

'You Have Heard it Said..'

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[0 : 00] More or less regularly, we've had a couple of breaks, but every Sunday morning in the last while, and we will be indefinitely God willing into the future, we're looking at Matthew's gospel in the sermon and working through the gospel.

So we kind of... we're... we stopped for a while and the sermon on the Mount, which is a very central, important part of the gospel of Matthew and of the teaching of Jesus.

And slightly later on in Matthew's gospel, Jesus asks a question of the crowds that were with him. He asked the listeners to him when they were... when the subject was John the Baptist, he said, who did you... what did you expect to see?

What did you expect when you went out to see John the Baptist in the desert? What were you expecting? You know, were you expecting someone in fine clothes who was come from a palace? Did you expect to see a reed blowing in the wind? And he asks that question because there was all kind of misunderstanding about who John the Baptist was. And I'm asking... I would ask the same question myself and of all of us this morning.

[1 : 14] What did you expect today? What have you expected today in coming to church and as we've opened Scripture? What was your view of church?

So what were you looking for? What did you... maybe as a Christian, what did you pray about before coming to church this morning? Or what is it you're expecting this morning from Jesus? Because we believe Jesus is living and alive, although he's not with us physically as he was when he spoke about John the Baptist. What is it you were expecting or looking for from church? Is it warm words or good singing?

Is it irrelevant truth? But they've an oxymoron really for us. It shouldn't be irrelevant. It should never be that way. Did you just come to meet people, to meet folks for a social occasion?

And you just hear out of interest, you're passing by and it was raining outside and you decided to come in from the rain. There may be lots of different expectations that you've come.

[2 : 12] Maybe you've come expecting to rip apart everything that we do because you're cynical about church and about community and about the gospel and about the Bible.

And I'm pretty sure that none of you expected that the theme of the sermon today would be anger and sex, okay? But that's what it's going to be because that's the passage that we have in front of us.

The Sermon and the Mount is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. It's one of the best known passages, one that many unbelievers, many people, or maybe wouldn't call themselves Christians, will still, they'll value what they think is in the Sermon and the Mount.

It's a good ethical moral teaching. Maybe that is true from that particular perspective. But maybe they haven't really thought terribly much about what Jesus does say in the Sermon and the Mount. We've seen the beatitudes and the blessings of the beatitudes and that's probably the most famous part. But here, Jesus talking about Himself, His law, and in relation to anger and in relation to sex.

[3 : 21] It couldn't be more real. And Jesus and the Bible often speaks about fundamental emotions and our desires and our reactions and the drives that we have at the very heart of our humanity, the very heart of our being, and that He's reminding us that as we come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, all of these things are challenged and all of these things come under His Lordship and come under His sovereignty.

Because we need to remember that the Sermon and the Mount is first of all spoken to Christians. It's spoken to believers. It's spoken to disciples, those who follow the Mother, people who are listening. So, He was speaking primarily to His disciples, to His followers.

And He's moving. It's a very important document as it were. It's a very important thesis that He brings. And He's moving on from the character of the believer, which is highlighted in the beatitudes, the kind of fruit, the kind of characteristics of the person who puts their trust and who follows Jesus, and the ones you know that we know about, the poor in spirit, the meek, the hungry, the thirsting, the merciful, pure in heart, the peacemakers, all of these things are characteristics that mark someone who's come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, the kind of character we have.

And really from that point on in the Sermon, we have the outworking of that. And therefore the conduct of the believer is Jesus is highlighting and expressing because of who Jesus is, because of what He's done for us, because He's transformed our hearts and gifted us salvation and changed us from the inside out.

It means that our heart is changing, and therefore our conduct is changing. It's not conduct first. It's not outward behavior first, and then somehow that makes us right with God.

[5 : 12] It's coming to Christ Jesus and knowing He freely offers us salvation and hope and forgiveness. And then recognizing that inner change brings outward...

