

Grace: Ouch!

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[0 : 0 0] So, I want to go back this morning to Matthew chapter 5, really from verse 33, these three paragraphs that are in the centre of the Sermon and the Mount.

And I wonder sometimes, I've prepared this before, they can have ramping up of the coronavirus stuff, so it's not directly related in any way, but it is directly related because it's God's Word and I hope that some of the application will be real and relevant today.

I hope that's true every week. But I do wonder sometimes what we're looking for from God as Christians to inspire us in our faith. You know, you hear a lot of different things, faith is kind of ordinary, and we want something to inspire it and make it great.

You know, we do signs and wonders, is that what we want? Do you want to feel goosebumps when we worship? Do you want more evidence of His love in our day-to-day life, a better church experience, more enjoyment, an easier walk?

There's lots of different things that we might want to, we think, inspire us in our Christian lives. But really, we have all the inspiration available to us in the voice of Jesus.

[1 : 2 3] That's really where our inspiration and our foundation and our strength and our development should come from as Christians. The risen, authoritative, committed, astounding voice of Jesus Christ, the significance of what He says, His love, His example, and His redemptive, atoning power.

It's quite the qualification, isn't it, to listen to? And we have that. We all have that in our relationship with Jesus Christ. And that's why preaching from the Word is so central to us, whether that's one to one or whether it's from a sermon or whether it's reading or hearing, that the Word of God and the voice of Jesus Christ through His Word is hugely significance.

I know that sometimes we think it's just all on paper. But how do I know more? How do I live? How am I inspired by Him? We do need to recall and remind ourselves that it is the inspired Word of God.

It's a living Word. It's three-dimensional. It comes off the page and meaning is brought to us through the Holy Spirit, applying it to our lives.

And I do believe the inspiration will come from putting our discipleship into practice through obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word.

[2 : 4 6] And by living out what His love looks like in our lives, it means losing our lives for His sake. It means being crucified to self.

And it means living for Christ. So in today's circumstances, we remind ourselves that we are citizens of another kingdom and we live accordingly.

Not carelessly and not piously and not selfishly, but we are citizens of Jesus Christ. And we are not to be conforming, you know, Romans 12 tells us that, we don't conform to the pattern of this world.

We are to be salt of the earth in this circumstance and in every circumstance we find ourselves in. And so God, God speaking to us is incredibly practical always.

It's never pious and distant and religious in kind of non-practical ways. It's responding to everyday life with extraordinary grace.

[3 : 51] That's what living as a Christian means for all of us. That's what it starts. It always is going to start with you and it's going to start with me and with our heart and with our relationship with God, recognizing God's profoundly impossible different standard that He requires of us, that drive us to Him in faith and drive us to Him in radical Christian living.

And if you ask the question, well, why am I, why am I, why am I, why am I, why am I in faith to feel more real, that's what it will feel more real, that's where it will become more compelling, more beautiful, more courageous and more crystal clear when we are walking in the footsteps of the Savior rather than anything kind of happening to us from the outside.

So in this passage there's three big areas where it's easy to ignore Jesus. You see, we often reimagine or we ignore or we reject how Jesus wants us to live.

And that's what the religious leaders of Jesus' day were doing. They were taking Scripture and twisting it, turning it, making it easier to live without reference to God in many ways.

And it's easy for us to do the same, is to take away the impossibility and the standards of grace in our lives. And what I mean by that is every day, every day, I'm not speaking about high days or significant other days but in the daily grind taking grace and the application of grace into it.

[5 : 30] So there's three, there's three paragraphs, so there's three sections and I'm going to use three words, truth and self and grace. So these are the three words that apply as we consider this.

So the first section entitled in the Bible, our pulpit Bible, in the pew Bible, page 810 is oaths from verse 33 and that's 33 to 37.

And Jesus says again, you have heard it said to those who will do shall not swear falsely but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. And there is quite a lot of stuff in the Old Testament particularly in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy about oaths.

So in Deuteronomy 23, hopefully that's, is that going to come up on the screen, Deuteronomy 23, it says, if you make a vow to the Lord your God you shall not delay fulfilling it for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, you be guilty of sin.

But if you refrain from vowing you will not be guilty of sin, you shall be careful to do what has passed your lips for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

[6 : 35] So there was precedent for vows and vowing before the Lord in the Old Testament. But what was happening with the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day was they were, they were, they were grading oaths.

So they were saying some oaths you needed to keep depending on the words you used and other little oaths you didn't need to keep. If you used God's name well you really needed to keep that oath but if you used the temple then you didn't need to use that oath.

