

Covenant Breakers (01/23/2016)

Text: Matthew 5:27-37

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹ “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ ³⁴ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one (*or from evil*).

1 Introduction

- We are continuing our series of Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew
 - We are going through what is called the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5 through 7.
 - We are looking at what Jesus **teaches**
 - In looking at what Jesus taught, we are learning about who Jesus really is
 - An in what He teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, we are hearing from Jesus himself what the life of a Christian is like
- Two weeks ago Pastor Jonathan preached on the Beatitudes in vs. Chapter 5 vs 1-20.
 - He called his message ‘Grace Mountain’, and we heard how followers of Jesus are:
 1. surprised by grace;
 2. seasoned with grace;
 3. shine out grace; and

- 4. successful because of grace.
 - The message was that grace changes who we are, to the very core, because of just how much Jesus Christ has done for us.
- Last week we heard Pastor Dana preach on Chapter 5 vs 21-26
 - He called his message ‘Tongue Murders’, and we heard how the Law that Jesus is reinforcing in this Sermon on the Mount is diagnosing not just our actions, but our hearts
 - In that passage, we specifically looked at anger and insults
 - The bad news is, when interpreted through the eyes of the Lawgiver – Jesus Himself – the Law of God reveals that we are all murderers in thought, word, even deed.
 - And murderers like us are guilty, and need a solution to our sin.
 - The good news is in Christ, we have freedom from our murderous thoughts, word and deeds
- This week we are continuing the bad news and the good news
 - Jesus turns his attention to some of our most intimate human relationships, how we act in our absolutely closest relationships with one another
 - And in these areas, he contrasts the old way of thinking about God’s commands, which focused on externals, with the way He wants his followers to look at these areas, which is internal and totally transforming
- I want to warn you that tonight’s passages in Matthew chapter 5:27-37 are difficult and unpopular
 - Many of us in this room are not going to like them.
 - They might make us uncomfortable.
 - They make ME uncomfortable.
- But if we are going to be faithful to scripture, to all of scripture, then we have to press forward no matter how uncomfortable we get
 - One of our core values at Cornerstone the Bible:
 - We study, preach, apply, and share God’s Word.
 - Faithfulness to the Bible means that we don’t treat God’s Word like a philosopher treats an ordinary book.
 - That is, we don’t just pick and choose what is true and what is not.
 - And, we don’t try and develop elaborate explanations and distort the meaning so Jesus’ words don’t make us feel so uncomfortable
 - Distorting and making excuses for Jesus’s words is not true to the scripture
 - And it is not how we meet the real Jesus
- So, brace yourselves.
 - You might have some criticisms and exceptions to what Jesus says.
 - I know at times I do.
 - But if you want to know Him, to really know Him, you need to let His words criticize you.

2 Body

- The Gospel of Mathew doesn't stop after Jesus's birth in Chapter 1, leaving us with just a "Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild" as the Charles Wesley poem put it
 - It doesn't stop after the visit by the wise men in Chapter 2
 - It doesn't stop after Jesus' baptism by John in Chapter 3
 - It doesn't stop after Jesus' temptation in the desert in Chapter 4, or his initial ministry of healing in Galilee
- If it did, we really wouldn't know much about what Jesus taught
- Here in Chapter 5, Mathew reveals to us what Jesus taught in his ministry
- And the first point in today's passages is that:

2.1 Jesus Directly Confronts Our Relational Sins

- Jesus is essentially walking through the Old Testament 10 commandments in the Sermon on the Mount
 - Those were God's law as delivered through Moses to the people of Israel
- In tonight's passages, Jesus addresses three areas that are related to this commandment
 - I'm going to walk through this breadth-first looking at each one, before diving in to what Jesus has to say about each.
- Let's look at the first of these: Adultery
 - 5:27
 - ²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'
 - Reference
 - Jesus is quoting directly from the 10 commandments
 - Exodus 20:14: "You shall not commit adultery."
 - Define adultery
 - I'm told by my Bible dictionary that the Hebrew word for adultery literally means: "To break the bond of wedlock"
 - Now we don't use words like "wedlock" to mean marriage now days, but the concept remains
 - The idea is that there is a marriage, a union between a man and a woman
 - That marriage is exclusive to them
 - There is a commitment and a promise of complete faithfulness to each other
 - That commitment includes sexual faithfulness
 - Adultery is the breaking of marriage faithfulness
 - It happens when one married partner has intimate relations with someone other than their spouse, outside the marriage
 - Explanation