Your character change brings outward conduct change, and it's fascinating. So what's Jesus doing here? He's doing several things in this passage and indeed in the whole of the Sermon, but particularly in this passage and beyond it actually.

Because last time, I think it was Thomas, Thomas or might have been Callum, can't remember, he looked at the previous verses which talks about Christ coming to fulfill the law, and we sung about the law, and the law is the moral law of God from the Old Testament.

And so here what we have Jesus doing, and it comes in a repeated phrase that he says a lot, he says, you have heard it said, but I say to you.

You have heard it said, but I say to you. You have heard it said, but I say to you. Now what is he doing? Well he's making a bold claim here when he's saying this. Now the context is the law of the Word of God, and he's saying you have heard it said, but I say to you.

[6 : 30] And what is he doing here? Well he's claiming the same authority as the Word of God, he's claiming to be divine, and we know of course that that's what ended up...

That's what ended his life and ended up in going to the cross because he claimed divinity. He's claiming the same authority as the author, and he's saying this is what God meant, and he's expanding on what God said in the moral law and the Ten Commandments.

He's internalizing it. He's also correcting in some of the passages, he's correcting the misinterpretation of the Jewish leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees.

You know, for example, he said, you know, you should love the Lord, you should love your neighbour but hate your enemy. So the law of God never says you should love your neighbour and hate your enemy.

They added that interpretation of hating your enemy, and it was never biblical. So sometimes he's correcting the interpretation of the scribes and the Pharisees. Sometimes he's broadening the teaching of the Old Testament moral law and giving us more insight.

[7 : 42] And he's using shock tactics a lot of the time. In some ways, I would have really liked to day if when that was being read by you and I heard gasps from the congregation, not because of you and reading which was impeccable, but because of the truth.

You know, were you scandalized by it? You should have been... We should have been scandalized by this truth. I wouldn't have been surprised if there'd been all kinds of gasps and hands being thrown up in horror at what Jesus was saying because he's using shock tactics and he's talking about hell.

No one in polite company talks about hell. And yet Jesus is talking about hell, he's speaking about Gehenna, which was a translation for the valley of Hinnom, which was the rubbish dump outside Jerusalem where the rubbish was thrown and burned.

And it was used as an image, as in a picture for hell. It was a place where nobody wanted to be, in other words, no one wanted to go there. No one spent their time there. It was outside of the city. It was an unclean place.

And interestingly, Jesus, nobody in the Bible speaks more about the reality of hell than Jesus, a place that Jesus says you don't want to go.

[8 : 57] A place that is a reality that he speaks about so much, primarily because he comes from a spiritual dimension, but also because he was to face it on the cross.

Interestingly, he speaks about hell. And for us, you know, the hell, not just a place for Hitler or pedophiles in common thinking, but a reality for those who live their lives without recognizing the Lordship and the rightful place of God in their lives, that's why he came.

That's what the gospel is all about. So he makes a bold claim. And in so doing, he's also challenging our approval ratings. He's challenging what we look for and who we look for and how we look for approval in our lives, speaking to all of us, and primarily to us as Christians.

He's asking us if we're looking in our lives for God's approval, because Jesus says that matters more than anything as he speaks in this passage, because he speaks about judgment and he speaks about justice, and he knows that God is the only author of these things.

And he says that the standard of God's law, God's goodness, God's relational parameters are based on love and are not just based on external expressions of love, but our heart.

[10:31] And he moves from the outward to the inward, so he moves from do not murder and says attitude of anger. He moves from do not commit adultery to the attitude of lust. We're going to look at both of these in a little minute.

And what he's reminding us is that the eye of God looks beyond our outward behavior and looks into our heart and into our thought life. And so what he's reminding the disciples and reminding us as Christians is that being a Christian is recognizing that we, at core, we need to change our hearts from the inside, or we need our hearts changed, and that is the work of God.

It's not just outward conduct. It's not just how we are morally in relation to the world around us. It's our heart, and it's therefore a recognition that we can't do that.

