

The Kind of Human God Wants

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Date: 11 August 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, you'll remember when you were a child, you probably had chores at home, right? Most children have chores at home and you might remember back to that time.

You don't have to remember if you are a child currently or if you are living under your parents' roof still, you probably still have chores to do at home. Maybe your parents have given you a list of things that need to be done every day or every week.

Wash the dishes, tidy your room, put up your hand if you've got a list of chores to do at home. Put up your hand, something like, okay, some husbands also putting up their hands.

Now, when you're an adult, hopefully you don't need a list of chores as much, right? You don't need someone to tell you and chase after you to wash the dishes and tidy your room like you did when you were a kid.

And the reason is because when you're an adult, you actually start wanting your room to be tidy. You want clean dishes to use when you make supper. And so even if you don't enjoy it, you do it without being told to.

[1 : 13] You don't need rules anymore as much because now you actually want what the rules intend and always intended in the first place. And that's one of the signs of maturity.

That comes with maturity. Not needing rules as much, but actually wanting what the rules have always intended. It's the same with many laws in our country. You know, when you were young and reckless, the speed limit was just a restriction.

But now you're older and you realize actually you want not to drive fast because you want safe roads for you and your loved ones. So as you mature, you actually want what the rules intend, so much so that you don't need to be told to do them.

Well, do you know exactly the same applies to God's law? And what God has always planned for humans is not to live by a list of rules, but actually to want what His rules have always intended. And that's really the progression of God's people from immaturity to maturity in the Bible. It's going from a people who need a list, you know, the Old Testament laws, to in the New Testament, the kind of people that God has always wanted, are people who actually want what the law is always intended without being told.

[2 : 36] And that's what the prophets foresaw, that God would write His law on people's hearts. That's what it means. And that is the type of human that Jesus claims here in the Sermon on the Mount that He has come to earth to make.

We saw last week, the end of last week's passage, Matthew 5 verse 20, He says, For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

You remember when He said that? But what He means by that is not that you keep rules better than the scribes and Pharisees, but that you actually learn to want, you go beyond the rules, and learn to want what the rules were always about, so you don't need the rules.

And so that's where we left off last week. This week, Jesus now starts to describe what that looks like in a person's life. What it looks like to actually want what the rules have always intended.

The intent behind the rules. And He does that by taking six Old Testament laws, and for each of them, uncovering God's intent behind them.

[3 : 47] To show us what it means to be the kind of people God has always intended for us to be. To show you what it means to be the kind of person that God made you to be.

And He begins in the first three that we're going to cover today, and then we'll look at the second three next week. But the first three, He begins by having us look at how we relate to the people who are closest to us.

That's where it starts. And He begins with the law against murder. The sixth commandment. Now, what's interesting is, now why does He begin with that?

Well, did you know a very small minority of murders actually happen by strangers? Statistics show that only about 10 to 20% of murders that happen, happen by people that the victim doesn't know. The rest of them, the large majority of murders, are by a person the victim knows. And so what's behind murder? Well, that's what Jesus wants to get into now.

[5 : 07] He starts here by saying, You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder. Now, I don't think anyone in this room will disagree with that being a good law for society.

No society disagrees with that. No civilized society doesn't have that as part of their laws. Secular, religious, it doesn't matter. Everybody agrees it's wrong to murder.

But Jesus doesn't leave it there. He goes on. Because while you may not have murdered anyone in your life, that doesn't mean you've actually kept the intent God has behind that law, which Jesus now gets into.

And now it gets much closer to home. From verse 22, So that's very shocking to hear, isn't it?

It's a very different way of looking at the law. I mean, you can have kept the law, and that's fine. You can feel good about that. But the moment Jesus uncovers it and goes beneath the law to see what's underneath it, then suddenly we start to feel bad because it's pointing at each of us.

[6 : 26] What Jesus is doing here by using such extreme language is He wants to break our categories of what we think is okay behavior, acceptable behavior, versus what we think is bad behavior and, you know, worthy of hell, worthy of being cut off from the kingdom, cut off from eternal life.

