

But I Say to You - Anger

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[0 : 00] Matthew in chapter 5. The Gospel according to Matthew in chapter 5. Matthew 5 and if we begin reading at verse 21.

You have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.

But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raka, shall be in danger of the council.

But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hellfire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar. Go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Agree with an adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

[1 : 20] Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the last, the uttermost farthing. And so this evening we are continuing our study in the Sermon on the Mount.

And as we've been looking at this sermon which was preached by our Lord, I'm sure that we're beginning to see that it is the best sermon ever preached.

Because it's a sermon which is not only challenging in every aspect of its teaching, but it's also a sermon which is still applicable and still relevant to our lives.

For as we've said before on numerous occasions, this sermon is all about Christ-centred living for Christ-centred lives. But as we progress in our study of this challenging and thought-provoking sermon, Jesus is now moving into a new section of teaching, where we have seen already so far in our study that Jesus has presented to us the marks of Christian character and conduct through the Beatitudes.

Then we were given those illustrations of salt and light, which sought to emphasize the point that those who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven are to live distinct lives from those who are in the world.

[2 : 42] And then last time we saw that Jesus went on to draw attention to his relationship and our relationship to the Old Testament.

And in particular, our relationship to the law. And so Jesus asserted to his listeners, which includes me and you, he asserted in verse 17 about the law, he said, And so with the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, we can see that there is one thing Jesus doesn't want us to think.

Because he doesn't want us to think that he's come to get rid of the Old Testament. He doesn't want us to think that this new phenomenon of the kingdom of heaven has come in order to replace and supersede the law and the prophets.

Instead, what Jesus wants us to understand is that although he has told us that those who enter into the kingdom of heaven do so by faith and repentance, he's still saying that the law and the prophets are as relevant today as when they were first given to God's people.

And as Jesus is affirming to us, he's saying nothing has changed as far as the law and the prophets are concerned. Because not even the jot or the tittle, not even the smallest letters in the Hebrew alphabet will be changed or altered until all is fulfilled.

[4 : 23] And by saying all this, Jesus is preparing us for what he's now going to teach us in this new section. Because it's the section which Jesus addresses the thought-provoking subjects of anger, lust, divorce, vows, retaliation and our enemies.

And in the classroom of this great school, our teacher is going to challenge us even further.

And he's going to get right to the heart of our thinking and our actions as Christians. He's going to cut right to the core of who we are and what we are like.

But we must always remember that the purpose in it all is to produce in us Christ-centered living and Christ-centered lives.

There's a purpose behind it. And so the first issue which we're looking at this evening and that Jesus wants to raise with us is an issue which I'm sure we can all relate to.

[5 : 34] One issue which we are not immune from. The issue of anger. The issue of anger. And I'd like us to consider this topic under three headings.

Contrast, contradiction and contrition. Contrast, contradiction and contrition.

So if we look firstly at contrast. There's a contrast. He says in verse 21. You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.

But I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And now as we enter into this new section of teaching, I first of all want us to notice the method of teaching.

We've noticed that before. The method of teaching which Jesus implements in his sermon.

Because when Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount, we saw that he used the method of repetition in order to make an emphasis.

[6 : 45] Where he repeatedly uses the word blessed. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they which mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness.

And so on. And then after the Beatitudes, we saw Jesus use the timeless method of preaching. State, illustrate, apply. State, illustrate, apply.

For Jesus would make the statement, illustrate it and apply it. And we saw Jesus implement this method in the illustrations of salt and light. And then the last section about fulfilling the law.

But now as we move into this section, it seems that Jesus employs a new method of teaching us in order to keep our attention and that we respond to what he is saying.

And I say this because it seems that Jesus uses the method of contrast in this section about the law. Where he contrasts what was said in the moral law back in Exodus 20 which we read.

[7 : 49] And he contrasts it with his own exposition. On the law. And Jesus does this by repeatedly using the contrasting phrases.

You have heard that it was said, but I say to you. You have heard that it was said, but I say to you. You have heard that it was said, but I say to you. And then Jesus would go on and give his explanation.

But what we must be clear on is that the contrasts which Jesus repeatedly makes when he says, but I say to you. It doesn't imply that he's going to do away with the law or that Jesus is in some form adding to the law.

Rather we ought to see that Jesus, what Jesus says here is that he's giving a fuller understanding and a greater revelation of why God made that law in the first place.