It's impossible. We need a Savior in order to help us to do that. In order to be visible as believers, he wants us to look at the invisible, the heart.

It's all about the heart, not about the hype. It's about what we've been looking at in our discipleship series, the root and the fruit, it's what goes on under the surface where our roots are, that we're directed towards God who is the living water through Jesus Christ where we get our nourishment and our life.

[11:54] In other words, what is reminding the disciples and reminding us, if we think somehow that the Christian faith, our Christian faith is a self-service engagement that we don't need to be in relationship with God or depending on God through Christ or praying to God and asking for God's help, not relying on Jesus Christ for a life of worship, then can I use a mixed metaphor with regard to the tree, I mean that we're barking up the wrong tree.

You know, we're barking up the wrong tree if we think that we can live the Christian life without Jesus Christ as it were, without the recognition of who He is and of our dependence on Him to change our hearts daily.

I hope that is what we emphasize here all the time because He says that's the standard by which we'll be judged whether our hearts are clean and we can't clean our own hearts.

We need to be covered in the righteousness of Jesus and what He has done on our behalf. And that's the reality for everyone according to Jesus and according to His Word, that's the standard by which we will all meet with God on that day.

So what He's doing is interesting, isn't it? He's setting up an impossibility and He's setting up Himself as having authority to save what He's saying and He does so in order to lead us to Himself.

[13:21] That's what He's always doing. In verse 20, the verse before the verse that you and started with, which we looked at before, for I tell you, unless you're righteous and it exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

And what you say, that probably doesn't mean a great deal to us but it was a very radical statement at the time because the scribes and the Pharisees were morally excellent.

They excelled in outward behavior and in church life and in outward morality. And He's saying, look, the very best moral people, He says, if your righteousness doesn't exceed that, then there is absolutely no hope of entering into the kingdom of heaven.

And that's because He has come to offer a different righteousness, not based on our own merit, not based on our own efforts, not based on our own morality.

But He is inviting us to think that His Sermon is always inviting us to think about and be challenged by Him because in three short years of having delivered the Sermon, the skies were darkening for Jesus Christ and it was leading Him to the cross which was a cross of hell for Him.

[14:31] You know, we ever thought of the, you know, why the most innocent, the most perfect, the most glorious individual who ever lived righteously, lived right before God?

If ever anyone didn't deserve to die in a cross, it was Jesus and yet He did and He did it willingly and deliberately and in a planned way because He was taking the forsakeness that is due to us because of our rebellion against God and paying the price.

Because we can't be good enough for God on our own. He was good enough for God but He takes the price. That's the message of His rescue and redemption and He wants to expose our heart to drive us towards Him in His great love.

You know, we get a great picture of that in the Old Testament for Samuel 16, verse 17, hopefully, yet where it's about Samuel choosing the next king and he doesn't look on, God doesn't look on the out, he ends up choosing David who's the youngest almost in the least, developed at least physically and emotionally.

The Lord sees, not as man sees, the man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks in the heart. That's a great summary of this passage. But so that's what Jesus is doing, He's driving us to that point where we'll say, well actually we feel uncomfortable but in a good way because it drives us to the great comfort and peace that He gives us.

[16:14] So I think that's at least some of what He's doing. And these two sections talking about murder and adultery, He's beginning to unpack as He goes on as well the blueprint for the Christian and community.

So that's important for us all, isn't it, as Christians? We're in community and this is the kind of thing He looks at for us in the way we love. And so He's really dealing with, and we'll talk technically for a moment about the second table of the law, so that Ten Commandments is split into two, a responsibility to love God and a responsibility to love one another.

And so He's dealing with that second part of the law which is how we love one another as believers love your neighbour as yourself or the Eleventh Commandment is sometimes called that He gives in John 13 verse 34 which I think we have as well.

A new commandment, He says, the Eleventh Commandment, I give you that you love one another just as I loved you, you are also to love one another. So it's the outworking of being Christians in community.

And the first one is do not murder, that's handy, it's good to know, that we're not to murder each other in church, sometimes feel like it, maybe, but that's not what He wants for us.