That's what He's talking about here. Now, we know that murder is bad, right? Murder is bad because what you do when you murder someone is that you are deciding that they shouldn't exist anymore.

You're taking that judgment upon yourself. You're being the decider of that person's existence. You're deciding that that person is not worthy to live.

But, you know, you don't have to murder them to treat them that way. In how you speak to them. In how you think about them. And God's intent is to create a people to populate His world who not only don't murder each other, but who actually value each other enough that they wouldn't even think of murdering each other.

Which starts with how we think about each other and how we talk to each other. And that kind of value is also seen in our relationships and how much we actually value the relationships we have with the people around us.

[7 : 56] The people that God has put into our lives. How much value do we put on those relationships? How much do we invest in and protect those relationships? Well, that's exactly what Jesus goes on to talk about next.

Have a look from verse 23. So, if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.

First, go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come back and offer your gift. See what he's saying here? He's saying you can't pretend to have a good relationship with God if you're not seeking right relationship with people.

You can't go to the altar and be religious, go to church, and give your gift at the altar, or today's version, sing songs of worship, and pretend that you have this great relationship with God when the people that are made in his image, you don't care about relationship with them.

You can't pretend to have a good relationship with God if you're not seeking right relationship with the people who are made in his image. And this is a concept that appears over and over again in the New Testament.

[9 : 12] You can't claim to love God if you hate your brother or sister. And so, Jesus says, leave your gift there in front of the altar.

First, go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come back and offer your gift. Now, I want you to understand what an unreasonable demand this sounds like to a Jew.

To go to the altar to give a worship sacrifice, most Jews had to travel for about a week from their home village to the temple in Jerusalem to give this offering.

So, what Jesus is proposing here is if you've got a problem with someone back home, and you've come on a week's journey to Jerusalem to offer, you can't offer it yet. You've got to leave it there.

Go back, take another week's journey back home, reconcile with this person, then come back, take another week's journey, and then only should you offer your gift. It's very extreme, the distance and the trouble that Jesus proposes we go to in order to reconcile relationships when they're not working properly.

[10:20] But that is the kind of human God wants. People who take all of their relationships that seriously.

How seriously do you take the relationships with people that God has put in your life? How much do you value the people God has put in your life?

Not just the people you choose to be your friends, but the people God has put in your life in church, as your Christian brothers and sisters, but also the people God has put in your life at work, the people God has put in your life at school, in your class, maybe even the people you don't like or you don't get along with.

Those aren't qualifications here. Jesus isn't saying these things just for the people you like, but any kind of relationships you have, how much do you value relationships with the people who are made in God's image, who He's put in your life?

How do you speak about them to other people? Because that shows how much you value someone. How do you think about them? And what lengths are you willing to go to to reconcile when there's a problem in your relationship with them?

[11:44] Are you willing to do that or do you just leave it? Because that is the easier thing to do, isn't it? Just let bygones be bygones, never talk to them again, avoid them, and leave it.

But that's never the solution in the Bible. That's not the kind of people that God wants to inhabit this world. He wants people who value relationships enough that they go to the nth degree, they go to any extent, anything within their power to reconcile.

Now that doesn't always mean that you'll successfully reconcile with the person if they're not going to want to reconcile either. But have you gone, have you made an effort? What lengths have you gone to to reconcile?

And, you know, how do you think and treat just the day-to-day people you come across out there in the world? People made in God's image.

How much do you value them? What happens when you have a run-in with someone out there, a stranger? You know, I must admit, every now and again, I have a run-in with someone out there, like someone who's parked the wrong way or someone who never stopped.

[12:56] They never stop at this intercedent. They stop straight outside St. Mark's. Nobody ever stops there. You know, and often I'll have a bit of a run-in or an altercation with someone. It won't get bad.

I won't swear or anything, but I'll roll down my window and have some sarky words to say or like some smart comeback. And I think I'm very clever and I drive away and every single time, I just, I feel ugly.

You know? I don't know about you, if you, maybe you're a much better person than me, but when you maybe have run-ins with people like that and you rub up against people and you say something in such a way that just expresses that you don't value this person, I do that.

