

**Sunday, August 23, 2009**

**Matthew 5.17-26  
If Looks Could Kill!  
SWCOB 8.23.09**

A little boy sat sadly on the curb,  
Beside his lawnmower,

When a minister came along riding his bicycle.

The minister noticed that the boy appeared discouraged,  
And wanted to try and help.

“Hello there!” said the minister.  
“How would you like to trade,  
Your lawn mower for my bicycle?”

“Sure, mister!” the little boy responded.  
And he went on his way riding the minister’s bike.

A few days later, the boy met the minister,  
As the minister sat on the curb,  
Next to the lawn mower.

The minister told the boy,  
“I think our little trade last week was unfair.

I keep cranking that old lawn mower,  
But it just won’t start.”

“You gotta’ cuss it,” said the little boy.

“Well, I can’t do that,  
I’m a minister,  
And ministers don’t cuss,” he said.

“And beside that,  
I forgot about cussin’ a long time ago.”

The little boy answered,  
“You just keep crankin’ on that old lawn mower,  
all that cussin’ you forgot a long time ago,  
it’ll come back to you.”

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Anger is an emotion we have all experienced.

From childhood temper tantrums,  
To the resentment and bitterness

Sometimes found in old people.

We've all gotten mad at one time or another!

Though Jesus knows that we all get mad occasionally,  
His concern in today's text is about the kind of anger,  
That has the capability of transforming into,  
Destructive thoughts and destructive actions.

Max Lucado writes,

“Resentment is when you let your hurt become hate.

Resentment is when you allow what is eating you to eat you up.

Resentment is when you poke, stoke, feed,  
And fan the flame,  
Stirring the flames and reliving the pain.

Resentment is the deliberate decision to nurse the offense  
Until it becomes a black, furry, growling grudge.”

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The Sermon on the Mount,  
Contains six contrasting statements,  
Juxtapositions, if you will.

Jesus used these contrasting statements  
To compare certain Old Testament laws,  
With a new spiritual understanding.

**You have heard that it was said,**  
Jesus said, followed by,  
**But I say to you.**

Jesus didn't change Old Testament laws,  
But rather deepened and broadened their meanings.

Today we will look at the first set of contrasting statements.

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Verse 21;  
**You have heard that it was said,**  
**To the people of long ago, ‘Do not murder.’**

**But I tell you that anyone who is angry**  
**With his brother will be subject to judgment.**

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The Pharisees were quite good at following the law.

If Scripture said, “Do not!”  
They didn’t.

If Scripture said “Do!”  
They did.

However the fault that Jesus had with them,  
Was that, though, they followed the legality of the law.  
They didn’t follow the spirit of the law.

The Pharisees knew,  
According to the Ten Commandments,  
They were not to kill.

The commandment didn’t state that they couldn’t hate someone.

Their interpretation was that the Divine Law,  
Prohibited only the sinful act,  
But not the sinful thought.

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Jesus responded to this way of thinking by saying,

**But I say to you!**

And essentially states that;

Rash anger without cause,  
Is the same as murder.

Anger is murderous thoughts that come from the heart.

One who calls another a fool,  
Has committed verbal murder.

Matthew Henry has this to say about this kind of anger;

“It is this anger and malice,  
That is the smoke from that fire,  
Which is kindled in hell.”

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You’ve heard the expression,  
“If looks could kill?”

Well, according to Jesus,  
They might as well.

For you will be held accountable,  
For every vicious thought,  
And for every hateful comment.

Let's use Jesus' own words,  
**Anyone who says, 'you fool!'**  
**Will be in danger of the fire of hell.**

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I knew this person,  
Who didn't mind using all kinds of bad words.

She could make a truck driver blush.

However she told me one time,  
When I used the word "fool" in a sermon,  
That I was way out of line.

She would never use that word,  
Because Jesus forbade it.

She didn't mind using other words that were equally vicious,  
And were meant to hurt and wound.

But not the word "fool."

This is the kind of thinking that Jesus  
Found fault with the Pharisees:

Following the law to a T,  
But missing the spirit of the law.

They were nitpickers.

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Now why is anger and hostile thoughts so bad?  
Aren't we told that it is helpful to vent a little anger?

Why is Jesus so strict about this sort of thing?

To me it boils down to one thing . . .

Relationships:

Our relationship with God,  
Our relationship to one another.

Anger causes division.  
By its very nature it divides and conquers.

Anger severs us from God,  
And divides us from one another.

When there is anger,

The Holy Spirit flees like a dove.

When anger is nurtured,  
When anger is harbored  
When anger is allowed to manifest,

It quickly squeezes out anything which is of God.

That is specifically why Jesus states,  
That if there is a problem  
Between you and another.

There's no point worshiping!  
There's no point offering your gift at the altar!  
There's no point in pretending all is well!

