

**JESUS ON THE FAT HILL:
LIVE ABOVE HATE, LUST & ABANDONMENT— MATTHEW 5:17-32**

Note: on stage is a ladder. Each time that I say that Jesus wants us to live up here, I climb it to show how high Jesus standard for living is. In the end, the only way to live up there is grace.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were hurled into the icy waters below. News of the disaster was further darkened when an investigation revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn't a technology problem like radar malfunction—or even thick fog. The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship's presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but according to news reports, neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to their senses, it was too late.

Those two captains suffered from an attitude that plagues most Americans. We're far more concerned about getting our rights that finding out if what we're doing or want to do is really right. This attitude, at best, keeps our relationships at a superficial level. If we stay in the shallow end of the relational pool we never realize our full humanity. At worst, demanding our rights is destructive. It kills connections. When nations follow this path the result is war and death.

This preoccupation with seeking our rights over and against finding out what's right is not new. The people of Jesus' day, by and large, had the same mind set. It was killing them and their relationship with God. Jesus addressed this problem and revealed the way to overcome it. In his famous, Sermon on the Mount, here's how he addresses a people very much like us.

READ Matthew 5:17-20

God had given his people, the Jews, the Law and the Prophets, what we'd call the Old Testament. He gave them to teach them how to have relationships that are transparent, healing and deep. Unfortunately, by the time Jesus arrived on the scene this purpose of the Law and the Prophets had been discarded by most people.

The Law was given to reveal the character of God.

There was law that said, "plant only one kind of seed in your farm land. Do not allow the seeds to mix." You could only use a piece of land for one type of seed. You could not grow corn and then grow beans in the same land. Why is that? What was God saying to the Jewish people? He wanted them to know that just as their crop was one kind, He was one God. The laws revealed who God was.

The religious leaders known as the Pharisees and the teachers of the law did not care about discovering the character of God in the Law. They cared about the letter of the law, following it so strictly that they alienated themselves from God.

When the Law said to tithe your first fruits, they tithed everything (even their spice rack). When the Law said to wear the Word of God on their foreheads, they literally wore a box on their forehead that contained Scripture in it.

They even added more rules to keep people from breaking the law. They probably had good intentions at first, but the result was that the people learned the absolute minimal amount of effort it took to not break God's law. They knew what was off limits and, more importantly, they were exceedingly interested in how close they could get to God's boundaries without stepping over. They even found loopholes to allow them to break certain commandments.

In other words, they were far more interested in asking "Is it my right?" than finding out if it's right.

Jesus told them that this kind of attitude doesn't cut it with God. If they wanted to be right with him they should be more concerned about determining if their actions and attitudes were really right than if they had the right to do this or that. For this reason he took his followers back to what they should have learned in kindergarten. Jesus reminded them of the true intent of the law.

In what we're about to read, Jesus isn't reinterpreting the commandments. He's simply restoring them to their proper and larger meaning. Here's the first one:

READ Matthew 5:18-26

Like the people of Jesus' day, most of us have never and will never literally murder another person. But Jesus presses the issue. Is someone any less guilty of the sin of murder if they simply lacked an opportunity to follow through with their thoughts? What if they wanted to kill another person, but simply lacked the courage or feared getting caught? Could they be absolved from murder just because they didn't commit the act?

Apparently not. Jesus makes it clear that the commandment not to murder is a matter of the heart as well as the hand. He called for His followers to live above hate. Harboring anger against another human being is simply the same as murder in Jesus' book. Jesus knew that murder began in the heart. It then moves itself to insults.

We have all been in a situation where anger took over and we wish we could take back those words. We then try to justify our actions by saying, "Well, I only called them

'raca', but I didn't hurt anyone physically. What's so bad about calling someone a fool?"

Jesus hits us right where we are by using the example of calling someone "Raca". Raca means "worthless", "empty headed", or "stupid." He then uses the example of calling someone a fool. Fool means fool.

Jesus' wants us to live above anger by realizing that these little springs of words reveal what is really in our hearts. If you are calling someone that rejects who they are in God, then you have anger in your heart. Anger is the seed of murder, and this puts you at odds with God.

If someone makes you angry don't say "I have a right." Find out if it's right. Live above the anger.

Jesus wants you to resolve your anger – quickly.

In fact, Jesus says that if there is anger in your heart: don't go to church. Don't attempt to worship. (How can you worship a forgiving God with anger and resentment in your heart anyway?) Don't do your quiet time. Proceed no further with any activity until you've taken care of business with the one your angry with and have offended. Treat it like your being sued. Settle the issue outside of court quickly. Reconcile your differences in light of God's mercy.

If you want radically real relationships that are healing and transforming do what's right. Don't ask "What's my right?" Live above the anger.

If you think that last teaching was tough you're going to love the next one.

READ Matthew 5:27-32

Here Jesus addresses the heart again, when the people thought that they were OK living on the bottom level. Jesus said to not commit adultery. He raises the bar so that people understand that adultery deals with lust and divorce too.

First he speaks about lust. For some reason we think we have a God-given right in America to look and lust. We are bombarded with sexual images all day in America.