- Jesus, a Jew, is quoting a Old Testament law that all his Jewish hearers know by heart
 - “You shall not commit adultery”
 - Now we call breaking this Old Testament commandment a relational sin because at the heart of it is the breaking of a promise of relationship between two people
 - Now it is interesting to note that the Old Testament prophets frequently used the picture of adultery to describe the Jewish people’s breaking their relationship with Yahweh, and seeking after other gods
 - Following other gods is described using the same language as is used to describe married man having adulterous sexual relations with a woman who is not his wife
 - This imagery is why we refer to marriage as a covenant, a solemn promise
 - In the same way that a man and wife in marriage make a solemn promise to be faithful to each other, God’s people make a solemn promise to be faithful to God
 - And when that promise, that covenant is broken in adultery, going outside the marriage, it is a painful sin of dishonesty and unfaithfulness
- Let’s look at the second relationship area: Divorce and/or Unfaithfulness
 - 5:31
 - ³¹ “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’
 - Reference
 - Here Jesus is quoting from the book of Deuteronomy which is the 5th book of the Old Testament
 - The book of Deuteronomy details specific ways in which the nation of Israel was to worship, govern, and act
 - It established the criminal and civil laws of the nation as they were entering the promised land
 - Define divorce
 - Now divorce here means pretty much what it means to us today.
 - It is the formal, civil, or legal act of dissolving a marriage
 - It legally releases the formerly married people from their marriage commitment
 - The particular passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 that Jesus is quoting about giving a certificate of divorce is interesting, because in context, it is not really about allowing divorce
 - It starts with “if a man gives a woman a certificate of divorce...”, and then explains some restrictions

- If on your own you go look at it in detail, you'll see that it is an explanation that if a formal, documented, legal divorce happens, and remarriage happens afterward, the remarried person can't come back to their original spouse
 - It seems to be saying that a certificate of divorce has limits in erasing the marriage and wipe the slate clean
 - There are still traces of the marriage promise lingering that cause the people in a dissolved marriage to be marked in some way that prevent them from reuniting
 - Explanation
 - Just like adultery in the previous passage, Jesus is quoting a well known old testament law and practice
 - A divorce, which is a formal breaking of a promise, has to be legally documented
 - The Old Testament says that God hates divorce in the book of Micah
 - The church has always treated divorce as a serious relational sin
 - At its heart it is breaking the promise between two people, in this case formally and legally breaking it.
 - It is interesting that the prophet Jeremiah uses the image of divorce papers in Jeremiah chapter 3 to describe how ancient Israel was so unfaithful to God, it was like God had to reluctantly give Israel divorce papers and send her away
 - And yet, despite Israel's unfaithfulness, the Lord asked her to return
 - It is a powerful message of the faithfulness of God despite the unfaithfulness of His people
 - This image is powerful, because people who have experienced, or been touched by, or witnessed the consequences of broken marriages can easily visualize the seriousness of breaking relationship with God
- Now let's look at the third sin: Breaking oaths and telling falsehoods-
 - 5:33
 - ³³“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’
 - Reference
 - Here Jesus is also quoting from the Book of Deuteronomy, this time chapter 23:21-23. Here is what it says.
 - ²¹If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. ²²But if you refrain from

making a vow, you will not be guilty. ²³ Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth.

- This passage is directly related to another of Old Testament 10 commandments from Exodus 20:16
 - “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”
 - This is another type of oath-breaking, which is falsely testifying
- Define oath
 - Now these oaths are promises made to God
 - Sometimes they are in the form, “As God is my witness, I say such and such is true”
 - I.e., you can really believe me.
 - Other times, these oaths or vows are of the form “if you God do something, then I promise to do something in return”
 - I.e., it is a promise which tries to earn God’s favor
- Explanation
 - It is fairly obvious that making oaths with no intention to keep them, or as a means to be showy and/or untruthful is a relational sin between us and someone else, either God or another person
 - Breaking promises destroys truthful communication between two parties
- Recap:
 - So to sum up, in these passages, Jesus is focusing on three types of relational sins
 - Adultery
 - Divorce
 - Oath-breaking
 - All of these are things that are familiar from the law of Moses
 - But what does Jesus say about these problem areas in our lives?
 - Well...

