

Meeting Jesus In The Sixth Commandment
Exodus 20:13

October 28, 2018

SI: We're studying the Ten Commandments this fall.

The theme verse guiding our of our study is Romans 10:4,

Christ is the end of the law.

Doesn't mean Christ gets rid of the law or abolishes the law so don't have to keep.

End is the Greek word telos—goal, aim, fulfillment—that kind of end.

When we study each Commandment we should end up at Jesus.

His perfection, his substitution, his deliverance—and ultimately we should see how the Commandments are ways for us to respond to Jesus in faith.

Our passage this morning is only one verse, the sixth commandment.

You shall not murder.

INTRO: As we've studied the Ten Commandments I've made the point that they are so familiar to us, that it's a helpful exercise to try to imagine how the Israelites heard them for the very first time.

They had been slaves in Egypt 400 years, almost twice as long as America has been a country. Generational slavery under cruel, violent taskmasters. The Lord freed them. He brought them out of Egypt.

Through Moses the Lord told them: I'm giving you the Promised Land.

When you get there, you'll have all the good things they never had in Egypt. Your own houses and farms and vineyards.

You'll be able to walk across fields of grain that belonged to you, and pick fruit from your own orchards, draw water from your own wells. You'll be free men and women, raising their children and grandchildren free from the whips and demands of the Egyptians. Set free by the Lord. In preparation for that life, I'm giving you my law.

This is how I want you to live as free people.

One of my commandments is this: Don't attack each other.

Don't strangle each other. Don't stab each other. Don't assault each other.

How did they respond to the sixth commandment when they first heard it?

Probably the way we do. Of course not. I would never do that.

That's what the Egyptians would do. That's what bad people do.

But God knows the human heart. This command is a window into what we are like.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn—spend decades in the Soviet Gulag, prison camps.

He saw enormous cruelty. He saw murder on a massive scale.

He said doesn't it sound like a good idea to gather up all the evil people, all the abusers and murderers and send them off to a colony somewhere.

Let them be bad together.

And then all the good people can stay and build a stable and happy society.

But he says that's impossible because the line of good and evil goes through the middle of every human heart.

Can you identify with the cruel? Can you identify with the violent?

Because if you've ever hated someone, if you've ever been dismissive and disdainful, you should be able to identify.

Let's look at the sixth commandment under three points:

The act of murder, the heart of murder, the redemption of murder

Credit where credit is due: Sermon, Brian Habig, Downtown Pres, Greenville SC

MP#1 The act of murder

First, the words themselves. Older versions say You shall not kill.

Many modern English translations say: You shall not murder.

That's a better translation. This is a command not to murder.

It's not a blanket prohibition against taking human life.

The Bible doesn't forbid all taking of life.

Way back in Genesis, long before the Ten Commandments were given,

God spoke to Noah after the Flood.

The human race had been wiped out by the Flood because of its violence—only Noah and his family were saved by God in the ark.

God spoke to Noah and re-established his covenant between self and people.

One thing he said to Noah was this:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

So if someone sheds the blood of another human being, God is not going to put the murderer to death. He has appointed other people to do that.

This is the biblical underpinnings of the state, of civil government.

This is what the Apostle Paul refers to as the power of the sword.

God has given the civil magistrate the power of the sword.

This allows for things like law enforcement, the military.

This is where taking a life in self-defense would be located, under laws of state.

I'm not going to get into a discussion about capital punishment is justified or when war is justified, or lethal self-defense, but simply to point out that the sixth commandment is not a prohibition against the state taking life in every case.

But apart from these specific powers granted to the state, the sixth commandment prohibits all other taking of human life.

So what are the specific implications and of this commandment?

It forbids harming another person's body through violence or assault—
or even threatening to harm them or kill them.

In the law of Moses, assault was considered a violation of the sixth commandment.

The penalty for assault was severe. It was eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

Kidnapping and rape were also violations of the sixth commandment because of the threats and violence done to the victim. In fact, the law of Moses considered these such heinous crimes that the penalty for both was death.

Negligent homicide was considered breaking the sixth commandment.

The example in the law of Moses is a bull goring a person to death.

The laws says that if the bull has always been docile and it snaps and kills someone,

then the owner is not held responsible. That would be accidental death. But if it's known to be an aggressive animal and the owner doesn't keep it penned up and it gets loose and kills someone, that's a capital offense.

Now in that case the law of Moses also allowed the victim's family to demand instead the death penalty any monetary compensation they wanted.

They could demand all the person's land and property for the negligent homicide..

The reason I mention these examples is to show how absolutely stern the law is about taking human life.

It's not just premeditated murder, but even threats and violence, even negligent acts which lead or could lead to the death of a person.

Driving drunk is a violation of the sixth commandment.