But every time I do, I just feel, I feel bad. I don't want to be that person. I don't want to be a person like that. I don't want God's world to have people like that.

And yet I see myself being someone like that and I feel bad. But then instead of feeling guilty about it, which is what we tend to do, you know what happens?

[14:07] I feel excited that Jesus has come to change me to not be that person. When I slip up, when I don't treat people the way that I should, instead of just wallowing in guilt, I feel excited that, I feel excited about the gospel.

I feel excited that Jesus came here so that I can be different, so that I don't have to be that person anymore, that I can change. And that is the first intent under the law that Jesus is exposing here. The kind of person that He came to make us. The second law that He opens up is the law of adultery. Again, one that gets to the hearts beneath our defenses.

Look at verse 27. You have heard that it was said, do not commit adultery. Now just as He quoted from the Ten Commandments earlier, by the way, do not murder was the Sixth Commandment, this is the Seventh Commandment.

Do not commit adultery. Basically that means don't have sex with someone you're not married with or sexual relations outside of marriage. Now, at least with married people not having sex with people they're not married to, even secular society agrees that's a good law.

[15 : 43] And again, in all civilized nations, even those that had no contact with God's law, they all agree that's a bad thing from people who have committed in a marriage to then go and fool around with other people.

Everybody agrees that's wrong. But again, Jesus doesn't stop here. He goes deeper and He takes us to the very cause of what causes adultery in the first place.

And what we see here is that it doesn't just apply to married people. So don't go to sleep if you're not married because what Jesus shows us is that this command actually applies to us all. Look at verse 28.

But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

And again, if you're a woman, don't think that this doesn't apply to you. Jesus is addressing men here, but the same principle applies. It starts in the heart, how we think.

[16 : 50] Now again, Jesus is not giving us more rules. That's not what the New Testament is about. Don't make that mistake. Don't think that the New Testament is just giving us a list of more rules to follow. It's not that.

But what Jesus is doing here, He's aiming to change us so that our hearts never even start the process that ends up in adultery.

Because it is a process. And it's a process that can begin very subtly. Trust me, I've personally known people who have been caught in the sin of adultery and when I talk to them, it always started very innocuous, very seemingly innocently, very subtly.

It can begin just with something as simple as a second look. The second look. You know what I'm talking about? The second look. In fact, the original language, more literally, this verse says, I tell you, everyone who goes on looking to commit lust.

Everyone who goes on looking in order to commit lust. That's what Jesus is saying. Who goes on looking. Not just looking once, seeing, oh, that's a beautiful woman.

[18 : 09] But then you decide to carry on. guys, you know what I'm talking about, don't you? The second look. The lingering look.

The look where suddenly things start to happen in your mind. That's what Jesus is talking about here. The second look that starts the snowball. Starts off a little snow, you know how the snowball effect is, you know, a little snowball rolling down the hill seems harmless, but then as it goes, it gathers speed, it gathers momentum, it gets bigger and bigger until you can't stop it.

And that's how lust works. We've seen it in the Old Testament reading today in David's life. King David. A man after God's own heart. This was a good guy, seemingly.

And yet look what happened. He looked and he saw Bathsheba and he lingered. He carried on looking. He made plans.

Eventually he had sex with her. She fell pregnant. He had to then conspire to get her husband out of the picture and eventually murdered him.

[19 : 20] You see how the snowball effect works? Starts with just David having a nice day and having a look over his city. That's how it started. And it ended with conspiracy and murder.

And that's David. The Bible says a man after God's own heart and yet a sinner like us all. And if he is not immune, I can promise you neither are you.

Neither are you. Don't think you're above that. Don't think that you're beyond that. Don't think that that'll never happen to me. I'm in control of my thoughts. No, you're not.

Sex and the sexual urge is much stronger than we think. And it will overcome us unless we take decisive steps against it.

And that's exactly what Jesus goes in to illustrate in no uncertain terms. How we must take decisive steps against these things in our life before they snowball. So he says in verse 29, if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.

[20 : 23] For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body that your whole body goes into hell. What is he saying here? Well, he's not teaching us that we must literally do surgery on ourselves and

gouge out our eyes.

