

Sermon - Matthew 5 – Jesus fulfills the law

Rev. Bruce Stanley

Sermon text and audio can be downloaded from www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

*** III** – If you had to choose between the high jump and the limbo, what would you prefer to do?

With high jump, the bar keeps going up and up and you have to go over it. For limbo, the bar goes down and down and you have to go under it. High jump is a difficult challenging sport. Limbo is a fun party game!

When it comes to obeying God's laws, do you like to lower the bar or raise it? Do you have low standards, or high standards when it comes to following God's laws? Love your neighbour, don't get angry, do not covet, do not steal, do not lie – God's laws are hard to follow. Unless, perhaps, we lower the bar a bit. Unless we compromise a bit.

In our passage today, Jesus is talking about the times we lower the standards of God's laws. The way we make stealing OK in our own mind sometimes, like illegally copying a CD, or a sick day of work when we're not really sick), or the way we justify that lying is OK if everyone else is doing it on their tax return. And Jesus wants us to know that the law of God cannot be compromised. We must have high standards. In verse 17, Jesus begins:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Jesus says: all the law and the prophets were about ME. Every law, every prophecy, points to me. Everything that was written in the Scriptures (our Old Testament) points towards me! Jesus is saying – I am the Messiah – I am God's promised King from the line of David. If we want to fully understand the laws and prophets of God, we need to listen to Jesus! And in the rest of this passage, Jesus fully explains God's laws. We'll look in detail at the first two and I'll briefly comment on the last 4.

1. Murder:

'You've heard that it was said: Do not murder, but I tell you the truth, anyone who is angry, anyone who says 'you fool!' Is in danger of the fire of hell.'

Murder, according to Jesus, isn't just about physically killing someone. Murder begins even with an angry heart and with an angry word. Jesus says if you're coming to worship God at church, to sing some songs, to serve in ministry, to give your gifts, and there's a problem between you and another Christian – go and sort out that relationship first! Settle matters quickly! Don't let that anger sit in your heart. Because you can't worship God with your **whole heart** when you're angry with your brother or sister. That's how murder begins!

Now sometimes anger is OK. It's a ***correct*** response to ***sin***. But when our anger comes between a relationship, when it becomes personal and destructive, it's murder. Anger because we have to wait in a queue at the shops. Anger at the kids for spilling something on the carpet. Anger at a slow driver on the road. Anger for getting a parking ticket we probably deserved. Anger not at sinful behavior, but at a person. And sometimes just because of circumstances that can't be avoided. Anger because of personal inconvenience and dislike, anger because of our pride or stubbornness. Anger because we've been upset. That anger destroys personal relationships and is murderous. We're all guilty of that anger. And Jesus says: Deal with it now. Don't let it continue. Don't let it destroy a relationship. Don't lower God's standards and make personal anger "OK".

2. Adultery:

'You've heard it said 'do not commit adultery', but I tell you – don't even look lustfully!'

There's a nice little advertising tune on TV at the moment – "From little things, big things grow" – and that's so true about sin! Little things lead to big things. Adultery isn't caused by two people falling together and accidentally having sex. It's caused by a lustful thought, a long inappropriate look, an inappropriate meeting that leads to other things like deceiving your spouse. Adultery isn't just the physical act of sex. It's everything that leads up to it. It often begins just with that lustful look. Like so many other sins – gossip, slander, lies, greed – from little things, big things grow.

What should we do? Pluck out your eye! What does Jesus mean? That we should actually pluck out our eye if we look lustfully? But if you pluck out your eye, can't you still see with the other one? And if you pluck them both out, can't you still **think** lustfully? What is Jesus saying then? He's saying: "Take it seriously!" **Do not put yourself** in the situations that you know can lead you into sin! **Cut off** those things that can lead you into sin. Whether it's the lustful second look or the poor use of the internet, or the inappropriate meetings – cut them out of your life. Because they can lead you to further sin, deeper sin, continued sin, and sin can lead you to hell.

Murder and adultery – most of us will say we haven't done them... physically. But we **have** committed them in our hearts. The problem is when we let them into our hearts and leave them there. When we leave sin in our lives. We make that sin acceptable to live with, then we have a problem. Let's look briefly at the other 4 things he mentions here:

3. Divorce:

"But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

God has high standards for marriage. He doesn't allow divorce **except for marital unfaithfulness**. No matter how much society lowers their standards, we shouldn't lower God's standards for us in marriage.

4. Oaths:

'You've heard it said: keep the oaths you made to the Lord, but I say: don't swear at all!'

Jesus says 'Forget about oaths!' Simply saying Yes or No should be **good enough** for our word. People should be able to trust our YES and NO. Simply keep your word!

5. Eye for an eye:

You've heard it was said: eye for eye, tooth for tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

Jesus is saying 'forget about revenge'. Stop worrying about getting what's yours. Jesus says: turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, be generous. Stop asking "What's in it for me?" like the rest of the world. Don't be always thinking about yourself. And finally:

6. Love for enemies:

You heard it said: 'Love your enemy and hate your neighbour', but I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

God says "love those who HATE you. Pray for those who PERSECUTE you." Do we? Do we really? Or do we make it acceptable not to love certain people. To ignore difficult people. Annoying people. "Different" people. Do we make excuses not to love, or excuses to ignore? God loves everyone, and his standard for us is the same.

All these things are difficult, aren't they? God's laws are hard to follow. It's hard to love your enemy. It's hard to give freely. It can be hard not to divorce in a difficult marriage. It can be hard to keep your word, hard not to seek revenge, hard not to lust. It's hard not to be angry.

But this last verse is **impossible!**

Matthew 5:48 – “*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*”

What does that mean?! How can we possibly ***be perfect***?

Actually, the word “perfect” here is talking about is our ***heart attitude*** towards God’s laws. It’s about what our hearts ***desire***. God wants us to have a heart that desires ***perfection***, even though we can never reach it on our own. We should be ***aiming*** for perfection.

III – For example, if you have 1000 cockroaches living in your bedroom, would you be happy if you got rid of half of them? Or 80%? Would you be happy if there was only 1 cockroach living in your bedroom instead of a thousand? Don’t you want to get rid of ALL of them? It may never happen. They may keep coming back. But do you settle for 99%? Don’t we AIM for perfection with those things?

If there’s mould in our fridge, rust in our car, holes in our roof – don’t we aim for 100% when we deal with those problems? It should be the same when we deal with sin. AIM for perfection. Of course, when it comes to sin, we can **never be perfect**. Only Jesus can. Only Jesus is perfect. But the question for us is –

“Do you ***DESIRE*** to follow God’s laws 100%?” Do you DESIRE perfection? Or is near enough good enough? Is there sin you’re not dealing with in your life? Are you happy to lower your standards? When we don’t care about sin, when we don’t take our sin seriously – that matters to God.

God knows your heart. He knows we fail. He knows we make mistakes. He knows we fall into sin. But he wants us to have a heart that ***desires*** perfection. If there is sin in your life, Jesus wants you to take it seriously.

Jesus calls us to do the high jump, not the limbo. To recognise sin in our life, to repent of that sin and to make changes in our life to do away with sin. Instead of lowering the bar, he wants us always to be reaching higher. When was the last time you sat down with God and said: “I’m struggling with this sin – anger, lust, lies, gossip, murder, adultery ... whatever – and I need your help, God, to turn away from it forever. To get it out of my life. Forgive me. Help me to repent. Help me to deal with this sin”

Maybe it’s been a while since you prayed something like that. So let’s do it now.

Prayer...