[17:27] And maybe as you look at that commandment, you say, well, I'm okay on that one, never murdered anyone. Never been in front of the High Court for any kind of murder. And you think, fine, I've passed that particular law, I'm okay.

But Jesus internalizes it. Well, He does three things, and He does this for both of them. He internalizes it, He exposes our heart, and He empowers us to change.

So He internalizes it and reminds us, when He says, you've heard it said, you shall not murder whoever murders your libel to judgment, but I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother's libel to judgment, whoever insults his brother will be libel to the council, whoever says you fool will be libel to the hell of fire.

So it's strong stuff, He's internalizing it. And He's reminding us that it's not about just our outward behavior, the fact that we've never been in front of the High Court, but He's moving into our heart and into our motives.

And He's using a very deliberate word, where He uses the word angry there. And it's a word that kind of speaks of brooding anger deep in our kind of being, a brooding rage that is in us, almost a disposition.

[18:41] There were angry people inside. We may not have faced the courts of the land, but we are guilty before the court of heaven, which is very radical, isn't it?

It's a much higher standard. And He exposes, why does He expose it? Because He says it's ugly. The uncontrolled anger in our... However we present outwardly, in uncontrolled anger inwardly is ugly.

In verse 22, He talks about, in some of the translation, it uses the word raka, which is an Aramaic word that was used.

It was a contemptuous word, which was a real insult to use in His day. And He's speaking about... Remember what He's speaking about here?

He's speaking primarily about how we respond to one another as believers, although it has a wider implication, of course. If you're really contemptible in the way you speak about or think about another Christian, or if you call them a fool, now that again has a much stronger connotation than

maybe our understanding of that word.

[19 : 50] And so doing your... It's where the root word for moron comes from, moronic, where you would bring it to question the whole inward thinking of that fellow believer that they couldn't possibly be really a believer in thinking in the right way at all.

A very aggressively hateful attitude. And He's exposing that and said, that's the opposite of how we should be in church. Sorry, I'm not just in church.

In Christian community. He said, murder is its final outworking. But bitterness is bad for relationships within the Christian community.

So if you think, or if I think, it's okay as Christians just to look good on the outside in terms of how we think of others, but really to sometimes find that what we're like on the inside is exposed by how we talk about people, whether we talk about them cheaply or bitterly or judgmentally or contemptibly, then we're revealing a heart that's not right with God, that isn't dealing with God.

We just don't get it. We don't get our own need and the darkness and blackness of our own hearts that need to be cleansed. And it's no use just finding fault and pointing the finger at other people because there's always three fingers pointing back at ourselves.

[21 : 09] And that always should be our attitude as Christians. He internalizes it, He exposes it, and then He empowers us to be different. Now, did you notice a subtle change as we go through this?

He talks about being angry on the inside and the judgment that we will face because we're not recognizing our need for a heart change. Many says, so if you're going to offer a gift and the altar and remember that your brother is something against you, first be reconciled to your brother. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're going with him to court. And it's moving from the angry heart of the individual to the fact that we may be causing anger in a brother and they're angry with us for how we're acting and offends that we might have caused.

And He says therefore, if you're to be so sensitive and so aware of how you're acting that if you have caused offence or if you've triggered someone to be angry because of what you've done and said, you have to be wise and sensitive enough to go and make that right.

In other words, He said, you take the first step. We are to be first responders as Christians. In other words, what we're not to say is, huh, He started it.

[22 : 28] I'll just wait for Him or her. I'll just wait for them to put it right. They're the ones that, no, you're recognizing that there's probably something in me that has caused the division or the separation.

Maybe it's not that much. Maybe the offence on the other part is much greater, but you still take the first step. You seek, reconcile, why do we do that?

Because that's what Jesus did with us. He took the first step. He takes the first step. He's willing to be wronged. He moves forward. That's our experience of God's forgiveness.