2.2 Jesus Intensifies The Standard of Our Relational Sins

- There are lots of people who have taught and preached on these passages and have gone into to great detail to soften what these words of Jesus say and mean.
 - They come up with complicated explanations, excuses, or escape clauses
- That approach totally misses the point of what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount
- The passages here are not about how to precisely delineate the boundary lines of what is allowed vs. what is not
 - If they were, that would be in the spirit and tradition of the scribes and Pharisees with all their additional laws and regulations
 - Jesus did not come to establish a new precise law

- His commandments were at a higher level, about love of God and love of neighbor
- Let's look at the three examples here to see how excuses and escape clauses are not good enough
- First: Lust and Adultery:
 - 5:28
 - **28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."**
 - Jesus says that his followers should be marked not just avoiding adultery
 - Not just following the letter of the law
 - Rather, Jesus followers should treat their inner lust just as bad as adultery
 - Wait a minute: a popular explanation and excuse on the topic of lust, even in the Church is:
 - "It isn't the first or second glance that is sin. It is the third one."
 - How many times have you heard something like this?
 - Maybe in a sermon, or a Sunday School class, or a Youth Group, or a Men's Conference
 - There is nothing in the Bible that tells us guys how many glances is too much!
 - It is time for us men to come clean on this. Let's be honest. There are circumstances where a single glance, hardly longer than a blink of an eye, produces sinful lust in our hearts.
 - This is not popular. But it is true.
 - Jesus says that what matters is the internal heart issue of lust
 - If we have been caught up in a lustful glance, even if it just one first glance, Jesus says we are adulterers.
 - Jesus has taken the "Thou shalt not commit adultery" commandment and intensified it to a whole new level.
 - Scarlet Letter, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hester Prynne standing on the scaffold for three hours with the letter "A"
 - **ADULTERER**
- Second: Divorce:
 - 5:32
 - **32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**
 - There has been so much written on the topic of whether divorce is permissible among Christians, and under what circumstances, that it is impossible to cover it in 30 hours, let alone a 30 minute sermon
 - There are many explanations out there of how to interpret this passage if the divorce was between people who weren't Christians at the time of the divorce

- Or whether there was infidelity by one or both partners
 - Or the importance of protecting people domestic violence or sexual abuse, and to make sure not to use passages like these to suppress victims from escaping danger and seeking help
 - But let's look at what Jesus actually says
 - First he says that divorce results in adultery, which we've already established is a sin
 - And the one "escape clause" (if you want to try and call it that) is that he mentions is if there is sexual immorality
 - Look at what Jesus has done:
 - If someone divorces the end result (according to Jesus) will be adultery
 - If someone divorces because sexual immorality, the adultery already happened.
 - EITHER WAY: there is a committing of adultery and a victim of adultery
 - A piece of paper legitimizing a divorce, whether the immorality or adultery happens before or after, does not erase the reality of a broken marriage promise, or as we called it, a marriage covenant
 - A promise was broken
 - A relationship was severed
 - What God has joined, man has been torn apart
 - I said before this isn't popular
 - By the grace of God, I can say that for 33 years, divorce hasn't touched my marriage
 - But I myself am the child of divorce
 - My earliest memories are images or scenes from my parents marriage breaking up
 - I remember in grammar school being the only child in my class with divorced parents, and the shame that brought
 - My parents' divorce still impacts me today
 - I'm still touched by my parents broken marriage
 - A week doesn't go back when I don't think about it in some way
 - And I still have a frustrating, painful, broken relationship with my earthly father who does doesn't really know me, and doesn't know my children
 - Behold one example of the legacy of divorce
 - A 51-year old with "daddy-issues".
 - **COVENANT-BREAKER**
- Let's look at the third example: Truth telling:
 - What does Jesus say?
 - 5:34-37

