

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes for July 12, 2006

Matthew 5:21-26

19: *Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

20: *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

21: *"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.'*

22: *But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire.*

23: *So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,*

24: *leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

25: *Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison;*

26: *truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.*

Discussion Notes:

Intro:

- Ever notice that once you attempt to clean up your act, you begin discovering far more problems than you anticipated? All of a sudden you've opened a hornets' nest of hidden faults and failures; makes you want to throw up your hands in defeat.
- Context:
 - Jesus has called his first disciples;
 - Jesus' entire ministry was about calling disciples;
 - Jesus' last words (in Matthew): "Go and make disciples;"
 - On the mount, speaking to disciples, beckoning others to come & join.
 - Basic purpose of Sermon / Beatitudes: Call to Discipleship = holiness.
- Now beginning section of "illustrations" / Examples of what he means by fulfilling the law:
 - His Beatitudes didn't abolish law, but call for deeper understanding / obedience.
 - SIX examples: "You've heard it said ... but I say..."
 - The way they have been taught versus
 - The way they now need to live, imitating Jesus.

- Many consider these as SIX separate teachings brought together;
- But following Matthew's intent (7:28-29), assume as presented as the unified flow of a sermon.
 - Any preacher can see this natural flow...
 - Premise
 - Followed by some clarifications
 - Followed by some examples (with poetic repetition)
 - Followed by more clarifications, applications, illustrations, & exhortations.
- Commentators / teachers have a natural tendency to expound on the topics of each section separately: anger, lust, divorce, swearing oaths, retribution, and love of enemies. We will do this, but we must not miss the overarching deeper implications of Jesus' illustrations:
 - Living out the Beatitudes / following Him / truly becoming a disciple requires a radical overhaul of our entire selves, outside as well as inside.
 - First, we must remember that we are talking about a spiritual battle... world, flesh, and the devil.
 - As long as we persist in complacency, our spiritual "enemies" may remain content to leave us be.
 - However, as soon as we get it into our heads to clean up shop, the enemies awaken, and start fighting back, to discourage us, and even make us worse of than before (i.e., Mt 12:43-45)
 - The great mystical writers (John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, etc.) describe this process: the journey begins with cleaning up the obvious external sins / bad habits, leaving us appearing "holy." But then the more difficult battle begins as we become more aware, maybe for the first time, of the internal sins of our heart and mind.
 - Personal illustration of berry picking...
 - Empty bushes long road, already easily picked;
 - Pushed thru briars to pick hidden patches;
 - On way out, turned around & saw all I had missed!
 - Choosing to follow Christ into / thru the Beatitudes makes us aware of sin & sinful attitudes that are otherwise easily hidden from others, but never from God; these are more difficult to eradicate; they may even seem to grow worse the more we attack them; and they may lead to despair: this is what happened to Luther...
 - Luther's answer: redefine holiness thru faith alone.
 - But His answer was not what Jesus taught:
 - This section begins & ends with call to perfection...
 - Many, following the Reformers, demote Jesus' teachings to "Plan A", i.e., of the Old Covenant BEFORE grace.
 - But no where does Jesus say that his teachings were merely scare tactics to lead people to surrender to faith alone. He always called people to higher perfection WITH his assistance BY Grace.
 - Jesus' insight in these SIX Illustrations is breathtaking: he addresses the most common inner sinful attitudes of man, that separate us from one another & God:
 - Anger & bitterness
 - Lust
 - Selfishness

- Lying, dishonest, doublemindedness, disception; duplicity; equivocate; prevaricate
- Retribution; revenge; “rights!”
- Loving selectively; bigotry
- We’ll focus today on the first: Anger

ANGER:

- This follows immediately on the context of call to holiness:
 - 19: Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*
 - 20: For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

21: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.'

- **“You’ve heard”** ... direct connect to scribes & Pharisees ...
- **“that it was said to the men of old”** ... none of them had Bibles to read; in their synagogues or in the temple, they heard the Law & the prophets read & expounded...
- **“You shall not kill”** ... Exodus 20:15
- **“And whoever kills shall be liable to judgment”**... Not from OT! An add-on.

22: But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire.

- **“But I say to you”** ... unusual claim of divine authority!
- **“every one who is ANGRY with his brother shall be liable to JUDGMENT; whoever INSULTS his brother shall be liable to ... THE COUNCIL, and whoever says, ... 'YOU FOOL!' [RACA] shall be liable to ... THE HELL OF FIRE [GEHENNA].”**
- ANGER:
 - But Jesus got angry! (clearing the temple; at the Pharisees & his disciples!)
 - Important qualification (included in some early manuscripts): “angry **without cause**”
 - Ephesians 4:31-2 “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*”
 - Ephesians 4:26-27 “*Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.*”
 - Colossians 3:5-8 “*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth.*”
 - James 1:19-20 “*Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.*”
 - 1 John 3:15 “*Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*”
 - **Jesus is not merely addressing the external expression of anger, but the internal, smoldering anger that plans, envisions, rehearses an angry confrontation.**
 - **Not the angry thought, but the dwelling on it.**

Practical:

23 & 24: So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

- Using Hyperbole (as he will later with cutting out right eye & off right hand)
 - Does not mean literally to skip Temple / Mass until straightened out all broken relationships;
 - Rather emphasizes the importance of reconciliation & being in the state of grace;

25 & 26: Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

- Start dealing with disagreements immediately! Don't put them off. (Eph 4)
- Note: "judge...guard...prison" || with vs. 22 ... final judgment.
- "never get out until" ... hell or purgatory?