

I. Set Up

A. Welcome to week three of our study of the Sermon on the Mount. This series is the third part in our year-long exploration of Renewal. In the fall we turned to Romans 12 to focus on personal renewal; in the Winter we turned to the Book of Acts to think about church renewal. We are now focusing on the Sermon on the Mount to think about Community Renewal.

II. Intro.

A. A couple years ago, I asked a friend – a bright guy with two Ivy League degrees who had spent his career in finance on Wall Street – if he could explain the disruption of 2007 and 2008.

1. Over the previous months I'd been asking him economic questions because it did not seem to me that the market acted in very rational ways. During one of these discussions I asked, "can you explain the crash of 2007 to me?" (By the way, I learned from him that if I wanted to sound like I knew what I was talking about, I should refer to the crash of 2008 as the crash of 2007 because that is when it started).

2. So, I asked, "Can you explain the crash of 2007 to me?" And he just looked at me. And after a pause, I asked again. And he didn't say anything. And so, I asked, "do you understand what happened?" He said 'Yes.'

3. Can you explain it? He said yes.

4. So, what's the problem?

5. Well, he said, I am trying to figure out how long it will take to explain it to you.

6. Touché.

7. He eventually said he would need at least an hour, maybe two. So I invited him to a Cubs game and he explained it over several hours. And his explanation was very helpful. More than a little unsettling, but helpful.

B. I share that to say, someone asking, "Can you explain the Sermon on the Mount?" is like them asking: Can you explain what happened in 2007, or, can you explain the Middle East?

C. The reality is, there are ten second answers to those questions. :

1. In 2007 the market crashed because a lot of speculative real-estate loans had been bundled and sold without an appreciation for their risk. When the housing market cooled off they sank a number of institutions.

2. The Middle East is a tense part of the world because you have different ethnic and national groups making historical and religious claims to the same land.

D. But those answers generally lead to follow up questions, which require leaving the shallow end of the pool to explain. And that can take hours.

E. And while people are not satisfied with ten second answers, they are not interested in two hour ones.

F. The ten second explanation of the Sermon on the Mount is that it is the greatest sermon ever given by the greatest person who ever lived. It sets out the radical vision and values of Jesus, which are grounded in a set of claims about who He is, about what God is going to do and about how we should live.

G. The challenge is, not only does he say some very unsettling things – what he is says is so profound and layered that it keeps unfolding the longer you look at it.

H. Indeed, if ever there was a topic that deserved an additional two hours it's the Sermon on the Mount. But don't panic. I will stay within my socially accepted restraints of 35 minutes, hoping that you will invest personal and small group study time to go deeper.

I. Indeed, hoping that you are listening to this sermon in your car and as you exercise or whenever you might otherwise be listening to a podcast or have the news on.

### III. OK, week three. Matthew 5:17.

A. In week one we were in the Beatitudes – rehearsing Jesus's radically disorienting list of blessings and curses, which I said:

1. Was Jesus 101, was jarring, demanded reflection and only made sense in light of eternity

B. In week two the focus was Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus talks about being salt and light.

C. Today we arrive at his comments about the law. He introduces the topic saying:

**D. V17: Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;**

1. The Old Testament – the Hebrew Scriptures – had three sections: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (wisdom literature).

2. The Law (what the Jews called the Torah) refers both:

- a) to the first five books of the Old Testament – which were written by Moses and also called The Pentateuch.

- b) And to the legal framework - the specific rules that unfolded out of the Ten Commandments and beyond.

3. The Prophets refers to the writings of the prophets – those people called by God to speak on his behalf - that are found in the Bible.

- a) We have five major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel – these are long books.

- b) And 12 minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum – there were twelve in all. They are called the minor prophets, not because they were not less important, but because they were shorter.

**E. Jesus said, Do not think that I have come to abolish – to dismiss or replace the Law and Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.**

**F. 18. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen,”**

1. The King James says, “not a jot or tittle” – which is code for a period or comma, a dotted “i” or crossed “t.”

**G. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen,” will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.**

**H. 19: Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

**I. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

1. We dislike the Pharisees because we see them through Jesus eye’s – we see them not just as religious rule keepers (misdirected busy bodies), but also as self-righteous and self-important scolds. In the first century their reputation was much higher than it is today. The pharisees were those who were trying the hardest to keep the law – to be good. To please God.

IV. Jesus says, the Pharisees are not doing enough. He then makes some specific comments about aspects of the Law – working his way down the second tablet of the Ten Commandments:

A. In verse 21 he comments on murder, noting that they had been told not to commit murder. But he says: if you get angry, you’re already in trouble.

