

WEEK 4 – ANGER, ADULTERY AND FORGIVENESS

MONDAY – I'm okay



1 Corinthians 11: 28 *Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.*

In the communion service we examine our hearts before we “eat of the bread and drink from the cup.” We don’t need to be faultless or perfect, but it is important to view our faults. If we are aware of any wrongdoing within our hearts and we are unrepentant or we laugh it off, then we have no place around the Lord’s table. At His table we are acknowledging our share in the cost of suffering to God for our redemption.

As we examine ourselves we will surely find that we are ‘not okay’. Jesus knew this and so presented the Sermon on the Mount to teach us how to live as His disciples. Before we look at this week’s verses, let us honestly assess where we are.

Is God first in your life?

“In everything you do, put God first” (Proverbs 3: 6). Not first in the compartment called church or religion – EVERYTHING. Work, sport, family. How about your thoughts?

If we were living how Jesus would have us live, we would be okay with living in glass houses. Where everyone can see how we live every moment of every day. Can you let the world see into your ‘house’ or are you glad to retreat behind bricks and doors – into privacy?

Reflection: If you are serious about putting God first in your life, then you need to stop, assess and pay attention to Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. Who or what is most important in your life right now?

And what are you wanting to hide?



Prayer: Lord, I know there are areas of my life, that are lacking Your direction. Even some things that I would rather hide. Help me to turn my face and heart to you. Teach me Lord in the way that I should go. AMEN

TUESDAY – But I can't



Matthew 5: 7-9 *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

Do you consider yourself to be an ethical person? Or morally good? Or pure of thought?

“Isn't it odd. We can only see our outsides, but nearly everything happens on the inside.” *The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse*, Charlie Mackesy...

...and therein lies the rub. If our thoughts could be seen on the outside, we may try harder at this ethical living.

Matthew 5: 17-41, the Sermon on the Mount, are the ethical teachings of Jesus. Today we look at these and say “Oh this is impossible.” But our decision to accept Jesus' calling to follow Him, puts us on the path of learning to live by His standards. Jesus knows how difficult this is

for us, but with the Spirit's help, it is our job to consciously strive to live into these teachings.

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest sermon ever preached, yet possibly the one that causes the most despair as it sounds so harsh and unattainable. Jesus teaches in prophetic hyperbole ie. intentional and obvious exaggeration, in order to stress the importance of the message. Should we gouge out our eye (Matthew 5: 29), NO but it is so important that we pay attention to what we see and think. We should make sure that what is on the inside is worthy of being seen.

What a blessing to be merciful, pure of heart and to be a peacemaker. This is what Jesus wants for us.



Prayer: Lord help me in my journey as I strive to live up to Your teaching. It does seem impossible, but may I have the determination to be pursue this purer life with all my heart. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Ripples



Matthew 5: 21-26

Matthew 5: 22 *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca' [derogatory term of contempt] is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Jesus quoted **Exodus 20: 13** *You shall not murder.*

Murder: well at least I am let off that one! I am not likely to do that! But Jesus greatly expanded this concept to include our THOUGHTS. And not just to do with murder but anger, hate, and contempt as well. Words can destroy others; and Jesus was saying that words can be as destructive as the actual act of murder. Words said in anger and hate can kill a person inside. Then He said that thoughts and feelings of anger and hate can destroy ourselves as well.

What we think and feel will come out and as those ripples go out in concentric circles they will touch all within our sphere. What effect

are your ripples having on those around you?

Jesus lived out what He was teaching – in fact He didn't wish to "kill" His enemies, He was willing to lay down His life for them.

N. T. Wright writes, "What's the alternative [to seething anger]? Jesus offers two remarkably specific, practical commands. Be reconciled; make friends....it's impossible until you look at Jesus.... Instead, he took the anger of his enemies within Israel, and of Israel's own enemies, the Romans, on to himself, and died under its load." (*Matthew for Everyone*). Jesus showed the way. Are you willing to let His Spirit keep reshaping your inner self to be like Him?



Prayer: Lord help me to examine my thinking. It is so easy to have destructive thoughts and words. Please reshape my thoughts and feelings in Your image. AMEN

THURSDAY – Jesus teaches faithfulness



Matthew 5: 27 & 28 *You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Jesus then takes up the thorny subject of adultery. We would do well to remind ourselves that the Lord did not shy away from topics we would rather not talk about – and neither should we. Should we hold ourselves and each other accountable in these areas? Or are we once again happy to retreat behind our closed doors?

Jesus is clearly talking about more than just physical actions. He is leading straight to the heart of faithfulness. An unfaithful heart causes deep hurt and brokenness. Jesus, yet again, is driving at our thoughts.

Reflection:

What is your response to the concept that by thinking it, you are committing it? And what is “it”?

Yes, there is a huge difference between the thought and the act. But Jesus views even the thought as unfaithful; as that thought can begin a journey.

If you dwell too long on those thoughts, your heart and mind will ultimately dictate what you do. (Adam Hamilton)

In His wisdom, Jesus knew the pain that these thoughts could lead to, and that is the point of the Sermon on the Mount: Learn a better way before you have to correct the problem.

Matthew 5: 29 *If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. **Jesus is saying don’t take it literally, take it seriously.***



Prayer: Lord I pray that even by my thoughts I may remain faithful to You and to those closest to me. Cleanse my mind and guide me towards purity of thought. AMEN

FRIDAY – Forgiveness



Romans 3: 23 & 24 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

We will fall short of these standards that Jesus sets. But God just expects a heart and mind that strives continuously to live up to them. He knows our thoughts; our goings in and out; He knows when we fall short. But by His grace we are forgiven.

When it comes to the sins and failings – admit them, face them and accept responsibility. Once we can do this, we can claim God's forgiveness. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1: 9).

Having stopped playing our games of pretending the wrongdoings do not exist, or calling them something else, or blaming others – Jesus offers us grace beyond measure. He still

loves us, forgives us, and treats us as if it never happened.

We don't doubt **God's** forgiveness but we struggle to forgive ourselves. Is this not a form of spiritual pride? Can we not just graciously accept all that is offered to us?

1 Peter 1:16 says "...for it is written: *Be holy, because I am holy.*" **This** level of perfection? If we can learn to abide in Jesus for a minute or two without sin, surely we can grow into this abiding perfection more and more. When we fail, let us not see ourselves as defeated, but striving for greater perfection just one day at a time. Let us claim the 'perfect cure' that our gracious Lord offers to us with love and thanksgiving.



Prayer: Lord I confess my sins and failures to You and thank you for Your forgiveness. Help me to strive each hour and each day for that greater level of perfection. Continue Your work of holiness in my life, O God. AMEN