

Life Improvements --- Mountaintop Makeovers --- All You Need Is Love!

Psalm 40 & Matthew 5:27-32 (The Message Bible)

“Let's not pretend this is easier than it really is. If you want to live a morally pure life, here's what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer.” Matthew 5:29 (The Message Bible)

Psalm 40 (The Message Bible)

¹⁻³ I waited and waited and waited for GOD. At last he looked; finally he listened. He lifted me out of the ditch, pulled me from deep mud. He stood me up on a solid rock to make sure I wouldn't slip. He taught me how to sing the latest God-song, a praise-song to our God. More and more people are seeing this: they enter the mystery, abandoning themselves to GOD.

⁴⁻⁵ Blessed are you who give yourselves over to GOD, turn your backs on the world's "sure thing," ignore what the world worships; The world's a huge stockpile of GOD-wonders and God-thoughts. Nothing and no one comes close to you! I start talking about you, telling what I know, and quickly run out of words. Neither numbers nor words account for you.

⁶ Doing something for you, bringing something to you— that's not what you're after. Being religious, acting pious— that's not what you're asking for. You've opened my ears so I can listen.

⁷⁻⁸ So I answered, "I'm coming. I read in your letter what you wrote about me, And I'm coming to the party you're throwing for me." That's when God's Word entered my life, became part of my very being.

⁹⁻¹⁰ I've preached you to the whole congregation, I've kept back nothing, GOD—you know that. I didn't keep the news of your ways a secret, didn't keep it to myself. I told it all, how dependable you are, how thorough. I didn't hold back pieces of love and truth. For myself alone. I told it all, let the congregation know the whole story.

¹¹⁻¹² Now GOD, don't hold out on me, don't hold back your passion. Your love and truth are all that keeps me together. When troubles ganged up on me, a mob of sins past counting, I was so swamped by guilt I couldn't see my way clear. More guilt in my heart than hair on my head, so heavy the guilt that my heart gave out.

¹³⁻¹⁵ Soften up, GOD, and intervene; hurry and get me some help, So those who are trying to kidnap my soul will be embarrassed and lose face, So anyone who gets a kick out of making me miserable will be heckled and disgraced, So those who pray for my ruin will be booed and jeered without mercy.

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ But all who are hunting for you— oh, let them sing and be happy. Let those who know what you're all about tell the world you're great and not quitting. And me? I'm a mess.

I mentioned last week that working on these messages from the Sermon on the Mount has been challenging. It is easy for a pastor to get up here week after week and teach or preach about a theological doctrine or philosophical argument that is way out there (pointing away from self). But this teaching of Christ from the mountaintop is not a great theological doctrine that is way out there. What Christ is teaching from the Sermon on the Mount are practical principles for living out a life in Christ—from our hearts.

Let us set the stage again for our reading. What Jesus is trying to teach those who have gathered is that he has come to fulfill the law. Even if the people try to fulfill the law, try to keep the righteousness of the Pharisees, it would not be enough. Jesus says in Matthew 5:20, ***“For I tell that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*** (Matthew 5:20)

What is it that Jesus is teaching from the mountaintop? In a nutshell Jesus is teaching that righteousness come from the heart. The Sermon on the Mount is about living a moral life, living a life in Christ. Jesus is presenting a new Moral Mandate to the people. Jesus is showing them the steps to a mountaintop makeover. Up until now they thought all they had to do was keep the law, ***“You shall have no other God, You shall not have for yourself idols, You shall not use the Lord’s name in vain, You shall keep the Sabbath by keeping it Holy, You shall honor your father and mother, You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false testimony, and You shall not covet.”*** (Exodus 20:3-17)

A Mountaintop Makeover is more than just keeping the law. Last Sunday, we were confronted with Jesus’ powerful statements on anger. What Jesus was trying to teach us last week is that there is sanctity in life and we cannot commit murder—even in our minds. This week the message is about the sanctity of marriage. These words from the Sermon on the Mount are hard. Originally, I thought I would skip over this teaching on lust, divorce and marriage because it is such a difficult topic. I have been convicted by the Holy Spirit that if I am going to preach through God’s word, I have to take the hard sayings and preach them, too. As your pastor, God is working in my heart during these past weeks and because of our Mountaintop Makeover, I have had to examine my own heart. This is an “in here” message—not an “out there” one! On Valentine’s Day, this is a message from the heart for the heart!

Over and over again throughout the Scriptures we are taught that holiness, and a righteous and moral life begins in our heart. Today, Valentine’s Day--let us open our hearts to God’s word.