Even if you don't actually crash and maim someone or kill them, you're showing a callous indifference to the lives of other people, and your own life.

And speaking of your own life, this commandment is a prohibition against suicide. The pain that would drive a person to suicide—physical or mental or combo—that should move us to the deepest sympathy.

I'm sure some of you have contemplated taking your life.

Probably everyone here has friends or loved ones who have tried or succeeded. But killing yourself is wrong. We need to say these things sometimes.

And there's one other I've got to say.

Even as I say this I feel like I'm walking on eggshells.

It's not that I have any doubt or uncertainty about speaking the truth—but I'm wary of our current political climate and cultural climate.

And I'm wary of how Americans have become polarized so that certain issues are linked automatically with politics. Even with those risks, this needs to be said:

The sixth commandment is a prohibition against taking the life of the unborn.

I know that's a painful statement to people in this room—directly and indirectly.

But please stay with me.

Because we come here on Sunday morning to gather around good news.

If the command cuts you, it's God doing the cutting. It's a healing cut.

So I want you to hang with me. Because I want you to hear the good news.

But first, let's go deeper. We've talked about the act of murder, let's consider

MP#2 The heart of murder

This is a step you have to take with all the commandments.

They are about more than the bare act.
Most people could say: I've never murdered anybody.
But the real question is what's underneath?
What's the source of the actions? What's the motivation?

Listen to how Jesus himself answered it. In Sermon on the Mount he said:
You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother
Hold on a minute. That's quite a jump.
Jesus goes from the act of murder, stabbing or strangling someone,
something very few people do to something everybody does—get angry.
But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who insults his brother is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

When we want to prop up our own goodness we often point out that we haven't done really bad things. I'm not a bad person. I've never killed anyone.
But then Jesus unpacks the real depth of the sixth commandment
If you've hated someone, if you've been enraged at or bitter toward someone.
If you've denigrated someone with your words—that's the heart of murder—and it's liable to God's judgment.

If you're going to take Jesus seriously you need to ask yourself:

Why do I hate some people?
A good place to look is the very first murder in the Bible. Cain and Abel.
There's an interesting commentary on that murder in NT, in 1 John.
Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.
And why did he murder him? (That's the question.)
Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

We hate people who expose us. We hate people who just by being themselves and in our presence, they show things about ourselves we don't want to be seen.
They remind us of things about ourselves that we don't want to face.
Jesus was not crucified for being good.
He wasn't killed because he was loving.
He was killed because he was holy. His holiness exposed the people around him.
Everybody who encountered Jesus either moved toward him, admitted their sinfulness and need for mercy—or was repulsed by him and hated him.
Are there people in your life you can't stand?
It's probably because they remind you of evil things about yourself that you don't

want to face or admit.

I hate that guy, he dominates every conversation.

But if I was honest, the reason I hate him is that I want to talk.

He has to give his opinion about everything and everybody listens to him instead of listening to me. Exposed.

Another big one is we hate people who hurt us, or who hurt people we care about.

Another murder in the Bible. King David had a daughter named Tamar.

He also had a son named Amnon. But they were half-siblings.

David had them with two different wives.

Amnon became obsessed with his half-sister Tamar. And finally, with the help of an evil friend of his, he was able to get her alone and he sexually violated her.

She was devastated, humiliated and shamed.

For various reasons David himself did nothing. He didn't uphold the law.

He tried to sweep it under the rug. Everything about this story is horrible.

Tamar had a brother named Absalom. Not a half-brother, a full-brother.

He was furious about what Amnon had done to Tamar, and he was furious at his father the king for doing nothing, so he went out that day and killed Amnon. No. Absalom quietly fumed and hated for two full years—then murdered Amnon.

We know there are going to be unpleasant people.

There are going to be jerks at work, and we know how to deal with them.

But for everybody there is a line. When that is crossed and real harm is done,

it's no longer a matter of toleration, it's hatred.

Heart of murder is: I want you out of my life.

That can be hiring a hit man or it can be the silent treatment.

That can be assault or it can be an icy heart. I don't want you alive any more.

Who is that in your life?

I bet for a lot of people, it's relatives. And particularly it's often a relatives you

don't share blood with, in-laws, stepmothers, someone married into family—

Over the years this person has hurt you and become an individual you hate to see

at family gatherings. There are no guns and knives, but inside of you, you

just want this person gone.

If I can't have you physically gone, I'll have you emotionally gone.

All of us have hated, all of us have written people off, all of us have denigrated

other people and feel our lives would be better if they were gone.

The law of God condemns and convicts us, but it does so to give us forgiveness

and hope. So let's look at . . .

MP#3 The redemption of murder

Several years ago there was an article written by a New York music critic. He was at jazz club one evening. There weren't any big names scheduled to play. But as he sat there listening to the band he noticed the trumpet player.