And I suppose you could say that Jesus is giving us his own commentary on some aspects of the moral law. Therefore what we need to understand is that this phrase where he says at the beginning of verse 22, but I say to you.

[9 : 00] It's a phrase of authority. It's a phrase of authority. And so in this passage which we're looking at this evening, Jesus is expounding on the sixth commandment.

Thou shalt not kill. But before he makes his contrast, Jesus draws attention to what was said. He draws attention to the past.

And he says, You've heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. And immediately Jesus is bringing before his audience the very foundation of their faith.

The moral law. The law which God had given to his chosen people. And a law which every Jew had heard being read to them in the synagogue every Sabbath.

Every Jew would have been taught the law. Every Jew would have been able to recite the law of God. But also when Jesus says, You have heard that it was said. We know that the Jews heard it.

[10 : 06] It was an oral message which had been passed on to them from generation to generation. And these laws, they were of old. They were from the very birth of the people of Israel.

As God's covenant nation. And when you think of these laws in that context, it makes you realise how high in esteem these laws were held by the people of God.

And yet this context is met by a contrast. Where Jesus says, You've heard that it was said, By them of old you shall not kill, but whoever shall be in danger of the judgment, I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

And what Jesus says in these few words not only sheds light on the sixth commandment, but they give it a whole new meaning. Because Jesus explains that keeping this commandment went a lot further than his hearers had reckoned.

especially the scribes and the Pharisees. Because the scribes and the Pharisees, they had thought that they had attained to the righteousness of the law by not committing and killing anyone.

[11 : 24] They had restricted, in a sense you could say, the application of the sixth commandment just to the deed of taking someone's life. And they took pride in the fact that they had kept the law.

They didn't kill anyone. So, they are upholding and attaining the righteousness which God requires. Because for them, they had drawn the line of the law by not putting someone to death.

But for Jesus, that line was only the beginning. because the true application of the law was much further and much wider. Where it extended not only to the actions of a person, but to their thoughts and also to their words.

And that's why Jesus says in verse 20, just the verse before, he says that our righteousness needs to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees.

They were drawing the line. But Jesus says, you've got to go further. Because our righteousness, it needs to go further and deeper than all the outward actions which everyone can see.

[12 : 33] Our righteousness, not only in relation to the sixth commandment, but all of the commandments. Our righteousness needs to extend and be evident in our thoughts and in our words.

And so, all we must see is that the sixth commandment which God gave or had given in Exodus, was it was always going a lot further than murder.

It was always intended to go a lot further than murder. Because the command, thou shalt not kill, sought to tackle a root cause of murder.

Which Jesus says is, he says, it's anger against your brother without a cause. Anger against your brother without a cause.

Now, unfortunately, the ESV has deleted the phrase without a cause. Which, in my understanding, is key. It's a key phrase in the teaching of Jesus and it should be there.

[13 : 36] Because if we're implying that all anger is evil, then we have to reconsider our view of the wrath of God. Because the wrath of God shone towards sinners and ultimately towards Jesus on the cross.

The wrath of God is just, it's holy, and it's pure. So we could never say that all forms of anger are wrong. And even in our fallen nature, there are occasions which we can experience righteous anger and righteous indignation towards decisions which are made or even towards the people who make them.

But in the same breath, the Bible also emphasizes that any form of righteous anger needs to be an anger which is in control and not out of control.

For any form of righteous anger must be slow to rise and quick to lie down again. And that's what James reminds us in his letter. Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

And Paul also says, be ye angry and sin not. And if any sinful human being ever knew the meaning of righteous anger, it would have been Martin Luther, the great German reformer, where he was confronted and plagued by the corruption and hypocrisy of the Roman Catholic Church, which inevitably angered him and caused him to respond to their centuries of lies and deceit.

[15 : 11] But Luther, he called his anger towards the Roman Catholics, he called it an anger of love. And he said, it's one which wishes no one any evil and one that is friendly to the Persian but hostile to the Syrian.

But sometimes there is this fine line between the anger of love and the anger of hate and resentment. And so what we must see in this statement of Jesus is that he's referring to unrighteous anger, which is an anger of pride, of vanity, hatred, malice, and revenge.

And Jesus says that these attributes are not to be present in our heart or towards our brother. Now the reference to brother, which Jesus uses, doesn't refer to a sibling or a family member.

Jesus isn't even referring to a Christian brother or a Christian sister. We ought to view our brother as an expression of our fellow man, mankind.

kind. Because what Jesus wants us to see is the close relationship which we have and ought to have with one another. Because we are all made, all of us are made in the image and likeness of God.