He's using this extreme language for another reason. And the reason he's not saying this is the solution to lust is because we know full well a blind person can still lust.

Right? So it's not the outward things you need to do. But he's saying the point is how far would you go to get rid of the things in your life that make you unfit for God's kingdom?

What decisive steps. You know, Job was a very godly man, one of the most godly men we'll find in the Bible. And he said this in Job 31 verse 1, I have made a covenant with my eyes that I would not look at a young woman.

[21 : 36] I have made a covenant with my eyes. This is a man who knows the power of sin. This is a man who understands how things start. Godly, more godly than any of us probably Job is, and yet he knows that his sin is powerful.

he knows the power of his sexual urges, and so he says, I've made a covenant with my eyes. This is the kind of human God wants, you see. Not just someone who's good on the outside, but someone who can control what happens on the inside, where no one else can see.

And those are typically the parts of our life that we don't pay much attention to because no one can see them, so we kind of let them do what they want, those instincts. And yet, that's the kind of person God wants, is the person who takes as seriously on the inside what's going on on the inside than what's going on on the outside.

Do you? Do you take as seriously what's going on in your heart as you do with the behavior on the outside that people can see?

Behind closed doors? Late at night? When everyone else is in bed and you're on your computer?

What's going on in your heart?

[23 : 01] Well, the kind of person God wants in this world is the person who, like Job, makes a covenant with your eyes. Are there habits, perhaps, in your life that you still need to cut off and you know?

There are habits in the way you think, men, women, whatever. Habits in the secret place that no one else sees but you know are not fit for a person of God, are not the kind of person that God wants and not the kind of person you want to be.

Are there habits that you still need to cut off in your thought patterns? Do you still need to make a covenant with your eyes? God wants to do you need to do you know?

Well, the next law Jesus chooses is actually not one of the Ten Commandments but it's a technical law about divorce. It's one of the smaller kind of side laws of the Old Testament.

He says in verse 31, it was also said, whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce. Now the reason that Jesus chooses this rather arbitrary little law out of Deuteronomy as the next law he wants to dig into is because in his day there was quite a heated debate over the interpretation of this law and specifically rabbis were arguing about when a man is allowed to divorce.

[24 : 35] So some were saying based on this law you can divorce just when you're tired with your wife. You can cast her off. There was a big school of thought in Jesus' day that said for any reason you can divorce your wife even if she burns the food, one rabbi said.

That's enough grounds to divorce her. Others took a harder line and they said no, it's only sexual immorality, things like that. And so Jesus weighs in because the problem of how people in his day were reading this particular law is that they were reading it as permission to divorce when in fact that wasn't the point of it at all, right?

The point of this law, the only reason God allowed this law, the certificate of divorce, is to protect the right of divorced women. It was to ensure that a bad situation doesn't get made worse by a woman being cast off and having no rights in her community and in that day, in Jesus' day, if you were divorced as a woman and you didn't actually have any certification, your life was ruined. You couldn't get remarried, you had no say in society and so this law was made to protect the rights of women, which was actually very advanced for its time, not to encourage divorce, but that's how people were using it.

They were seeing it as, oh, God says it's okay to divorce and Jesus was like, no, that's not the point. They were missing the whole point in how they were reading this particular law.

[26 : 08] They were missing God's entire intent for marriage. They were missing the intent of the law. It's like, to illustrate, it's like in South Africa, according to law, if I'm driving my car and someone runs in front of me into the road and I hit them and I kill them, I'm not liable for murder because it

was an accident, right?

The law protects me from being prosecuted because I was just driving my car and someone came into the road and it was their fault. And so I'm not prosecuted for murder.

And so there's a law like that, but just because that law doesn't exist doesn't encourage me to seek out people in the road to hit now, right? It doesn't mean that just because I won't be charged for murder that I must now look for people running in the road and veer off and try to get them.

That's not what the law is there for. And that's how people were reading the law about divorce, you see? And that's why Jesus was saying, no, that's not the point. That's not what it's about.

That's how they were using the law, basically saying, what can I get away with? And they were looking in God's law to answer the question, what can I get away with? That is the wrong question to ask.