And God, they were giving more weight to some of their words than other words so that some of their words actually couldn't be trusted and yet they were using oaths to give them a veneer of truthfulness and responsibility.

Jesus utterly and completely slams them in His, in His vows, the seven vows of Matthew 23.

What do you scribes and Pharisees, you swear by the gold of the temple and you say it can't be broken but then you swear by the, and He just annihilates the fact that they are hypocritical and that their words are not just, you know, to swear by the temple is nothing, to swear by the gold of the temple is binding.

[7 : 42] They were speaking with fork tongue, in other words. They were using oaths in a way to allow themselves to make promises or make vows they couldn't keep.

And I'm just going to broaden that. I'm not going to go into detail into the different oaths and everything else that we could do here, but the basic teaching of Jesus here is that to be a disciple of Jesus is to be known, to be absolutely trustworthy and transparently honest.

It's broadening out beyond simply the taking of oaths, you know, as it finishes there in verse 37, let what you say simply be yes or no. Anything beyond that comes from the evil one.

And why is that? That is because Jesus is the truth. Jesus is the revelation of the truth. Jesus holds the truth.

Jesus is the truth. So if we are followers of Jesus' truth, as it's revealed in Him and in His revelation of what the world is but also particularly in salvation, our lives are to be based on truth.

[8 : 57] You know from the very beginning that the problems arose with Satan's lies, and he's called the father of lies. That's not insignificant. It's the complete opposite of God, as God is truth and Satan is lies.

And so we recognize Satan as the father of lies. And ever since, lies have been damning and confusing and dividing and creating havoc in the world in which we live.

Whether it's lies to gain popularity, lying on your CV, lying to get acceptance, hiding who we are in order to gain wealth or to gain some kind of advantage.

At the very heart of your walk of faith and mine as Christians is that we are not liars, is that we tell the truth and that we live by the truth. And we all say, of course.

That will impact how you live tomorrow and how I live tomorrow. We should be people who are known as people of the Word, people of our Word. Our Word is our bond. We can be trusted.

[9 : 58] So parents, you go home and you don't make false promises to your kids in order to placate them or promises you don't keep saying you'll be somewhere and not turning up.

Be people of your Word. We'll make mistakes. Of course we'll make mistakes. But be known, be apologetic, seek forgiveness when we fail to keep our promises in our lives.

In our church relationships, there will only ever be Christian depth between us in our Christian lives if there's a trust and a basic honesty between us.

If you say one thing, if you speak with forked tongue in church, with other Christians, if you say one thing but mean another, then you're hiding the reality. If you talk behind people's backs and a smile to their faces, if you're saying you'll do something or be somewhere for another Christian but you pull out easily and cheaply just because we can't be bothered then, it's because truth doesn't matter to us.

And yet it's a truly fundamental part of our lives as Christians. Your workplace, what is your reputation in the workplace?

[11 : 09] Or in the student body or in the school or in... What is your reputation? Do you have a reputation for being known as a truth teller who's honest, even sometimes when it causes difficulties?

Sensitive, yes. But truthful, honest, reliable, scrupulous. And when we say things, we don't need to swear on our granny's false teeth in order to be known to be saying something that we'll keep to.

We don't need to make oaths because our yeses are yes and our noes are no. We are people of integrity and honesty. That is the most practical outworking of grace in our lives and will bring our faith alive.

It's costly. We live in a society you would expected to lie. It's absolutely natural. Expected to lie about your income, expected to lie in your tax return, expected to lie to get customers off your back.

It's completely natural to lie. Lie about your abilities, lie about your character to avoid conflict, to be popular, to progress in life.

[12 : 20] We are citizens of another king. Our life and our behavior, accordingly by grace, is to be different.

Sometimes we throw up our hands and say, I never have an opportunity to share my faith or to show that I'm a Christian. Guarantee. As we live by Christ and the cost of living by Christ with regard to the truth, we will have plenty of opportunities.

Say what you mean, mean what you say. Anything else is from the father of lies and the self-interest that goes with that.

Grace loves truth and that is the reflection of the character and the person of Christ. And then the second section is retaliation. This is quite a radical section.

You've heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and so on. An eye for an eye. We've got Exodus 23 to 25.

[13 : 21] That's the Old Testament law. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. Exodus 21, 23 to 25.

Now that was given by God in the context of the outworking of the Ten Commandments and it was given in the context of the civil law of Israel, that this was to be outworked in the law courts.

It was to be outworked in the society. It was to restrict and to ban personal unlimited revenge and individual retribution.

It was for this theocratic law court of the Old Testament and it's the principle in which many of our law courts are based. Punishment is to fit the crime.