[16:37] And we are all brothers and sisters, you could say, because we all share our first parents, Adam and Eve. And so our brother is everyone.

Our brother is everyone. So that's a contrast. We've looked at the contrast. You have heard that it was said, but I say to you. Then secondly, we see that there's a contradiction.

A contradiction. It says in verse 22, But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raka, shall be in danger of the council.

But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hellfire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar.

Go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. And it's clear from the teaching of Jesus that the emphasis of the command, Thou shalt not kill.

[17:45] It's a command and a call upon us to preserve life. That's what it means on the basic level. Thou shalt not kill. We are to preserve life.

But as we've seen already, this command isn't just a call to refrain from murder. Or even defend against euthanasia or abortion, which are of course of the utmost importance.

Because we ought to preserve life. Life is a gift from God. And therefore, why should we be given the right? Or why should anyone be given the authority to end life?

For life is something which solely belongs to God. But what Jesus is getting at in this section of teaching, is the root cause. For he's saying that the root cause of this commandment is not only to preserve life, but it's to preserve relationships with one another.

With the command, Thou shalt not kill, it's more than the physical action. It extends to our thoughts towards other people and our words towards other people.

[18:56] And so the call to preserve life must be understood as the call to preserve our relationships with one another. Because when we look at the physical actions of murder, abortion, and euthanasia, they're all a result of a breakdown of relationships.

Where murder is the result of a breakdown in a relationship with either the victim of murder or someone else. But I also believe that abortion and euthanasia, they're the result of a breakdown in our relationships in society.

With the most vulnerable people in society being the victims. such as the helpless unborn baby, the elderly, and the sick and the terminally ill.

Our failure to preserve life and the desire to preserve life is because of a failure to preserve relationships. And I know abortion and euthanasia are sensitive subjects and I hope I'm not coming across as insensitive.

But what Jesus is showing us is that the command Thou shalt not kill it's more than just the physical action. It's extending further.

[20:15] Extending towards the thoughts and towards our words. But the question which I think Jesus wants us to be asking is how do we view our brother?

How do we view our fellow man? How do we view the unborn baby? How do we view the elderly? How do we view the terminally ill?

And what Jesus is saying is that we are to view people as precious because they are made in the image and the likeness of God. The command is to preserve life and we do so by preserving and protecting our relationships with one another.

But what's interesting is that when we consider that everyone is a brother or a sister because we're all related to our first parents Adam and Eve. When we read about our first parents in the narrative of the book of Genesis we haven't gone very far.

We haven't turned many pages before we encounter murder. Because as you know the first children in the Bible were brothers and one murdered the other where Cain murdered his brother Abel.

[21:29] And what we can say about that incident is that Cain failed to preserve life because he failed to preserve his relationship. And he failed to preserve his relationship because his relationship with his brother had failed on his part.

He was jealous. And his relationship with God was wrong because he wouldn't listen. And what Jesus is drawing our attention to is that the outward action of Cain murdering his brother it found its root in Cain's anger towards his brother.

But even deeper than that Cain's anger found its root in Cain's jealousy towards his brother. And when we look at this one case we can see that there's this knock-on effect.

It's a knock-on effect where one thing leads to another and the end result is an outward action of murder. But of course many people don't go as far as Cain went.

We don't go to the extreme of murder. Because when we consider what a murderer is it's someone who's out of control.

[22 : 44] It's someone who is without restraint. And so what Jesus is saying when we think of it like that is that when we get angry and lose our temper against our brother our fellow man without any righteous reason to do so he's saying you are like a murderer.

Not in the outward sense but within your heart. Because when we we that is all of us when we get angry instead of quenching and quietening the anger maybe walking away from the situation we allow it to bubble up within us to the point that we can be out of control we can lose all sense of reasoning we can become so unreasonable and there is no restraint.

And when that happens our anger can reach absolute boiling point and the end result says Jesus is abuse. Not physical abuse but verbal abuse.

We might not be hitting other people if we're angry but Jesus warns of the danger when we start verbally abusing those whom we are angry with.

Is that not what Jesus said? Out of the heart the mouth speaks. And here Jesus warns us about what we say when we are angry and when we're acting irrationally because when we get angry there's one member in our bodies that becomes so loose and that's our tongue.

[24 : 24] And Jesus tells us here watch your tongue because he says in the second half of verse 22 whosoever shall say to his brother raka shall be in danger of the council but whosoever shall say thou fool shall be in danger of hellfire.

