

Murder By the Internet

Matthew 5:21-26

Have you ever committed murder?

I doubt that anyone listening this morning will say, I have. However, have you ever posted or commented on FaceBook that attacked someone or a group of people? I have FaceBook friends who I believe to be deeply committed Christians but many of their post or comments are filled with anger toward a person or group of persons. Let's consider the possibility this morning that many of us are guilty of "Murder By the Internet."

We continue our focus on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Today's sermon is the third in the series of messages I've entitled **"The Only Way to Live."**

It is based on the greatest sermon ever preached in history – the Sermon on the Mount. Up to this point in the sermon, Jesus has been very general in his comments but now he gets very specific. He addresses six critical areas where what goes on in the inside of a person is far more important than what occurs on the outside of a person. He is going to be dealing with murder, adultery, divorce, honesty, revenge, and loving your enemies.

What he is about to say is not only going to astound the common people who heard him, but also deeply anger the Pharisees. Because you see the Pharisees believe that righteousness begins and ends on the outside of a person. Jesus is going to teach us that righteousness begins on the inside of a person.

Six times Jesus either quotes from the Law or from the interpretation of the Law given by the Pharisees and the rabbis during that day. Then after quoting the Law he then gives his interpretation of what the Law really means. Five times he says **"You have heard"** but then he follows by saying **"But I say."** With the subject of divorce in **verses 31 and 32**, he says "It was said" but then he adds "but I say."

Now some people believe that Jesus is contradicting the teaching of Moses and contradicting the Old Testament Law. But the contrast is not between the Old Testament and what Jesus is going to teach us here in the New Testament. The contrast is between the way the Law had been mishandled and misinterpreted by the legalistic Pharisees and what the Law really meant.

In fact, when Jesus is quoting strictly from the Old Testament, He uses the words **"It is written."** But in these verses he introduces what the Pharisees taught by saying, "It was said" or "It has been said." In other words, Jesus is not denying what the Law taught. He is deepening what the Law taught.

The first situation he deals with is murder. As you know the first crime ever committed in the Bible was murder. That was not the first sin but it was the first social result of man's personal sin. We are still reaping the bitter fruits of that sin today. There are 16,000 known murders a year in the United States. That is 44 every day. That figure does not include suicides and abortions. We have now become the murder capital of the western world.

Yet, if you were to ask the average American "Have you ever murdered anyone they would emphatically say 'No!'" But then here is the shocker. Jesus would say, "Not so fast!" The Lord is going to show us that murder is not only an act it is an attitude.

This attitude of Murder is most prevalent today on the Internet. Two internet sharing platforms, FaceBook and Twitter are filled with people who are expressing an ATTITUDE of Murder toward individuals who disagree with them.

As I share this message this morning, I want you to think about what you have written or read on the Internet and consider if we are not guilty of "**MURDER BY THE INTERNET.**"

In fact, before one becomes a murderer with the hands, he first becomes a murderer in the heart.

This reminds of the statement made by the late Billy Graham's wife in an interview. She was asked, "Have you ever thought about divorce?" She said, "No, but I have thought about murder on a number of occasions."

It is possible to have the seed of murder in your heart whether or not you ever actually sow that seed and let it bear fruit. A perfect illustration is the prodigal son. You remember the prodigal son comes to his father and says "I want my share of the inheritance and I want it now." Well, in Bible days, the only way that you could get a share of the inheritance was if the father died. What that son was really saying to that father was "I wish you were dead."

If you have ever been angry at a person, angry enough to have even a fleeting thought of wishing they were dead, you are guilty of murder. But Jesus goes beyond that to show how ordinary everyday run-of-the-mill anger that we see even in our homes is really murder in the first degree. It is a great lesson on how we should view anger and have victory over it.

I. Seriously Perceive Anger before You

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." (Matt. 5:21-22)

People then, just as people now, thought that murder was simply the unlawful, physical taking of a human life. But now Jesus is going to teach us that you can be a murderer in your heart without ever committing murder with your hands.

There is more to murder than just actually taking someone's life. For example, suppose you want to kill someone and you even have the murder all planned out but at the last moment you change your mind. Jesus said you are guilty of murder. Just because you didn't follow through, because you couldn't pull the trigger or because something stopped you does not mitigate the fact that you had the attitude of a murderer.