There's no point in it!  
Worship becomes an empty and hollow ritual.

Resentment, bitterness, and hatred,  
Builds a wall that God's Spirit will not climb,

And opens the door,  
To welcome the Evil One in.

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So what do we do when we are angry,  
Or when bitterness and resentment rises,  
In our thoughts and minds?

Jesus says,  
**Go and be reconciled to that person,  
Settle matters quickly.**  
We need to do everything we can,  
As quickly as we can,  
As carefully as we can,  
As decently and respectfully as we can.

~~

A friend's father,  
Grew up with five brothers.

They grew up in a tight knit family.

They all fought in World War 2 together.

And afterwards, several of them started businesses together.

But over the course of years,  
One thing led to another,  
And what started out as a close family

Became so divided,  
That later in life,  
The brothers wouldn't speak to one another,  
Or even go to the other's funerals.

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Life is too short for this kind of behavior.

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There's another story about two brothers,  
Who ran a store together.

One day the books didn't balance.  
They were short exactly thirty dollars.

The one accused the other of taking the money,  
And the fight began.

The dissolved their partnership,  
Divided their store in half,  
Built a wall between them,  
And actually made two stores,  
Where once there was one.

They wouldn't talk to each other,  
They wouldn't go to one another's houses,

They wouldn't share Christmas, Easter,  
Or any of the holidays.

The one brother who was accused of the theft died.

Years later, a man came in to the remaining brother's store.

He gave the man thirty dollars,  
And explained,

That years ago he had stolen the money,  
When no one was looking,  
And had recently felt so guilty,

That he returned the money and wanted to ask for forgiveness.

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We all know stories about how,  
Anger and hostility divides and conquers,  
Families, businesses, and churches.

We all know people that go through life,  
Feeling bitter and resentful,  
Because of something that took place in their life.

Tell me this:

Are they happy people?  
Are they spiritual people?  
Are they people who seem at peace?

Do they accomplish anything good with their hostility?

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There is a story from the Chicago Herald Examiner,  
Written in 1930,

The article entitled,  
“Man spites his wife by staying blindfolded in bed seven years.”  
Reads,

“The strange story of Harry Havens of Indiana,  
Who went to bed—  
And stayed there—  
For seven years with a blindfold over his eyes,  
Because he was peeved at his wife,  
Was revealed here today when he decided to get out of bed.

Havens was the kind of husband who liked to help  
Around the house—  
Hang pictures, wipe the dishes, and such.

His wife scolded him for the way  
He was performing one of these tasks,  
And he resented it.

He is reported to have said:  
‘All right, if that’s the way you feel,  
I’m going to bed.

I’m going to stay there the rest of my life.  
And I don’t want to see you or anyone else again.’

His last remark explains the blindfold.

He got up, he explained,  
When the bed started to feel uncomfortable  
After seven years.”

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Anger causes division.

Anger is tool the Devil uses,  
To divide and conquer.

The Holy Spirit finds it difficult to work with those

Who carry resentment and bitterness in their hearts.

We must seek the spirit of reconciliation,  
For true revival to take place.

It takes humility, courage,  
A willingness to sit down at the same table,  
With those we have difficulty with,

It takes forgiveness,  
And it takes a willingness to swallow one's pride.

But what better opportunity is there than today,  
To seek for true revival in our church,

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In *Preaching Today*,  
Author and speaker Tony Campolo tells this story:

I was in a church in Oregon not too long ago,  
And I prayed for a man who had cancer.

In the middle of the week, I got a telephone call from his wife.

She said, "You prayed for my husband. He had cancer."

I said, "Had?" *Whoa*, I thought, *it's happened*.

She said, "He died."  
I felt terrible.

She continued, "Don't feel bad.

When he came into that church that Sunday  
He was filled with anger.

He knew he was going to be dead in a short period of time,  
And he hated God.

He was 58 years old,  
And he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up.

He was angry that this all-powerful God  
Didn't take away his sickness and heal him.

He would lie in bed and curse God.

The more his anger grew towards God,  
The more miserable he was to everybody around him.

It was an awful thing to be in his presence.

After you prayed for him,  
A peace had come over him and a joy had come into him.

Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives.

We've sung.  
We've laughed.  
We've read Scripture.  
We prayed.

Oh, they've been wonderful days.

And I called to thank you for laying your hands on him  
And praying for healing.

And then she said something incredibly profound.

She said, "He wasn't cured, but he was healed."

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Let us strive to do all we can to transform the anger,  
The resentment, and the bitterness,  
That lies deep within us.

Allow the Holy Spirit to do its work in us.  
Allow Jesus to carry the burdens of your pain and suffering

We can leave here today,  
And pay no further attention to this sermon,  
Or we can begin to reconcile with that neighbor,  
With that relative,  
With that once dear friend,

It's good for your health and the health of your family and church.  
It's up to you.