Appropriate punishment for the appropriate crime or appropriate damages for punitive damages for crimes committed. But Christ is taking it here into the realm of discipleship, into the realm of personal responsibility and reapplying it and restating it against the Pharisees who had taken it and misapplied it in every way because they took what was the truth of the Old Testament and added to it of course in different ways.

[14 : 52] And so here we see Christ speaking about our attitude as individuals, presenting an individual Christian law of non-retaliation, the personal ethics for a believer.

Romans 12, 17 to 21, Paul restates it, repay no one evil for evil but give thought to what is on and will say of all possible as far as live peaceably with all men.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves but leave it for the wrath of God for it is written, avenge its mind, I will repay. It's a recognition that we don't have the right to personal retaliation and revenge in our Christian lives and he gives four different little cameos of what that means.

He starts with them, do not resist the one who's evil but if anyone slaps you in the right cheek, turn to him the other also. A tremendously challenging statement but reminding us that we are not to return violence with violence, that we're not taking it beyond the image or the illustration, we're not also to return insult for insult.

And Christ is a great example. You don't return personal insults by slapping some more personal insults on people and as much as possible also not to take personal vengeance of course and revenge on people.

[16 : 32] He then goes on to speak about if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. I think that's in the context of being sued for something or the payment of a debt and I think the principle here is listen, be generous.

If you owe someone something, don't contest it on a technicality but be willing to give back more than is expected of you and especially within a Christian church context where it says in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 7, we have to be willing to be wronged.

To have lawsuits with one another is already a defeat. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? And it reminds us of our attitude towards one another as Christians. Then the third little vignette he gives is if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

Well, what does that mean? Well, it comes from the practice of the Roman soldiers who were able to compel particularly peasants into service to carry their gear for them.

So they would ask us and they only had to carry it for one mile. So you would carry the gear of a Roman soldier for one mile and that would be your duty under Roman law. And here the idea is when we are compelled into service in whatever context, we're not going to be asked to carry someone's gear for a mile in the army or the air force as they go on the streets.

[18 : 00] It's the whole idea of not just doing the minimum required, just grudgingly. The idea, do more than what's expected.

Do more than the bare minimum. If you were a Christian peasant in the Roman times, if the Roman soldier actually do one, well, walk with them two miles as well. And whether you're there, speak to the guy and try and get to know him.

And so there's this idea of being known as someone who is willing to serve and willing to go the extra mile, known as a, maybe in your rotten jobs, doing the rotten things that no one else is willing to do and doing it well, not skiving and cheating, but working and carrying a load for God's glory.

And not doing it well just when we're being watched, but when nobody is watching or when we think nobody is watching, recognizing God in all of these things.

And the last one is give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse from the one who will borrow from you in the whole context of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And again, it's, I think it's just speaking about generosity, willing to lend out of love, but not in a careless way, but just generally holding loosely to our possessions and our material goods and having a generous attitude towards others.

[19 : 16] Because Jesus is the giver of all good gifts. And because that is what He looks for us. So I think there's a generous, if you've taken overarching thing, there's a generosity of spirit here and our recognition that we will be wronged and that we will be treated badly.

It's the very opposite of the victim mentality in which we're living today. For everyone's a victim and it's a moving towards a much more generous, open, gracious attitude to the world and to the lives we live.

Because that's the second area. The third area is the last one, love your enemies. And this is the most obvious twisting of the Old Testament from the Pharisees of Jesus Day where they said, you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.

That was never the Old Testament requirement. Leviticus 19, verse 18, speaks of it says, you shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

I'm you, Lord, I think, sorry, I think it goes on to say you shall also love your enemy. So Leviticus never adds that you should love your neighbour and hate your enemy.

[20 : 31] That was an additional unbiblical emphasis of the religious leaders of your day. But Jesus says, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.

So this is beyond even non-retaliatory love, it is positive action in our lives towards our, not just our neighbours, but our enemies.

So who's your neighbour? Well, it's the person that's next to you. Sometimes literally, but just in other words, whoever comes into your experience, whoever comes into your life, but we're to regard even our enemies with that same love, maybe those who persecute you in the workplace, those who hate you for who you are, I hope, not for legitimate reasons of being hypocritical in our lives.

But we are to love and to offer the hand of friendship and grace towards our enemies. We're to pray for them. It's very difficult to pray for someone and then to treat them badly.

It should be if our prayers are genuinely concerned for their welfare. The philosophy of the world is to love those who love you in return.

[21 : 56] Quid pro quo, I love them because they love me and because they can be good for me and that'll be good for them. And it's the whole, if we talked about the victim mentality of the world in which we live, this plays into the identity politics of the world in which we live, is we only associate those who agree with us and who think the same way as us.