Suppose someone decides they want to murder you. At the last minute, it is not that they are afraid of having your blood on their hands. It is not because of a guilty conscience. But they are afraid they might get caught so they decide not to carry out the act. Jesus said they are still guilty of murder. But then Jesus carries murder even deeper than that.

"But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." (v.22a) Now this is the anger that is seen in the gritting of the teeth, the clenching of the jaw, and the flashing of the eyes. Someone makes you so angry as the old saying goes - you could just spit. But you really don't do anything. Nobody sees it except God. He sees that boiling burning rage inside of you that nobody else can see. Jesus said you have the spirit of a murderer.

There was a little girl who came forward during a revival and told the pastor she needed to be saved. After church the mother went up to the daughter and said, "Why did you go forward?" She said, "Mother, I needed to be saved." The mother said, "Honey, you are a good girl. You read your Bible. You go to church. You never give Dad and me any trouble. How can you say that you need to be saved? You're too good to need to be

saved." The little girl looked at her mother and said, "Mother, you can't see my heart." Well, God can and he sees those times when you are angry and boiling on the inside though you cover it up on the outside.

Then he goes on to say, **"...And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council." (v.22b)** Now the word "raca" is a word that doesn't really have an equivalent English translation. But the best scholars say that it literally means to call a person "a valueless person." Jesus here is referring to the times when you get angry and you say something that you really wished you hadn't said. You allowed poisonous venom to come out of your mouth before you could plug up the jar. Perhaps you let profanity spew out of your mouth and you curse someone before you even realize what you had done.

I heard about a young father who came home from work and found his wife crying. He said, "What's wrong?" She said, "I have had a terrible day. The baby cut his first tooth and took his first step..." The father said, "But that's wonderful!" She said, "Yes, but then he fell down and cut his lip on his tooth and said his first word." Have you ever been that angry? Jesus said you for an instant had the attitude of a murderer.

". . .But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." (v.22c) Now, the Greek word for fool is the word moros. Obviously you can guess that we get from that the word moron.

Let me stop right here and ask you: have you ever said out loud or quietly to yourself, "you moron!"?

This was a word that was used to refer to people who were basically morally wasted people. In other words, when you get to this point and lose your temper and scream insults at someone like this you have determined that person is nothing but trash.

This is the type of anger when we get to the point where we just lose it and begin to yell and scream, rant and rave, at the top of our lungs not caring who we hurt or who we insult.

There was an Auburn football player who was on spring break down in Florida. He went to one of these get acquainted parties and met a beautiful female student from an Ivy League school. He walked up to her and said, "Where do y'all go to school?" She said, "Yale." He took a deep breath and shouted: "Where do y'all go to school?"

Now when you get to this type of anger where you are yelling and screaming and losing control even to the point of degrading someone's human worth, you have reached the guilt stage of hell fire. Now Jesus is not saying you are going to hell. But he says you have enough guilt to send you to hell. You have the guilt of a murderer

What Jesus is trying to get us to understand is just how destructive murder is. One of the phenomena we are seeing now in America is what is called road rage. Recently, on the Golden State Freeway in Sylmar, CA; Delfina Moralis and her daughter were irritated by an unnamed driver. Other motorists saw the two women tailgate a van and make angry gestures at the driver.

When the van exited from the freeway, Mrs. Moralis followed closely and then got into position to spin her tires and splash the van with mud. She quickly spun around flinging mud and then drove up the ramp from which both vehicles had just exited. In her state of anger, she lost her bearings and treated the off ramp like an on ramp. She drove straight into oncoming freeway traffic. She and her daughter were instantly killed when they crashed into a Federal Express truck. Anger, like that, cannot only cause you to become a murderer in your heart but it can become the murderer of yourself.

This is why John said in **1 John 3:15: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."** When you get to this type of anger, you have gone too far. It is

nothing less than a verbal stabbing from the heart and it causes you to murder the other person with a sharp knife-like insult.

II. Spiritually Put Anger behind You

"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Matt. 5:23-24)

Jesus now deals with a situation that occurs far too often, both in the church and outside the church. I would be shocked if there is not someone listening to this message right now that either does not have something against someone or maybe does not know someone that has something against you. Either way Jesus said reconciliation is so important that you should drop what you are doing in the church. Get outside the church and find that person who needs the church and get right with them before you can worship God.