Now again the ESV doesn't use the word raka it refers to it as an insult which it is. But the word raka is a severe insult because when you would say raka to someone the word literally means empty but the connotations attached to that word was that you were not only insulting their intelligence by calling them empty headed or an idiot or brain dead by saying raka you were also referring to them in the social sphere you'd be insulting them as worthless useless your life is purposeless basically you'd be calling them a waste of space and the logical conclusion of saying to someone that you're a waste of space is that you'd rather that they were dead but Jesus not only says don't say raka he says he warns us that we're not to call anyone a fool and this is hard hitting stuff

I know it is but he warns us secondly not about not to call anyone a fool and you remember just last Lord's Day we were looking at when God spoke to the rich man who had built his bigger and better barns God called him a fool and God called him a fool because he lived his life without any thought of God he didn't acknowledge God and he denied the existence of God and what the Bible is clear on is that we don't have the right to call anyone a fool because that right is only reserved to God alone and so what Jesus is highlighting for us is that we're not to speak ill of those who are out of Christ those who live their life without God and without hope we're not to get angry with them and call them fools yes their behavior and their actions to some extent could be described as foolish but we need to see that without grace they are blind and in need of salvation because like the apostle Paul our confession tonight and why we are here tonight is because we can say I am what I am by the grace of God and the grace of God alone and so what Jesus wants us to see is that we need to practice self-control not only with our bodies and our thoughts towards others but also with our tongue or else we will be in danger and that's the warning which Jesus has repeated throughout these verses he says in verse 21 you've heard that it was said by them of old time thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment but I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment whosoever shall say to his brother Raca shall be in danger of the council but whosoever shall say thou fool shall be in danger of hell fire and what Jesus is saying to us is don't let your anger be dangerous be in control don't become irate and hold grudges and enter into dispute and dig your heels in and talk about people in order to make yourself feel better because we need to remember that we are not anyone's judge and Jesus is reminding us that God is their judge and God is our judge and our lack of self-control with our thoughts and our tongue is so severe Jesus warns us that we shall be in danger of hell fire and

you know isn't it interesting that James in his letter he uses the exact same phrase about our need to control our tongue because James says the tongue is that little member that boasts of great things in fact he says it's a fire a world of iniquity and it's so bad that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of our nature and it's set on fire by hell our tongue says James it's an unruly evil full of deadly poison because with it we bless God and we also curse men which are made in likeness the image of

[29 : 31] God and what's staggering is that out of the same mouth he says proceeds blessing and cursing then James says my brethren my brethren these things ought not to be and what James points out for us is our greatest problem if we are angry with our brother we are a contradiction if we are angry with our brother we are a contradiction because with our tongue we bless God but also with our tongue we are cursing men we insult our brother and speak ill of them and at the same time we seek to bring our gifts to God and in effect Jesus is asking us how do you expect your worship to be accepted if that's the state of your heart how do you expect God to receive your gift if you can't control your life and you can't control your tongue and Jesus is saying our gifts are no use to him if we are at enmity with our brother and that's what we were singing about in Psalm 66 where the psalmist he desired to come before the Lord with all his gifts all his burnt offerings of rams and bullocks and goats and his offering of incense and he was going to offer it all to the Lord upon the altar but then he makes the most searching statement about his own worship and his own heart before the Lord because he says if in my heart I sin regard the

Lord me will not hear if in my heart I sin regard the Lord will not hear me and so what the thrust of Jesus Jesus is teaching here is don't be a hypocrite don't be a hypocrite don't be like the actor on a stage with all your spiritual makeup trying to cover up your heart don't live don't give the facade that everything is fine on the outside but in reality there is anger and disunity and resentment against your brother don't be a contradiction to your profession don't contradict the fact that you are a citizen of the kingdom of God no says Jesus sorted out sorted out contrast contradiction and lastly and most importantly contrition contrition or repentance he says in verse 23 therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee leave there thy gift before the altar go thy way first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift and the illustration which

Jesus uses here it's often been applied to the Lord's supper that we shouldn't take or we shouldn't partake of the Lord's supper and sit together at the Lord's table if we have a grievance against our brother or our sister in Christ and that's certainly true and a good practice but we should never confine it to our brother or sister in Christ rather it should be extended to our families our neighbours and our friends where we shouldn't sit at the Lord's table until we have either been reconciled with them or at least attempted reconciliation and if they refuse to be reconciled with you then well you can't do anything about that you can try and try but it might make it even worse and that's what I think the last two verses in this section are about what Jesus says in verse 25 agree with thine adversary quickly while the