Let us pray: Lord God, Creator, Sustainer and Giver of Life, We come this morning to hear Your Word. May the Holy Spirit prepare and heal our hearts. Fill our hearts with your love, grace and mercy. May Your Word become the living Word. May your living Word be the healing balm of Gilead. This morning we lay our hearts on the Valentine altar of your love. Amen

Matthew 5:27-32 (The Message Bible)

⁷⁻²⁸*“You know the next commandment pretty well, too: ‘Don’t go to bed with another’s spouse.’ But don’t think you’ve preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your heart can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your body. Those leering looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.*

²⁹⁻³⁰*“Let’s not pretend this is easier than it really is. If you want to live a morally pure life, here’s what you have to do: You have to blind your right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer. You have to choose to live one-eyed or else be dumped on a moral trash pile. And you have to chop off your right*

hand the moment you notice it raised threateningly. Better a bloody stump than your entire being discarded for good in the dump.

³¹⁻³²"Remember the Scripture that says, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him do it legally, giving her divorce papers and her legal rights'? Too many of you are using that as a cover for selfishness and whim, pretending to be righteous just because you are 'legal.' Please, no more pretending. If you divorce your wife, you're responsible for making her an adulteress (unless she has already made herself that by sexual promiscuity). And if you marry such a divorced adulteress, you're automatically an adulterer yourself. You can't use legal cover to mask a moral failure.

The three points for this morning deal with SIN: **1) The Source of Sin 2) The Sinfulness of Sin 3) The Solution for Sin**

THE SOURCE OF SIN

When Jesus was teaching this message, He was speaking to the hearts of his followers. Jesus wants his followers to search their hearts. They thought they had kept the law. They had not committed murder; they had not committed adultery or coveted their neighbor's wife. They thought they were righteous. Jesus now speaks to their hearts. Jesus was speaking about holiness and living a holy, righteous life—living a moral life. God had given the 10 Commandments as a moral code to live by. The Torah, Psalms, Proverbs, and Prophets were further plumb-lines of moral truth. Jesus saw the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law and it was time to get to the heart of the matter.

I love how Eugene Peterson translates the Bible; his version is called The Message Bible. Peterson says these challenging words on Psalm 40 --- *I waited and waited and waited for GOD. At last he looked; finally he listened. He lifted me out of the ditch, pulled me from deep mud. He stood me up on a solid rock to make sure I wouldn't slip. He taught me how to sing the latest God-song, a praise-song to our God. More and more people are seeing this: they enter the mystery, abandoning themselves to GOD.* ⁴⁻⁵ *Blessed are you who give yourselves over to GOD, turn your backs on the world's "sure thing," ignore what the world worships; The world's a huge stockpile of GOD-wonders and God-thoughts. Nothing and no one comes close to you! I start talking about you, telling what I know, and quickly run out of words. Neither numbers nor words account for you.*

How often have we been caught worshipping what the world worships? Jesus' words cut to the heart of the matter of morality. Our world is being consumed by sex and sexuality. Just this past week, a local church sent out a flyer inviting people to come to church. Their theme is "The 21 Day Sex Challenge." I am not judging the church, and I am sure that they are going to challenge their congregation to walk in the ways of Christ's morality. But in our culture today, mass media uses sex to sell its products and to glamorize their programs.

Sex crimes are at an all-time high while infidelity, divorce and perversions are being justified. In our society today marriage, sexual fidelity and moral purity are being ridiculed, scorned and laughed at. One Bible Commentator said, "We are preoccupied with sex to a degree perhaps never before seen in a

civilized culture.ⁱ Did you see the Super Bowl game? It seems everything they were selling had some sort of sex appeal to it.

What Jesus is teaching in this sermon is simple: sin comes from our heart. We may be able to keep all the outward signs of righteousness--not committing adultery, but if we lust in our mind and heart we are guilty.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, is person who I enjoy reading, he was a longtime pastor at Westminster Chapel in London, has written many wonderful books and commentaries. I found his reflections on this passage helpful. *“Sin is not merely a matter of actions and of deeds; it is something within the heart that leads to the action. In other words, the teaching here is the characteristic teaching of the Bible everywhere about this subject, namely, that we must really concentrate upon is not so much sins as sin.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

Jeremiah the prophet said this about the heart; *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it.”* (Jeremiah 17:9)

Jesus said this about the heart later in the Gospel of Matthew: *“Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?”*¹⁸ *But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.*¹⁹ *For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.*²⁰ *These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”* (Matthew 15:17-20)

Lloyd-Jones goes on to say that **sins are nothing more than the symptoms of a disease—a disease of the heart--called sin.** The message that Jesus challenges the followers on the mountaintop with is: sin begins in the heart and then it is acted out.

Point One: We all have a fatal disease! The source of our sin: our sinful hearts.

THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

Last week we learned about anger altars. Anger is an emotional response. Anger is a feeling. Anger is a secondary feeling—driven by another, more primary, feeling. Feelings of fear, pain, and frustration are the three top winners that drive most of our anger. I don’t want you to think there’s only three—rejection, neglect, abandonment, shame, guilt, contempt—the list goes on and on. What I do want us to remember is that we all have our own anger altars. Last week Jesus shared from the mountaintop that the solution is for us leave our gift at this altar and go—go and reconcile our anger—go to our friend, our enemy, or our family member and bring God’s love and forgiveness.

Again, from the mountaintop, Jesus brings us back to our heart. First he addresses murder, and anger; now He adds adultery, lust, and divorce to the list. The sinfulness of sin is that it turns our Kingdom-loving hearts into cold, hard hearts of stone. That’s the tradeoff: we trade our Kingdom-loving hearts for hearts of stone.

All of us are going to be tempted in this world; temptation is not a sin. It's when we desire the desire that turns our hearts cold. What Jesus is addressing is the adultery of our heart. Jesus is telling us that even if we gouge our eyes out, or cut off our hands—the sinfulness of sin still lives in our heart. The sinfulness of sin has one objective: the death of our heart. Paul tells us "*the wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23) What Jesus is teaching us here is that when we don't deal with our anger in positive ways, our anger will lead us into contempt. When we don't deal with our contempt, we often find ourselves desiring our desires—and our temptations turn into fantasies and obsessions that lead to adultery, lust and divorce.

In The Divine Conspiracy Dallas Willard states, "It's not an accident that Jesus deals with divorce after having dealt with anger, contempt, and obsessive desire."ⁱⁱⁱ What we need to know is that back in Jesus' time there was a teaching from the rabbis that said you could divorce your wife for any reason. If your wife salted your food too much, or burned your supper, or you found another more attractive woman—you could issue your wife a certificate of divorce. From the mountaintop, Jesus was not only addressing the sinfulness of sin but he was also trying to protect the women of his culture. A divorced woman had no future. She had four choices: she could go live with her relatives as a servant, she could remarry but it would always be classified as a degraded relationship, she could become a prostitute or she could live the life of a beggar—all for salting someone's food too much, or burning dinner or growing older.

Point two: Jesus came to heal the brokenness of the sinfulness of sin. He came to heal our hearts of stone and to turn them into hearts for Him alone.

THE SOLUTION FOR SIN

So What --- What is "The Solution for Sin!" So, today is Valentine's Day—a day for love. LOVE, LOVE, LOVE—all we need is love! Do you know what the #1 Love song of all time is? "Love Me Tender!" This is what Jesus is saying to us today. Here's a great visual: God gave us a great moral code—the 10 Commandments. God sent us prophets. Yet all that was not good enough. Try as we may, we still all share the fatal disease of sin! Heart disease is not just a modern-day killer!

The philosophy of today teaches us that people are innately good and we will keep getting better! Reformed theology and Scripture teaches us that we are innately bad, born with sin in our hearts. This is called depravity. Calvinism calls sin in our hearts ---- totally depraved! In essence, what Scripture teaches is that left to ourselves we will always choose our selves. We are all in need of a heart transplant—by Jesus!

Here's the SIN SOLUTION: God knew that the 10 Commandments and the prophets weren't enough. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.*" (John 3:16-17)

A story is told that during the Civil War a beautiful, highly educated, and popular young woman fell into prostitution. By the time she was 22 years old, she was friendless, broken, and lay dying in a hospital in Cincinnati. Just before she died on a cold winter day she wrote a poem lamenting her life. The poem was published in a newspaper the next day and soon drew the sympathetic attention of thousands across the country. The poem ended with these lines:

Fainting, freezing, dying alone,
Too wicked for prayer,
Too weak for a moan to be heard
In the streets of the crazy **town**
Gone mad in the joy
Of the snow coming **down**.
To lie, and to die,
In my terrible **woe**,
With a bed and a shroud
Of the beautiful **snow**.

Sometime later another verse was added by another pen:

Helpless and frail as the trampled **snow**,
Sinner despair not, Christ stoopeth **low**
To rescue the soul that is lost in its **sin**,
And raise it to life and enjoyment **again**.
Groaning, bleeding, dying for **thee**,
The Crucified hung, made a curse on the **tree**.
His accents of mercy fall soft on thine **ear**.
Is there mercy for me? Will He heed my **prayer**?
O God! In the stream that for sinners doth **flow**,
Wash me and I shall be whiter than **snow**.^{iv}

The Sin Solution? Jesus Christ. Happy Valentine's Day!

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ⁱ MacArthur, John. *New Testament Commentary Matthew 1-7*, Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute, 1985

ⁱⁱ Lloyd-Jones, D Martyn. *Studies In the Sermon on the Mount*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1960

ⁱⁱⁱ Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy*. San Francisco, CA: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1998.

^{iv} Nainsmith, A. *1200 Notes, Quotes, and Anecdotes*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1962.