This is one of the very few times in the Bible where we are told that there is something even more important than worship. One of those things is making sure you are right with the people that you know. ***1 Timothy 2:8 says: "Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."*** Do you see that word ***"wrath"***? You cannot worship God with an angry heart. In other words, you cannot be right vertically until you are right horizontally. If you are not right with someone on earth, you cannot be right with God who is heaven.

Imagine this scenario. You begin to pray. Sometime during your prayer time, someone's face flashes across your mind. It is a face with a name. It is either someone you have offended or someone who has offended you. The Lord brings that person to your attention. He pulls that face up on your memory screen. It becomes the screen saver of the monitor of your heart and you can't forget it. All of a sudden, your prayer time goes out the door. That is exactly what Jesus is talking about.

But the point is, you can sit in church, have your Bible open, nod your head, say "Amen" and still not worship God because you are not right with a brother or a sister.

Incidentally, Jesus is speaking here of someone who has something against you. In other words, you may not have anything against anybody but if you know someone that has something against you then you should try to reconcile with that person. But let me just add these words, "If it is possible." Paul said in the book of Romans, "If possible, live peaceably with all men." In other words, when you made a good faith effort to reconcile with someone and they refused to reconcile, your conscience is clear. But until that happens, you need to do everything you can immediately to be right with others so that you can indeed be right with God.

III. Sincerely Place Anger beyond You

"Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny." (Matt. 5:25-26)

Now the point Jesus is making here is simply this. You better make things right with everyone you know before it is too late. Jesus here is referring to someone who has been accused of owing someone money. Now in Bible days, if you were convicted for not paying whatever you owed, you went to prison. Here in America, in our early days, we had what was known as debtor's prisons. If you went to prison, it became a catch 22.

You see, there was no time limit on your punishment. The only way you could get out would be to pay your debt. But the problem was while you were in prison you couldn't work. If you couldn't work, you couldn't earn money. If you couldn't earn money, you couldn't pay your debt. If you couldn't pay your debt, you couldn't leave. So in effect, if you went to prison for owing someone money it was a sentence of life without parole.

That's why, in this story, Jesus advises you to settle quickly and quietly and finally before it gets to court. Because once it got to court, it was too late.

Roman law said that a plaintiff could bring an accused person before a judge. But the Law also said that the two could settle anything "on the way." You could be right on the steps of the courthouse and if you chose to settle your case between the two of you, it would be settled. But the minute you walked into that courtroom and stood before that judge, it was out of your hands and your fate would then be in the hands of the judge.

Jesus is illustrating a truth that I hope you will really take to heart today. It is very sad, to say the least, to have bitterness in your heart toward another person or for someone to be bitter toward you. For either person to die before they at least make an attempt to be reconciled.

I want to die right with God. To be right with God I must have made every effort to be right with my fellow man. Incidentally, there's a greater truth and that is this. You better settle your sin case out of court with God before you die. That's why I don't fear meeting God when I die. Because once I gave my heart to Jesus Christ, I settled my case out of court.

Now the amazing thing that Jesus teaches here is this. It is incredible how giving forgiveness to someone or seeking forgiveness from someone unloads the gun in the other person's hand. The story is told that when the painter Leonardo da Vinci was painting The Last Supper, he had an intense and bitter argument with a fellow painter. Da Vinci began to think of a way to get this guy back. He came up with a devious plan.

He decided to paint the face of his enemy onto the face of Judas Iscariot so it would be captured for time in memorable and that is exactly what he did. When people came to look at his work, while it was still in progress, they immediately knew who "Judas" was. Da Vinci got great joy out of portraying this man as Judas Iscariot.

But as he continued his work on the painting of Jesus and his disciples, he finally came to the face he had saved for the very end-the face of Jesus. But he drew a mental blank. He had what writers call "writer's block." He could not paint a thing.

Finally, God convicted him and showed him the trouble was he had painted the face of his enemy as the face of Judas Iscariot. He realized that his hatred and bitterness was keeping him from being able to face the face of Christ. So he went back to the image of Judas and painted some nebulous face. He went to his painter enemy, asked forgiveness, and they were reconciled. Then he went back and could clearly paint the face of Christ and finish one of the world's greatest portraits.

You know that in one sense we have all been guilty of murder of first degree because we are all guilty of murdering the Lord Jesus Christ. But if the Lord Jesus can forgive us and make things right with us even though we crucified him, how much more, through his power and because of his blood, can we do the same for others.