- Real commitment to covenant promises, not quick legal fixes to troubled marriages
 - Real truth in all areas of our lives, not just when we make special showy promises.
- If you are like me, you find that you fall short in all these areas
- And as we continue in the weeks ahead on the rest of the Sermon of the Mount, whether it is retaliation, loving enemies, giving to the needy, praying, fasting, greed, worry, judging others
 - Not one of us is going to be spared
 - Jesus' sermon on the mount convicts us all
 - We are all guilty
- Are you uncomfortable yet?
- The question we have to ask ourselves is does Jesus really mean this?
 - Is the Sermon on the Mount is just describing some ideal future state?
 - Is it just a list of unattainable good ideas?
 - How can Jesus possibly expect this level of goodness from us?
- We are only human, how can we possibly live up to this ideal?
- Well, if we look deeper, we see that...

2.3 Jesus Expects Real Change In Our Lives

- Jesus indeed expects us to fight sin with our entire being
 - 5:29-30
 - ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.
 - ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.
 - You can debate whether or not this is a literal command to mutilate your own body in order to keep yourself from sin
 - But without even answering that question, it is clear that Jesus expects us to fight sin
 - He is expecting us to wage war on sin, and the price of that war is high
 - Body parts
 - Blood
- But maybe that is just for the sins of adultery and lust?
- Well, there are at least three examples from Matthew that make it clear that Jesus is calling his disciples to a total, radical holiness in all areas of their lives
 - Example #1: Jesus expects us to have greater righteousness than that of the Scribes and Pharisees:
 - 5:20

- 2 Corinthians 5:21
 - ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- Jesus death on the cross cancels the debt of our sin
 - Colossian 2:13-14
 - ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us;
 - (more than that...)
 - he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.
- We can receive this righteousness by faith
 - Romans 3:22
 - This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

3.3 But what about the holy behavior that Christ commands?

- In this week's Cornerstone Connect, Pastor Jonathan recommended we listen to Timothy Keller's sermon on the Sermon on the Mount called the Inside-Out Gospel
 - I really recommend you do this.
 - Take the 39 minutes out of your day tomorrow, and listen to this sermon.
 - Don't give up on it. Stay with it, and pay close attention to the last 5 minutes.
 - The good news of the gospel, what makes Christians different from religious people, is that Christ works inside our hearts and lives first, and then flows out to our behaviors, as grace allows, afterwards
- The point is, after we accept and are changed by the Gospel, our approach to God's law is totally different
 - This is what makes Christianity completely different from all other religions and philosophies
 - In the old days, we had hearts of stone that couldn't love God and couldn't love our neighbor, no matter how hard we tried
 - Our motivation to try and keep God's law was fear
 - We worked at in external ways, in religious ways
 - And no matter how hard we tried, we could not measure up
- But under faith, God says:
 - Ezekiel 36:26-27
 - I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

- Our new motivation is responding to God in love
 - It is becoming, as God enables, in reality, the righteous people God has declared us to be
- The gospel changes the bad news of Jesus' unattainable standard of perfection in the Sermon of the Mount into the good news of the type of Christians God is transforming us into
- These aren't unattainable goals that you have to strive toward in fear to try and achieve
- These are the perfect laws of God that He transforming you into being able to keep
 - And not just able to keep, but love to keep
 - When God looks at you, he sees Jesus, who is the only person who has lived the Sermon on the Mount perfectly
 - He finished it. Completely.
 - And then, as you He has given you a new heart
 - You are not going to forever be that person stained with the shame of Adultery, or Lust, or Divorce, or Oath breaking
 - Rejoice, God is making you into someone who knows him, who loves him, who is transformed by the work of Jesus, someone who loves God's law so that you have victory over lust, victory over broken relationships, victory over a pattern of lies
- Jesus transforms his disciples from Covenant-Breakers into Covenant-Keepers.
- and
- The Life of the Christ is becoming the type of people God already declares us to be.

4 Doxology

- Jude 24-25
 - To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.