

The Savior's Sermon
It's A Heart Condition

A Sermon on Matthew 5:21-37
Year A - Epiphany 6
12 - February - 2017

JJ¹

A man went in for his regular checkup. The doctor performed the exam then took blood samples and sent them off to the lab. The doctor asked the man to stay in the exam room and he'd be back. About twenty minutes later the doctor comes back and says, "Sam, I've got some concerns about your heart." Sam responds, "Ah doc, my ticker's ok. Healthy as an ox!" The doctor has been in this situation more times than he'd care to count, but still is shocked by the foolish response every time. The doctor says, "Sam, that's what you say. But I gotta tell you that you're a ticking time bomb!"

Some of you guys might be smiling because maybe I just described the snarky dialogue from your most recent visit with the doctor. Wives, you may be rolling your eyes for the same reason. This Sam character is living in denial of the truth. Outwardly, things seemed to be fine, but the doctor could see deeper. He had the right techniques, tests and equipment to literally get at the heart of the matter.

As we move along in **THE SAVIOR'S SERMON**, Jesus now shows us in fine detail what God demands of his people. Jesus shows us what he meant at the end of our gospel last week when he said: "Indeed I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and experts in the law, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 5:20) The righteousness that the Pharisees and our own sinful hearts think is enough has only to do with externals.

Today Jesus teaches us that **IT'S A HEART CONDITION**.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, Jesus addresses our failure to realize the depth of our heart condition with a refrain which repeats six times (four times in our text today; two times next week): "You have heard...But I tell you..." There are few places in the Gospels where Jesus is so blunt in the preaching of the law than he is here in the Sermon on the Mount. Today and next week, Jesus is going to dig far beyond the surface-scratching in the law we perform to try and convince ourselves and others that we're good people. Today and next week, Jesus isn't going to let us push the soul-crushing hammer of the law out to a "safe" distance where it can only hurt the really bad sinners who make it on the evening news and behind jail bars.

Today Jesus cuts deep into the heart so he can show us just how shockingly wicked and depraved we all really are. He shows us that we prop ourselves up on an imaginary pillar of self-righteousness if we think we're good to go with God simply because we've only committed the sins we're capable of.

The first shocking heart condition: "You have heard that it was said to people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be subject to judgment..."

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Murder isn't just a matter of a suicide bomber, a distraught mother drowning her child or a troubled young man getting off a plane and emptying two clips of bullets into the bodies of people in a crowded baggage claim area in Ft. Lauderdale. Jesus says murder is a heart condition, and you have it if you've ever been angry with someone without cause. Don't be quick to puff yourself up now either! When Jesus says "without cause" he isn't talking from a human point of view, but God's. How many of us can honestly say that when we've been angry it's been righteous anger because God is offended? Very rarely, if ever! When we're angry, we're angry because "They did this to *me*, they hurt *me*, now I want them to hurt!"

Murderers, the lot of us! And it doesn't stop there! We murder with the poison that drips from our lips with mean, degrading and slanderous words. We murder when we hurt people with our sin—mentally, emotionally and physically. Look at how serious Jesus is about our terrible heart condition! He says we can't even worship properly if we refuse to reconcile with those we've sinned against! (23-24) Then Jesus shows how shameful it is if our sin comes to the point of being brought before the courts! (25)

When Jesus says, "Amen I tell you: You will never get out until you have paid the last penny," understand that Jesus' ultimate concern isn't that you end up in an earthly jail because of your heart condition, but the eternal jail of hell! Jesus says something very similar in his parable of the unmerciful servant: "His master was angry and handed him over to the jailers until he could pay back

everything he owed. This is what my heavenly Father will also do to you unless each one of you forgives his brother from his heart." (Mt. 18:34-35) Jesus shows us that refusing to reconcile with another person is a symptom of alienation from God and a refusal to respond to God's mercy. To refuse to apologize for sin committed against another person and continue in that impenitence throughout life will leave you without the expectation of heaven when you die. You will be lost and will "be thrown into [the] prison" of hell, where you "will will never get out until you have paid the last penny." The punishment of hell is eternal. There is no possibility for the sinner ever to be able to pay his way out of hell.



The second shocking heart condition: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Adultery isn't just a matter of sleeping with another person's spouse, sexual acts before marriage, homosexuality or any of the other physical manifestations of sexual immorality. Jesus says adultery is a heart condition, and you have it if you've ever even once looked at and thought about someone with a hint of lust—with thoughts wondering what the eye cannot see or what could be. Know that this can even happen as you look at and think about your spouse. There's a difference between loving and appreciating your spouse for who they are mentally, emotionally and physically and looking at and thinking about them as nothing more than a means to satisfy your desires.

