

Matthew 5:21-37 We will not read it at this time.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I remember learning long ago in public speaking class about the psychology behind every single commercial on tv. If you want people to buy your product, they have to see and understand their need for it. They have to see someone suffering without it, and how great life is with it.

And so we come to Jesus' sermon on the mount. And like in a lot of commercials, we find ourselves in the "show them their need for it," section. Jesus' primary point is not to show us how we should be living, but rather, how we are unable to live up to how God wants us to live. No one can walk away from this section of Scripture thinking they've done it all and all that is left is for God to welcome them home to heaven. It's not unlike Jesus' answer to the man who came to him wondering what he had to do to get to heaven. Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." And the man in his mind thought he had — "All these I have kept since I was a child." And Jesus replied, "One thing you lack. Sell all your things and give to the poor." And the man went away sad because he was very wealthy. In the same way that Jesus, in a very personal way, showed that man that he had not done everything God commanded, so too here, with his Sermon on the Mount, he showed his disciples, and everyone else, us included, that we have at no time, lived up to what God expects from us — namely perfection in not just the letter of the law, but the spirit too. Why? So that they, and we, would see our constant need to **Cling to Jesus, as we look to our past, as we look to our future.**

Jesus gathered his disciples around him in order to teach them the truth about God's law, to show them how not just actions, but thoughts, not just words, but attitudes, are judged by our God. He said, **"You have heard that it was said to people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment.'** <sup>22</sup>**But I tell you that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be subject to judgment... will be in danger of hell fire."**

**"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,'** <sup>28</sup>**but I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

**"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'** <sup>32</sup>**But I tell you that whoever divorces his wife**

[frivolously or for unscriptural reasons, sins against her] **causes her to be regarded as an adulteress. And then, whoever marries the divorced woman is regarded as an adulterer too."**

**Again you have heard that it was said to people long ago, 'Do not break your oaths, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.'** <sup>34</sup>**But I tell you, do not swear at all: not by heaven, because it is God's throne; <sup>35</sup>and not by earth, because it is his footstool; and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King.** In other words, be so pure, be so holy that you don't need to swear by anything. Just let your yes be yes and your no, no.

If we are honest, we must confess that these words of Jesus do not paint us in a very nice light. They don't take us to a very comfortable place. We live in a sinful world, and we are sinful people. As Jesus goes through the law here, ticking off one by one, what it says and what it means, you can imagine the heads around him, one by one, lowering with chin on chest until no one was left looking at Jesus, everyone too ashamed to look at anyone else, every man and woman on their own island with no escape. And as we look back on our past, our relationships with those around us, with our spouses, with our God, while by the letter we may be able to say, "I'm doing pretty well," by the spirit, by what God's law *really* says and what God *really* demands, our heads too, should be hung in shame.

For here Jesus wields God's law in a way that had been lost on God's people. Jesus cut them to their hearts, where our sinfulness resides and starts its mad rebellion against our God. Where it regroups and redoubles its efforts, not to drag us kicking and screaming, but with head held high, confident in our own righteousness, into the fires of hell.

Jesus made it clear to all those standing around him, to all of us here today: **There is no one who is righteous, not even one!** What's the reality of Jesus' words? Where do they leave us? As we look to the past and see all the ways we have broken and shattered God's law, what can we do? What can we do but cling to Jesus? There was a stark contrast before those people then, and still before us today, between the words spoken and the one speaking them. Such law in his speaking and yet such Gospel in his presence.

This is why Jesus had come. And while he didn't really speak much gospel in his Sermon on the Mount, he didn't need to. The gospel was standing right in front of them all, if they could only see past their own

supposed good works and behavior. And his sermon didn't end when he stopped speaking. It had just begun. Listen to an outline of Matthew following Jesus' sermon:

Jesus heals a man with leprosy.

Jesus heals many.

Jesus calms the storm.

Jesus heals two demon possessed men.

Jesus heals a paralytic.

Jesus heals a woman and raises a girl from the dead.

Jesus healed 2 blind men and a demon-possessed man who could not talk.

Feeding the 5000, walking on water, feeding the 4000, the transfiguration, Holy week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

Jesus is the answer to all the guilt and shame that comes from our sin — sin that originates in our hearts and that materializes for all to see in our words and actions. Nowhere do we see our Savior so clearly, nowhere is the call to cling to him so urgent and obvious, than when the law shows us the depravity of our hearts and the depth of our sin, as Jesus does here.

And yet there our Savior stands brightest as his mere presence proclaims his perfect life in place of each of our sinful ones, his suffering and death in place of the punishment we deserve, his rising from the grave making death for us the doorway to life.

What a sight that must have been, Jesus' disciples gathered around him, a crowd of people gathered around the disciples, all listening intently, all cut to the heart by the Law over their sins, many no doubt bowing their heads in shame and despair. But there was the answer, the comfort, the peace, the confidence, the Gospel standing right in the middle of them all. The one who would take all their sins away, all our sins away, when he went to the cross, shed his blood, and bowed *his head* in death.

As you look to the past, cling to Jesus! His life, his death, his resurrection guarantees that you are forgiven, you stand right with God, right now, today.

What about tomorrow? The devil would have us think that we can take it from here. We know the gospel, we're good. But then, "I'll stay in the Word," becomes, "I know the word, I don't need to be in it so much." "I can stay away from sin" becomes "I can handle the sin in I've let in my life." Soon we're not clinging to Jesus as we should. Soon the devil has

an inroad once again, through the sins I don't see as being so bad or so dangerous.

Jesus' message as we look to the future is shocking, but needed, and true. It reminds us just how serious sin is and how much we need him.

**<sup>29</sup>If your right eye causes you to fall into sin, pluck it out and throw it away from you. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>If your right hand causes you to fall into sin, cut it off and throw it away from you. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.**

As sinners, what other option do we have, on our own, when it comes to the sins we are tempted with or fall into? They are so serious — each one the devil's attempted at your soul — that it *would* be better to go to heaven maimed than to go whole into hell. But who could really do that, and what would be left? There would be no end to the gouging out and cutting off — that's how sinful we are. But that's how serious we are to take sin. To flee from it, to do whatever it takes to put an end to it when it makes itself at home in our hearts.

To flee where? Not to the knife drawer, but in repentance for forgiveness to our Savior. Once again, as in the past, so in the future, he stands before us as the only option. Cling to him. Cling to his cross that has freed you, not *to* sin, but *from* sin. Cling to his perfect life that makes you righteous in God's sight today, tomorrow, and forever -- and strive to live up to it because that's how God sees you in Christ.

How do we do that? How do we cling to our Savior, Jesus? Through the Word — revisit his words and promises. Revisit what he has done for you, so that you will be in heaven, not maimed or blind, but whole, better than whole, as God intended you to be at the creation of the world.

Through the Sacraments. Remember daily the water of your baptism that washed your sins away, making you God's child. Receive the Lord's Supper as the wonderfully personal reminder where Jesus comes to you specifically and give you his body, gives you his blood, for the forgiveness of your sins.

Take the Word, take your baptism, ponder the Lord's Supper, to be spiritually grounded in good times, easy times, when faith just sails on,

but also to be spiritually strengthened and supported in bad times, when doubts come, when faith is challenged, when trust is difficult.

Cling to Jesus. That's why he came. That's why he preached the Sermon on the Mount, so that we would cling to nothing else ever again, but only him.

Through these words we've seen what we lack, what we need, and what we have been so graciously given. Forgiveness of sins, life, salvation.

Cling to Jesus as you look to the past, and as you look to the future, today, tomorrow, and forever. In Jesus' name, Amen!