] You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (ESV)

Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” (ESV)

By Jesus' sacrifice for us, we are forgiven in our anger and called to something better in our lust. Those approved by God no longer have to live this way. We can find satisfaction for all of life in this Savior-King. Freed from captivity to the battlefield of life with Jesus fighting for us.

And when we come to him in our need, our poverty of spirit, he renews us, when we come to the end of ourselves, he strengthens us, he calls us to life in him, no longer angry, no longer craving. Full, happy in him.

"We reap the benefits of knowing, loving, and delighting in Jesus. The Father gives us peace that surpasses understanding and provides for all our needs according to his riches. No good thing is withheld from us and all things work together for our good. Living in light of these truths proclaims to a discontent world that Jesus is better than anything the world has to offer. As we look to Jesus to make us truly happy, we also proclaim to a world in need that only Christ can truly satisfy." Philip Holmes

"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." And it is far better than the corrupting influence of anger and lust. Hearts made new in Jesus. Headed for eternity.

Living in Christ is not a lowering of expectations so we don't get hungry for something else, but a constant returning to our source. To love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our mind. Because he has loved us with all of who he is.

Jesus is the remedy. He is the way out of anger into peacemaking. He is the way out of lust into purity of heart.

Be Free - Come out of bondage, hear of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for you. His forgiveness for you and new mercy each day to live again. In him, you are new and can live new. Come in repentance and surrender to his grace.

Be Ruthless - Fight sin even in the depth of your heart. Don't let it fester or grow as a dark pet you feed on occasion. Seek peace. Seek purity. It is the way of Jesus and he has called you to it. Get friends to help and make a plan. Take it as serious as Jesus does.

Be Satisfied - Run to Jesus. He is our anchor of hope. He holds us. When we were lost in our sin he gave himself for us and now frees us to give ourselves to him. He is our peace, he is our purity. Draw near to Jesus and he will draw near to you. Humble yourself before the Lord and he will exalt you.

The buffet is closed. You don't have to lash out or go on craving the forbidden fruit anymore. And there is a meal for you in Christ. A celebration where we will have our fill for eternity.

Revelation 19:6–9 “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

[7] Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

[8] it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

[9] And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” (ESV)

Oh, what a meal that will be! Rejoice and be glad, yours is the kingdom of heaven.