Absolutely not the case for the Christian is we are to show and live a life of love without enemies.

That is radically counter-intuitive. If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Even the Gentiles or the Pagans do the same.

That's the way of the world. We can all do that. And it's really sad when sometimes the way of the world comes into the church and the church acts more like an unbelieving world than it does look like that we are citizens of another kingdom.

And so there's much need for us in our lives for forgiveness. And he says, you therefore must be perfect, your heavenly Father is perfect. Perfect here meaning come to that place where you, having attained the end or the purpose of what you're doing.

[23 : 13] And that is a true understanding of grace when we live out grace like Jesus lives out because the greatest example of loving your enemies is Christ on the cross.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The greatest example of generosity is Jesus Christ and his life and the death on the cross.

The greatest example of truth is Jesus Christ and his life and death on the cross and all that he does for us. So we are to be children of our Father so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

And that simply means that makes us like Him. You know, when children look like their parents, we are to look like our Father is who is in heaven.

We recognize that the Father in heaven pours out gifts onto those who believe Him and those who don't believe Him. He gives life and He gives health and He gives laughter and He gives happiness to people who spend not one day in His company who do nothing but stick their fingers up at Him and who aren't interested in the living God, who claim to be atheists and who mock and deride the idea of God and of heaven.

[24 : 26] He pours out goodness to them day to day. He sends His Son on the evil and on the righteous. And we are to live with that same reflective grace.

God is loving and patient and He is also just and one day His justice will be revealed. But as we wait on Him, we are to remember the quote from Alfred Plummer which is a very good one, to return evil for good is devilish.

To return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine. And that is impossible without Christ in our hearts.

So the sermon in the mount speaks all the time of unnatural norms, I'm using that word guardedly, unnatural in the nature of the world in which we live.

It speaks against society's norms because we belong to a different kingdom and we have a different king and we are citizens. And the gospel is radical.

[25 : 48] I headlined this or themed this sermon, the grace ouch. This week you got grace, wow, this week you get grace ouch because the gospel has, can I say, the gospel, the grace's teeth, it's encouraging us to act in a powerful way.

Dwaynevsky says that love and action is much more terrible than loving dreams. We often are just loving the gospel and Jesus and dreams, but going out and loving this way in the indiscriminate, selfless, loving the unlovely, those who don't love in return, it is impossible without Christ in our hearts because that is what He did to us.

That is who we are. That is what we are like without His grace. How can we ever pass judgment on others when we know our own hearts?

That I believe as we, in a life of repentance and faith every day, that's how we will begin to get a buzz from our faith.

That's how we will become more real where we will get goosebumps because that's what will change the world. That's what is going to change this world. And that's what's going to transform your experience and my experience of faith.

[27 : 24] It's faith that's going to be tried and tested in the coface of day-to-day living.

It's not in here that we become strong Christians. This is where we're equipped. It's when we live it, when we test it, when we try it and live Christ's way in the world in which we live.

So I would discourage you from looking for, from some kind of magic spiritual dust to make us feel the love as we walk in the Holy Spirit, an impossible dependence and obedience to Jesus' way, which is different from the world in which we live.

And I think life changes for us and we will know God's love because we will be living God's love in all the grime and dirt and mud that is this world.

Son-deserved love, and I don't think it's like any description of love we have naturally from within us. It is absolutely divine and therefore we need Him.

[28 : 37] And His grace to transform our brokenness and our sin and the reality of death in us. We need to be saved from that and redeemed and live as citizens of another kingdom.

Amen. We pray. Father God, we ask for Your help to live this way. It may become relentlessly stark to live this way in the current situation.

It may be impossibly powerful to act with grace and with love and restraint and commitment and truthfulness when self-preservation seems to reign.

We pray that we would remind ourselves of where our hope lies, like Paul and Plenty or a need that we are confident and we are able to be comfortable and rely on the living God and be content with what we have.

We know that there is much wrestling in that and we don't say it and pray that we wouldn't say it to others or even to ourselves in a trite and in an uncaring way, but that we would recognize that these days demand us to be extremely prayerful and extremely in connection with Jesus Christ and learning from His truth and living His truth.

[30 : 28] Help us. We pray to do so and help us to help each other to do so. I pray especially today for those who have burdens because of what's happening, have fears whose plans have been thrown up in the air, who can't visit loved ones either locally or internationally for the many we have in our congregation who are here from other parts of the world and for the challenges and complications it brings into their lives.

We commit all of these to you and pray that we would love and support and care for one another very powerfully in these days.

So help us to look out, help each of us to look with shepherd's eyes and care and protect all those who we know and those also who we don't know.

For Jesus' sake, amen.