B. In verses 27-32, he talks about adultery, noting that if you lust for someone other than your spouse, you already deserve “the fires of hell.”

1. In other words, his comments on the first two situations makes it clear that it’s not just our actions that matter, but also our heart.

C. In verses 33-37 we get his treatment on keeping our word – he talks about oaths, encouraging us to not play dishonest games with our commitments.

1. That is, not to get all wrapped up in the letter of the law, but to keep to the Spirit.

2. and to realize how limited we are in our ability to keep some of them.

D. And then in verse 38 – 42, he has a number of things to say about justice – which ends with his radical call to sacrifice for the sake of others.

1. I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup> If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

V. I want to make three observations about this passage. It struck me that each deserves two hours and that my thirty-minute overview may confuse you or get me in trouble. If that happens – if you end up confused, and especially if you end up mad - be sure to direct your emails to your campus pastor.

VI. Number One: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus celebrates Law.

A. That is to say two things:

1. First, he affirms the idea of timeless, objective standards and universal truths.
  2. And second, he affirms a specific set of laws – those given to the Jews (and later to us) via Moses on Mount Sinai.
- B. As you may know, there are all kinds of laws. We have Constitutional laws, civil laws and State regulations. Theologians have a category called Natural Laws - which does not refer to laws of nature, like gravity, but to moral observations that can be made based on creation.
- C. As you know, we have all kinds of laws. We not only have so many laws that we have laws on top of laws, and laws that contradict other laws, and laws that people have forgotten about. We have categories of laws that few people understand.
- D. Our focus here – the specific set of laws Jesus is referring to when he says, I have not come to undermine the Law and prophets but to fulfill them, is the law found in the Old Testament. And even more specifically – to the moral law found in the Old Testament.
- E. There are actually three types of Laws in the Hebrew Scriptures:
1. Moral laws – which deal with moral issues, like those he comments on here: murder, adultery and lying.
  2. There are civic laws in the Old Testament – which do not apply to us. They were written for the Jewish people living during the period in which God was their King. We do not live in a theocracy. We are living in a republic:
  3. The third category was Ceremonial. These laws, which deal with the sacrificial system and the Temple – and fill up the Book of Leviticus - also no longer apply to us.
- F. There are a couple things in play here for the first point – the idea of Law generally and the specific laws Jesus was talking about. Let me focus on the first point. I want you to see that Jesus affirms the idea that there are universal, eternal, objective rules for life.
1. These are not suggestions. These are not guidelines. These are not arbitrary. These are not subject to a vote.
  2. These are timeless standards that come from God. And the implication is that they grow out of his nature. They are not fluid. They are eternal realities and, we do not break them, so much as we break ourselves against them.
- G. The suggestion is, these laws are a gift. That Good Laws are a good thing. They help us understand how things work. They map out reality.
1. If you lie, your life will stop working.
  2. If you sleep around, your marriage will unfold.
  3. These things do not kick in as quickly as some physical laws – if we touch something hot we will get burned. But they are true and God in his love tries to explain, this short cut is not a short cut. Do this and not that, and in ten years you will see why.
- H. Why am I am belaboring this point.
1. Well, for starters because it is unpopular. People do not like laws. People do not like the idea that they are restricted by anything.

2. And also because many misunderstand sin, they think that God has these arbitrary rules and if we break them, he will punish us. I think it is far more accurate to think that God's rules are ways a loving parent tries to keep precious children from hurting themselves.

I. But the real reason I am camped here is because there a lot of confusion surrounding rules right now - and things are changing quickly.

1. If I was giving this sermon ten years ago, I would have said:
  - a) When we moved out of the Middle Ages into Modernity, we moved from the idea of universal truth revealed by God (and guided by tradition) into the idea of universal truth established by reason and science.
  - b) And when we moved out of Modernity into Postmodernity, we moved away from the idea of universal truth into a realm of personal truth - where people were free to affirm whatever they wanted to affirm.
    - (1) Where we no longer talked about truth, instead we talked about "your truth" and "my truth."
2. But in the last few years the rules about rules have been changing quickly:
  - a) Some of what is in circulation today is a belief that truth is relative, and we are free to believe whatever we want to believe.
  - b) But the new vibe – what some are calling Postmodernity 2 – is rolling out a new set of rules. And while there is some lip service about the idea that we are free to believe whatever we want to believe – there is also a sense that if you do not believe what I believe, you should be cancelled.