And he thought to himself, that looks like Wynton Marsalis.

So he asked a stranger sitting next to him: Is that Wynton Marsalis?

And the man scoffed at him, Of course not. Why would he be here?

Well, what no one in the audience knew was that is was Wynton Marsalis.

The back story was that he was in a difficult time in life, he was depressed, he was overweight, he had pulled back from limelight, playing incognito.

So the band played and they got to a song that ended with a trumpet solo—so this mystery trumpeter who nobody knew but who looked like a depressed overweight Wynton Marsalis stepped forward and as he started playing the place got quiet, something special was happening . . .

And then just as he reached the dramatic climax, someone's cell phone went off, and the spell was broken. Some people laughed, some started talking, the clink of glasses, the noise of the bar. He stopped playing.

The New York music critic jotted down on a napkin: Magic Ruined.

But the trumpeter kept standing there at the microphone.

And then he raised the trumpet to his lips and he replayed the cell phone ring note for note. And then he played again. And then he improvised.

And the crowd got quiet again. And through his artistry and skill he brought it back to the very place where the song had been interrupted and then he finished it.

The place erupted in applause.

God is never surprised by events, like Wynton Marsalis was surprised by that ring tone. So from that perspective this is not a good sermon illustration.

But from the perspective of the crowd, what they saw, or heard, was something disruptive, something ugly, something that seemed irredeemable, magic ruined.

But the master artist took that thing, and he used it, and worked it, so that his end result was even more beautiful and amazing.

In the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter was arrested and brought before the Jewish ruling counsel. This was the governing body that sentenced Jesus to death.

The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

You killed Jesus. The man whose life was a masterpiece. The only man who ever lived whose every thought and word and action was motivated by love.

You beat, mocked, stripped and crucified that beautiful man.

You murdered him with your kangaroo court. Magic ruined. Music over.

But God, the master artist, took that murder and through it he brought resurrection from the dead, he brought about the death of death and eternal life. God took that murder and through it offers to every person who asks the gifts of repentance and forgiveness of sins through Jesus.

Who murdered Jesus? In the hymns and songs of the church this is a theme that is echoed over and over. I did. My sins murdered Jesus.

Was it for sins that I have done he groaned upon the tree?

It was my sins that held him there . . .

I wasn't there, but in my heart I have the same spirit of murder.

I have the same hatred of God's holiness exposing me.

And the proof of that is my anger and bitterness and hatred and disdain of other people who either expose me or hurt me.

But even though your sins killed him, God raised him from the dead.

And if you believe in him, he forgives all the evil and hateful things you've said and thought and done to other people.

Isn't that wonderful? You can be forgiven of your sins against other people.

You can be forgiven of your hate and violence.

But there's more that God can do. The master artist is not done.

He wants you not only forgiven but changed.

Here's how that happens.

When you know you've been forgiven that causes you to look at the people who've wronged you differently. You realize that even though you didn't do what they did, in your heart you could have. So you cut that person a little slack.

And that little move in your heart can turn into mercy.

And mercy can turn into love. And sometimes, not always, but sometimes, that love is returned and there is actual reconciliation.

Just as you were reconciled to Christ.

I've read you this story before, but please indulge me.

It's about something Charles Colson witnessed in an American penitentiary.

His ministry Prison Fellowship taught an 18-month class to inmates on biblical principles of repentance, restitution, and reconciliation.

One prisoner, Ron Flowers, was incarcerated for the murder of a young woman.

For 15 years he had maintained his innocence, but after this class, for the first time he admitted his crime, wrote to the victim's family, confessed what he had done, and began to pray they would forgive him.

The murdered girl's mother, a Mrs. Washington, was an angry woman. Once a year for 15 years she had made a point of writing a letter to the parole board, angrily demanding that they deny Ron Flowers a hearing.

The hatred in her own heart had grown murderous. She wanted this man gone. But then one week, she felt the Holy Spirit telling her to repent of her hatred and forgive this man. That very week she got Ron Flower's letter.

Colson describes what happened at that graduation ceremony in the prison. As Ron Flowers approached me for his certificate, out of the corner of my eye I saw a tall, stately woman rise from her seat among the visitors. Her name was Mrs. Washington, and she swept to the front, wrapped her arms around the inmate, and declared to everyone, "This young man is my adopted son." The place was electrified. I saw hardened criminals and tough corrections officials with tears in their eyes . . . Their tearful embrace at the graduation ceremony was the climax of a series of what can only be called miracles.

Only the supernatural grace of God could bring together a murderer and his victim's mother; only the resurrection power of Christ can create love where there once was hatred and revenge. I know that in my own power I could never have done what this woman did. And if a miracle can happen in prison, it can happen anywhere.

Jesus Christ was murdered so that murderers like us can be forgiven.