Lord in the way with him lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge and the judge deliver thee to the officer and thou be cast into prison verily I say unto thee thou shalt by no means come out then till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing and what Jesus is saying here is don't miss your opportunity don't be guilty for failing to be reconciled to someone don't regret that you didn't attempt reconciliation for as a citizen of the kingdom of God I believe that we must always initiate reconciliation whether we have committed the wrong or not we should initiate reconciliation because we're not to be proud or smug that it was others who wronged us whatever the situation we should initiate reconciliation we should say maybe sorry and seek peace or at least seek peace and even if it's a small fallout or a major division in our home or our family or with friends or with work colleagues we should initiate reconciliation that's our duty because it was God who took the initiative to reconcile us to himself and that's what the apostle Paul said in 2nd Corinthians 5 we have been reconciled to God through Christ and we have been given the ministry of reconciliation it was God who initiated forgiveness it was God who brought peace into our lives it was God who broke down the middle wall of partition it was God who changed everything therefore we ought to do the same we ought to go to our brother and initiate reconciliation reconciliation but whatever you do says Jesus don't regret that you didn't attempt reconciliation and don't let something that may have begun so small and so insignificant don't let it fester into something so big that reconciliation seems impossible because there's one thing which I think

Jesus is stressing to us in this commandment it's the fact that life is too short life is too short because the worshipper in this illustration he wasn't even allowed to offer his gift he had to leave his gift immediately and seek reconciliation with his brother and then come and offer his gift and although the thread of Jesus is teaching is that we ought to love one another that's the main emphasis you could say but I also think he's emphasizing the shortness of time the shortness of time and that if we have a problem or a grievance with a brother we should seek to resolve it and that should be our priority that there should be this urgency in our desire for reconciliation don't let the sun go down on your anger says Paul and what Paul was saying is before the day is even out sorted out because our priority in keeping the sixth commandment is both to preserve life and to preserve our relationships we are to look after the relationships and friendships that we have whether it's even in our marriage in our relationship with our family our friendships we're to seek and preserve them we're not to stay silent and give the silent treatment and think that that's what they deserve again we are not the judge

[37 : 59] God is the judge we have to seek peace and reconciliation because again life is too short life is far too short and when we put it in that perspective of life being too short it makes us realise not only how much time we can waste how much time we can often waste with petty arguments but it shows us how much we need to live Christ centred lives because a Christ centred life will not want to commit murder in God's sight but a Christ centred life will also want to seek peace with one another and love one another because loving one another is the definition of a disciple of Jesus Christ so contrast contradiction and contrition and God willing will continue our study in this great sermon may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray

O Lord our gracious God we realise that when we come before the mirror of thy word how far short we fall and how much we need thee to sustain us each and every day O Lord that thou wouldst teach us that thou wouldst cause us to be more and more like Jesus Christ our Saviour help us Lord we plead or to love one another as Christ has loved us and gave himself for us help us Lord to display that love towards one another and help us Lord we plead or to follow in thy footsteps to say even as we began this evening O how I love thy law it is my meditation all the day Lord that thou wouldst go before us help us Lord to walk in thy way knowing that it is a narrow path but it is a narrow path that leads to life and we know that few there be that find it cleanse us Lord we plead remember remember those who need thee tonight for whatever reason it is those who are hurting those who are in hospital those Lord who are laid aside that thine hand would be upon them for good O Lord look upon us bless us and build us up for we know that except the Lord to build the house those who labour in it to build it in vain Lord go before us and keep us for Jesus sake Amen I conclude by singing in Psalm 119 Psalm 119 from verse 17 down to the verse mark 22 it's page 401 Psalm 119 from verse 17 with me thy servant in thy grace deal bountifully Lord that by thy favour I may live and duly keep thy word open mine eyes that of thy law the wonders I may see I am a stranger on this earth hide not thy laws from me down to the verse mark 22 of Psalm 119 with me thy servant in thy grace deal bountifully Lord to God's praise let be thy servant in thy grace deal bountifully Lord and by thy favour I give this un truly keep thy word open my eyes touch all thy saw the wonders thy name see thee I am a stranger on this earth I know thy laws from me my soul within me Fare yeah to thy judgment due.

[43 : 20] Thou hast rebuke the worst and proud who from thy precepts were.

Reproach shall share removed from me. For I thy laws observe.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.