We are de-escalators. That's what we are to be because Jesus is de-escalated by going to the cross for us. He's de-escalated our need before the living God.

So do not murder. Takes it internally. So that affects us all. But then He also says, do not commit adultery. Well, I may be a bit more awkward on that one.

[23 : 29] You might not have murdered, but well, well, you might be saying, well, I haven't done that either. Well, at least not with someone who's married. Yeah, okay, I'm not perfect.

Just natural right of sex. So I may have done that. But more than any other area and sense in the world in which we live today, this is a challenge to us as believers to recognize that God is Lord of our lives.

It requires a different ethical and moral understanding of sexuality than is prevalent in the world in which we live.

So I guess in many ways, and I'm going to be very general here about the prevailing opinion in society, about sex is generally purely a biological act.

It's natural, however you would define natural, and that God is anti-sex. And Christians are Victorian and hypocritical in their ideas.

[24 : 33] And maybe sometimes we are. But I think if we are, then that's because we don't understand sex and sexuality as God's gift, as God, as the Creator, and underestimate its significance and its power.

Because the Bible eulogizes sex as God's gift. There's a whole book about it in the Old Testament, the Song of Solomon. It's all about sexual love. And in the context of that book.

And it's God's gift. And when God made Adam and Eve together at the very beginning, He said, this is good when they were joined together. And but what we realize, and what we see, and what Jesus is getting to hear is that it's given as an expression of love within the context of covenant, within the context of commitment.

Not within the context legally of marriage, as we understand that now. But the primacy behind that is commitment and intimacy and promise and vows and covenant.

I can't think of a word to update to covenant, but it's not a word. We use that often, but it's such a uniquely good commitment word that reflects God's commitment and covenant to us in salvation.

[25 : 59] So much so that marriage, the husband and wife is related to love of Christ for His church. And so it's covenant as opposed to consumerist.

That may be the best way to describe it. We move from a consumerist idea of sex, which is what I can get from it and what is good for me and what can be used in a move on context to a covenant where it's seen in the context of intimacy, commitment, sacrifice and service, which is maybe very different.

So the ad is rather that, who can give me what I want when I want it? And is the current what I'm getting good enough or do I move on somewhere else?

I think a good and helpful quote is from a book that I use quite a lot when I'm going through marriage counseling or marriage preparation. A guy called Mike Mason said, to be naked with another person is a sort of, I think I've used it here before, sort of picture or symbolic demonstration of perfect honesty, perfect trust, perfect giving and commitment.

And if the heart is not naked along with the body, then the whole action becomes a lie and a mockery. It becomes an involvement and an absurd and tragic contradiction, the giving of the body, but the withholding of the self.

[27 : 17] It is in effect the very last step in human relations and therefore never one to be taken lightly. It's not a step which establishes deep intimacy, but one which presupposes it.

And that highlights some of what Jesus is saying here. It's a hugely spiritual reality reflected in the love of Christ for His church.

There's creational, relational, redemptive genesis of new community and family. And so it's very complex and very deep. So Jesus is doing the same thing here as He did with murder.

He's internalizing it, He's exposing it and He's empowering us. So He's internalizing it again and saying, you know, you've heard it said, you shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you that everyone who looks at women with lustful intent has already committed adultery within our heart. So He's talking about our thought life and our imagination and our heart and seeing how that can so often trigger destructive and divisive behavior.

[28 : 27] So it's not about acknowledging beauty. It's a much deeper malaise, He's speaking about you, because He exposes it with, again, with that word, lustful intent, a very strong word.

It's a word that's about deeply, deeply desiring something that you need to get at all costs. That's really what the word means.

It's used in the Old Testament quite often with regard to idolatry, you know, lusting after foreign gods. What it becomes therefore, what is preeminent in our lives, what takes first place.

It's all that matters. I need to have, I need to get this, I need to ditch this relationship and get into another one. That is what will bring me happiness. That is what will bring me contentment.

I've made a mistake in this and I'll go for that. And it's that focus on what will bring you ultimate peace and ultimate joy and ultimate contentment.