Adulterers, the lot of us! Look how serious God is about our heart condition when it comes to adultery! Cut it off and throw it out! At the heart and core of this heart condition is lust, which is idolatry. Whatever is dragging you into this sin must be removed from your life, no matter how painful or inconvenient it may be! It is better to go without that one thing in this life “than for your whole body to be thrown into hell!”

The third shocking heart condition: “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to be regarded as an adulteress. And whoever marries the divorced woman is regarded as an adulterer.”

Divorce reveals a heart condition which more often than not involves a combination of the first two—anger and lust. In Matthew 19 Jesus explains that God only ever gave the option of divorce because people’s hearts were hardened with sin. Understand that the option was only on the table when sexual sins were involved! The sin of divorce starts with the heart and the damage it brings is shocking.

The fourth shocking heart condition: “Again you have heard that it was said to people long ago, ‘Do not break your oaths, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ But I tell you, do not swear at all...”

Jesus points out that all swearing is actually taking an oath in God’s name. Jesus reveals your attitude toward God and his name is pretty low if you feel the need to use his

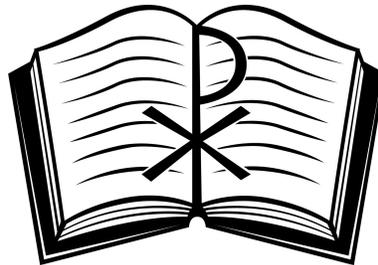
name as an expression of shock, “Oh my God!” or as a witness to a menial fact, “I swear I’m telling the truth!” These things, Jesus says, come from the devil (37).

Friends, what an awful lot we are! What a terrible heart condition we have! We can cry out with our psalmist today: “Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees”—but they aren’t! “Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands”—but I am! (Psalm 119:5-6) This life-long lesson of shame which we compound every day often feels like too much to take in!

One of my Seminary professors recently wrote: “I am convinced that if God had shown me the full depth of that grotesque reality when I was young the shame might have overwhelmed me. Instead, through one painful insight after another gained from the Word and confirmed in scripturally narrated life experience, the Spirit continues to teach me how true it is that my heart is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9).”² I’m sure you feel the same way, as do I.

Our heart condition isn’t God’s fault, but our own! Yet the amazing thing about our God is that he takes it on himself to heal our hearts! While our heart conditions are truly shocking, one more shocking is the heart condition of our God. Realizing our heart condition is too much for us to handle, that is until we remember who brings this message to us.

Speaking these words to us is none other than our Savior, Jesus. His was a heart that hid no grudges or bitterness for anyone, even



² Professor Richard Gurgel (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary - WLS), in his February 2017 Grow In Grace Notes: *A Painfully Beautiful Ongoing Lesson!*

though many sought to provoke it in him. Here was the one whose life never sinfully offended anyone and yet who rushed headlong into the fray to bring reconciliation to all people with their holy God. Here was the heart that never knew an instant of lust and the eye which remained pure in every way while walking through our human cesspool of temptations. Here we marvel at words always spoken with such transparency that there was never reason to doubt the simplicity of his “yes” and the honesty of his “no.” Here is the only one whose steadfastness meant that when he considered his Father’s commands he felt no shame.³

Then comes the most shocking part of God’s heart condition. “Jesus who knew no shame of his own covers me with his shamelessness while he loses not just hand or eye but is cut off completely”⁴ from the land of the living as he bears my shameful on the cross!

Friends, it is that shocking heart condition of our God which creates in a us a new heart condition—a heart condition that loves God and wants to thank him for his forgiveness by living a life of love ourselves. Our new heart condition seeks to love others first, and when we have not, be the first to seek out the one we’ve wronged to be reconciled. Our new heart condition seeks to respect our bodies and the bodies of others by honoring God’s gift of sexuality. Our new heart condition seeks to rejoice in the gift of marriage

and to support marriages so that they heal and grow. And finally today our Savior’s love gives us the heart condition to want to glorify God and his name without even using his name but simply letting our “yes” be “yes,” and our “no” be “no.”

Friends, let’s listen to our doctor, Jesus our Savior. He’s the one with the perfect tools and power to see our terrible heart condition. Let’s recognize our heart condition and our desperate need for our heavenly doctor because he’s the one who can give us a new heart condition—his own which lives for love and holiness. Amen.

SDG⁵

³ Some paraphrase and some verbatim from Gurgel’s 2017 February Grow In Grace Notes, noted above.

⁴ Gurgel.

⁵ SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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