[27 : 21] The right question is, what does God want? What does God actually want? What is his intent behind this law? And it's, I must tell you, it's so sad how many Christians still treat the Bible like that.

Look at it and go, what is allowed? Often, as a pastor, I've been asked, am I allowed, as a Christian, am I allowed to do this or that? And immediately, you know, that's the wrong question.

You shouldn't be asking, what am I allowed to do? You should be asking, what does God intend for me to do? How does God intend for me to live? Not, can I get away with this?

And so here, Jesus makes it very clear what God's intent for marriage is in verse 32. But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in the case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery.

And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. And so what Jesus is doing, he's taking us back to God's intent for marriage, which is to be a lifelong, inseparable commitment that cannot be undone just because you get tired of your spouse or you fall out of love, which is the most ridiculous concept because love is not a feeling.

[28 : 48] Love is a decision. Love between a husband and a wife who covenant themselves together in a relationship is a decision to love this person no matter how I feel. That's what you do when you get married.

You promise to love someone and commit to them irrespective of what happens. Sickness, health, richer, poorer. When you feel it, when you don't feel it, it's a commitment.

It's a decision. When you covenant with someone, you are committing to love them come what may. That is what God intended for marriage. You know, I've done a fair bit of marriage counseling as a pastor and I can tell you right away the single biggest key to a successful marriage is to know there is no exit route.

To know that you're in this for life. When both spouses know that, when they don't consider that there's an exit route in the marriage, no matter how difficult that marriage is, no matter what problem it's going through, it can survive and they can get through it because they're both in it for the long haul.

There's no way out and so they both put their all into making it work and it does. It's the single biggest key to a successful marriage is no exit route. Commitment.

[30 : 06] That is the kind of person God wants. A person who commits to what they covenant to. A person who stays the course and commits in the relationships that they've committed to.

Just like God committed to the people he covenanted with. God covenanted with people when he makes a covenant with people.

It's an amazing thing in the Bible. When he makes a covenant with people, what he's doing, he's committing to them such that he has no exit route.

That there's no way for him and he binds himself to them. There's no way for him to get out of this commitment that he's made. And that's what took him to the cross. To die on the cross.

Because there was no other way. There was no way God could just say, you know what? Ah, leave it. God committed. When he covenant with people, God showed us what true commitment is and that commitment took him to the cross.

[31 : 11] And you know, that's actually the secret that enables us to be any of this that Jesus is describing here. It's that God was that for us first.

Each of these things. And only that can enable us to be the kind of people that Jesus describes here in the Sermon on the Mount. When we realize how God was that for us.

And that's why only Jesus can make us into these people that we read about here. Because it's only through a real experience of God doing these things for us that we can do them for others. And that's why Jesus went on from the Sermon on the Mount eventually to die on the cross. So that he could bring us into a kind of relationship with God that will change us into these people.

People who realize that because God has traversed the distance between heaven and earth to reconcile our relationship with him, even though we never deserved that, we'll now honor that by going whatever distance it takes to reconcile with others, even if they don't deserve that.

[32 : 32] To be a people who realize that because Jesus has given us his very righteousness to make us fit for his kingdom, we'll now be resolved to cut out of our lives anything that still isn't fit for his kingdom.

And to be a people who realize that because God has kept his commitment to us, even when it hurt him, we'll keep our commitment to others no matter what. That is the kind of human God wants you to be.

And I think you want that as well. But you can only be that. That will only happen by being in a real daily relationship with the God who showed you what that is like.

And that is the very reason Jesus came to this earth, to die, to bring you into that relationship, to change you, to be this kind of person. Will you follow him?

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your plan of salvation, not just to save us from our sins, but to transform us into the kind of humans you have always planned to be in this world.

[33 : 45] Lord Jesus, we worship and thank you that you went the distance, so committed to your people that you died for us. You gave us your righteousness so that we can be different, we can be new people, we can be changed.

Help us to get on board with your plan to transform us. And through your word, would you do your work on us and slowly but surely create us to be the kinds of people you describe here and help us as a church community to help each other to be those people in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[35 : 06] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.