[29 : 31] It's often idealistic and it can be self-centered because it's getting what I want at all costs.

And in the context of adultery, and I think God, Jesus is broadening out here beyond a tight technical explanation of adultery.

But in adultery, He's decrying the attitude in the Christian faith, in the Christian church with those who believe that Christ is their Lord and God, saying that it's worth throwing away what God has given me and the vows that I've taken and the relations that I have in order to get what I need and what I want and what's important at this point.

You know, destroying what God has brought together. And Jesus is saying, that's destructive of love. It's not what will bring the satisfaction and the peace and the longing that we're looking for.

It's throwing away all that we have vowed and sought to do in order for something else. And it can leave so often, can't it, a sense of despair and failure and guilt and suffering and insecurity and division.

And it's that expectation. And a believer, it's an expectation of finding in another relationship the ultimate satisfaction that can only be found in our foundational relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and in using the gifts He's given us, the way He intends to use us.

[31 : 05] But I think it can be broadened to not just pure adultery at that level, but also to pornography example because pornography moves completely away from that ideal of sexuality as God gifts it to us.

It does the complete opposite of what God intends in community and in sacrificial giving to and for one another. It's detached, it's isolating, it's impersonal, it's consumerist, it's exploitative, it's objectifying, it's shallowing, it's desensitizing, it's creating unrealistic expectations and so we could go on.

And we recognize the huge reality and problem of pornography in the world in which we live today and how it's destroying relationships and destroying love and separating people rather than God's ideal which is that we love Him and love one another which we can't do.

Unless we're dependent on Him and come to Him for salvation. And so He empowers also in this particular area using very strong but you'll be glad to know symbolic and imagery language when He talks about, you're right, I cause you to sin, tear out and throw it away, better to lose one body than throw a body, be thrown into hell and you're right hand cause you sin, cut it off.

He's got literal, he's just using radical, powerful imagery to its extreme to remind us that sexual desire with us is a very, very strong power and it takes within us the drastic power of God's Holy Spirit and our commitment to live within His parameters and enjoy His gift at the right time in the right way in the way He intended.

[33 : 05] God's blueprint is a challenge, huge challenge and we need, it's hard to disentangle it from abuse and from selfishness and the Christian life does involve for all of us some in different ways, singleness, married, in different ways it's a life where we need the grace of discipline, the recognition of cost and self denial and forgiveness.

It's not this kind of amazing standard that we need to do to please God, it's recognizing that we will fail and fall and stumble but by His grace and by Himself putting everything in place that enables us to walk His way because it's a way of blessing and that's a huge challenge for us.

You'll hear a completely different message, 99% of the week to which you've entered and even from within our own heart which says, no, I want to do things my way.

Well I hope and I pray that Christ has got your attention this morning, certainly got mine and reminded me of the impossibility, I'm impossibly lost without His work of reconciliation in my heart and that I need every day Jesus Christ as my Savior otherwise if you don't you're on the road to destruction.

All the signs are there, all the division, all the hatred, all the separation, all the bitterness, all the abuse, it's all there. So there are no hearts in this society in which you live and the challenge is to turn to Jesus afresh and find His, the battle of grace working out victory in our lives.

[34 : 50] Let's pray. Father God we ask and pray that you would help us to live for you and live with you and live in you. As our Creator you have given us all good things to enjoy, the reminders of that, celebrate that, love that, the reminders we are in a broken world and our hearts are broken and need to be made whole and need to be transformed and rebuilt by your grace and love so that we live that sacrificial life of love loving you and loving one another, a life of committed service and servitude to each other because we've seen Jesus serving and being, having an attitude of servitude towards us.

So help us we pray, bless us today, bless us, really bless tonight as well, our praise, Sam praise and it would be an opportunity for many people to invite friends in and here a simple message from the living Word as well as sing from the Word and hear it in different ways and may we be just alert to that reality of God this evening as well.

For Jesus' sake, amen.