John MacArthur put it this way, "Ours is a day of unbridled indulgence in sexual passion. People propogate, promote, and exploit it through the most powerful and pervasive media ever known to man. It seems to be the almost uninterrupted theme of our society's entertainment.... Mass media uses sex to sell its products and to glamorize its programs. Sex crimes are at all-time highs, while infidelity, divorce, and

perversion are justified. Marriage, sexual fidelity, and moral purity are scorned ridiculed and laughed at. We are preoccupied with sex to a degree never before seen in a civilized culture.”

Back in the seventies President Jimmy Carter admitted in an interview that he'd broken the adultery commandment by looking lustfully at other women. In the 90's, we had a president who actually committed the act and maintained that it wasn't adultery! How far we've come today!

Why is lust the same as adultery? How can Jesus say that? Here is the thing: lust really comes down to abandoning two people: your spouse (whether future or present), and your God. When you put those thoughts in your head, you are not remaining faithful to your spouse. You are abandoning them. The same is true for your God. When you lust, you are saying to God, "I want that more than I want you." The issues are abandonment and purity.

Jesus wants you to live above abandonment. He doesn't want you to live down here where your thoughts in the gutter. He wants you to live above.

As far as lust goes, Jesus said to do whatever it takes to get rid of it. He even said that we should pluck out our eye or cut off our sinning hand. This is a way of saying, "Do whatever it takes to stop it and do it now."

Colossians 3:5 – *Put to death... whatever belongs to your earthly nature.*

Jesus says that if you lust, then you have committed adultery in your heart. It is the same thing.

Jesus then addresses the issue of Divorce. He wants the people to know that divorce can cause adultery.

In today's society, divorce is also seen as a first Amendment right in our age. Divorce may be a right in this country, but Jesus wants us to ask, "what is right." Jesus says that only marital unfaithfulness is a legitimate reason for divorce according to God. In fact, the Bible tells us that God hates divorce.

In the first century, a man could divorce a woman for any reason: burnt toast, losing their good looks, spending too much of their money. Can you imagine that? Sadly, some people can. This means that the man had the right to abandon his wife.

Jesus called the people to live above their right. He wanted them to ask, "what is right?" Jesus' calling was to live above abandonment. He knew that sometimes people would be unfaithful to their spouse. He said that divorce was only possible

when marital unfaithfulness occurred. Marital unfaithfulness means adultery, desertion, and abuse. Those things that break the vows made on the wedding day. In His grace, God allows divorce in some situations.

Jesus, however, raised the bar and said that outside of unfaithfulness, divorce was the same as the sin of adultery. If you aren't getting along, if you have fallen out of love, if you have financial difficulties, if your spouse is sick and you can't take it anymore. Jesus said that divorce is the same as adultery.

These two problems in our society: Lust and divorce are really two sides of the same coin. Both are related to how we view the object of our desire or the object of our disdain. There's the problem. We see the other person as an object and not a human being made in God's image. When we tire of them, we abandon them for someone else.

Jesus wants us to live above divorce, lust, and ultimately abandonment by asking what is right, not what is our right.

What Jesus is talking about in what we read today is way radical. In fact, what He is talking about is too high of a standard for us to live.

If we are angry at someone and call them a name (even if it isn't out loud), then we sin!

If we hate someone, we should drop all important activity and get it fixed. Otherwise, we have sin in our heart!

If we have lust in our heart, it is the same as adultery. It is sin!

If we abandon our spouse, then it is sin!

It seems to me that Jesus is calling us to be perfect.

Is that what the Christian life is about? I thought the Christian life is about living a life of freedom in God.

I want you to remember what Jesus said in the beginning. In fact, the key to all of this is the memory verse that is in your bulletin.

Matthew 5:17 – Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to do away with it. Jesus came and was the Perfect One – the one who could live out the Law perfectly. He was the only one ever to be

able to live up to the standards in the Law, never breaking them. Jesus is telling us these things – to live above hate, lust, and abandonment – because He wants us to depend on Him. The only way we could ever rid our hearts of hate, of anger, of lust, of disdain, of impurity, of disgust, of dislike is to give our hearts to Jesus.

Jesus does not expect perfection. Jesus expects us to trust Him for perfection.

Jesus wants us to live up here, because this is where we have to trust Him.

Jesus died on the cross to ultimately fulfill the Law for us. We could not live up to its standards, so He did for us. He became the perfect sacrifice to cover our sins. He died on the cross to make us whole. He died on the cross to give us the power to live above hate, lust, and abandonment. He died on the cross willingly for all of us.

Not only that: He rose from the dead to prove who He was. He rose from the dead to show us that we each have the power through the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who rose Jesus from the dead, to conquer these huge sins in our life. He rose from the dead so that we would trust Him to live up here. Up here is where we have to trust Him.

Do you trust Him? If so, then it should come out in your life.

Are you willing to trust Jesus? Come forward during this next song.

Decisions:

- Baptism
- Coming Back
- Stepping up in the Church
- Prayer

My Jesus I Love Thee - # 297

(Some of the ideas in this sermon have been adapted from a sermon by Joel Smith of Wellspring Community Church who said it better than I could have)