J. I am not interested in unpacking culture in this sermon – I am simply noting:

1. This is a confusing moment full of a lot of confused people who are making confusing claims.
2. And, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus affirms both the idea of a stable set of rules, but also a specific set of rules – those we find in the Ten Commandments and the rest of the "law and prophets."

## VII. Number Two: Jesus highlights our Sin.

- A. Number one – Jesus Celebrates Law. Number two – Jesus highlights our sin.
- B. One of the main purposes of the law is to convict us of sin.
- C. Theologians often talk about the three purposes of the Law:
  1. It has a civil function. That is, to restrain evil. The law cannot change our heart, but if it is backed by a civil code, it can help limit behavior.
  2. Secondly, it provides a path we can try to follow. It advertises the way we should live.
  3. But the big purpose – and it is on display in the Sermon on the Mount, is to help us realize we are broken, that we are sinners and we are not able to earn God's favor, so we must be rescued.
    - a) One of the key things the law does is provide us with a clear, objective declaration of God's standards. Lacking that, we are inclined to think we are doing pretty well.

b) We judge ourselves on the basis of our intentions. We judge others on the basis of what they do. We come out ahead. But Jesus makes it clear that it's our heart that matters and it has to be perfect.

(1) This is different from what Aristotle taught. He taught that if we can control our actions, we improve our heart – that the outside determines the inside.

(2) And this is the way a lot of us think. If I can just change my behavior, then I can change who I am.

(3) The Pharisees were in this camp.

(4) Jesus says: no, the inside determines the outside. In Matthew 15:10, he says: "Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them." V 18: The things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."

c) *Jesus makes it clear, God is concerned with our heart and it needs to be perfect. And according to the if / then framework of the law, we are sunk.*

D. The last few verses in this passage are designed to make it clear that we are in trouble.

1. If you are not thinking you are in trouble when Jesus says – it's not just murder, it's anger; it's not just adultery it's lust; it's not just our actions it's our heart, the last line should leave no doubt.

**2. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

3. Jesus says, you have got to try harder than the Pharisees – and that hardly seems possible.

VIII. Number Three: Finally, Jesus points to himself.

A. Jesus celebrates Law; Jesus highlights our sin; Jesus points to himself.

B. This section starts with Christ's claim to be the fulfillment of the Law. No one has been able to fulfill the law.

1. This all gets set up with the story of Adam's sin – He is in a Garden. He has every advantage, but he fails, and sin enters the world.

2. Jesus comes along as the Second Adam – He is in a barren desert, he has every disadvantage, but he fulfills the law. He passes the test.

3. The Christian message is that we are saved by grace through faith. We are rescued by Christ. We ride in on his coattails.

C. One of the outlines to understand the Bible unfolds with two words: Law and Grace.

1. The Law is: if / then.
  - a) If you speed, then you get a ticket.
  - b) If you eat donuts and cheeseburgers, then your health suffers.
  - c) If you keep God's law perfectly, then you go to heaven. But if you do not, then you do not.
  - d) The law is if / then and it sets out passages make it clear what is expected of us. And it is clear that we have failed. The if/then of the law is bad, news.
  - e) *To be clear, some laws are more important than others. Breaking some laws have greater civil or moral consequences than breaking others, but God's standards are perfect righteousness – of our heart. Not just our actions, but our heart.*
  - f) *One of the key functions of the law is to expose our sinfulness to ourselves.*
2. But there are passages that highlight God's grace.
3. And there are passages that make it clear that God rescues sinners.
4. There are lots of passages that drive home the law. Thank God there are also passages that highlight grace, which is not if/ then but because / therefore: because Jesus came into the world to save sinners, therefore, we can be saved.
5. Because Jesus lived a perfect life – fulfilled the law and then died in our place, therefore, we can be Rescued. Forgiven. Reconciled. Redeemed through his work on our behalf.

- IX. If you have been around much, you know that I trip over myself trying to make this point:
- A. I didn't hear it for a long time
  - B. Many of you do not as well.
  - C. I hear a lot of karma out there. I hear a lot of people who think they are good enough. I hear a lot of religion.
  - D. The EE questions are way out of date. I think they made the rounds in the 80s, when more people in this country had more of a Judeo-Christian set of assumptions. I have not used them in a casual conversation in years, but they make the law / gospel point very well:
    1. If you were to die tonight, do you know you'd go to heaven?
    2. If God asked you, why should I let you into heaven, what would you say.
  - E. Let me give you the right answers:
    1. Yes: We can know.
    2. I am with him.

X.