Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Matthew Chapter Four – Week 53: The Great Sermon, Part 2

Old Things and New Things …

Day 364. Desiring and Lusting

"You have heard that it was said, '***Do not commit adultery***.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into hell. (Matthew 4:27-30).

Jesus quotes from the law (both Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18), which His audience knows well. And then again, He elevates it. If you look at someone you are not married to with desire to have sex with them, regardless of if you act on it, you have already committed adultery! And He claims for Himself the authority to state this.

Another way of phrasing Jesus' statements may be, "in God's Country, people do not look at those they are not married to with lust. In fact, they do not look at anything with lust – they do not desire what is not theirs. If you wish to be in God's Country and you find it impossible not to look at others (or something else) in this way, it is better for you to blind yourself than miss being in God's Country! In fact, if there is anything which prevents you from entering Gods' Country, it is best for you to get rid of it, so that you may enter God's Country. Being in God's Country is worth everything – even life itself."

If you find yourself deeply yearning or lusting after anything or anyone, does Jesus ask you to lay it aside? How do you differentiate between desiring (and pursuing) what is healthy and loving versus desiring something which is of not benefit to you, or is even harmful? Do you agree that being in God's Country is worth everything?

Share your answer with those you trust.

Day 365: Divorce

Jesus said, "It was said, '***Whoever divorces his wife must give her a legal document***.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." (Matthew 5:31-32)

The concepts of marriage, adultery, and faithfulness are tightly interwoven in Jewish thinking, and apply to relationships between people and relationship with God.

Adultery is, in essence, abandoning someone that you are in union with, for another. That someone may be your husband, your wife, or God Himself.

Jesus makes two inter-related claims: a.) a divorced wife must commit adultery, therefore it is not her fault, but the fault of the one who divorced her. This is because 2000 years ago in Judea, women had no legal or culturally accepted method of supporting themselves independently of a husband or prostitution. Therefore, if someone divorced their wife, they were forcing her to seek out and join with another man. Which leads to the second claim: b.) if a man married a woman who had previously been married, he was causing irreparable harm to the first union which that woman had.

Marriage, from a Jewish (and Christian historical) point of view, involves not two people, but three: a man, a woman, and God. Marriage is a sign of God's New Creation. Ideally, three complementary yet different beings become one effective being, part of flesh and part of spirit, for the rest of their lives on earth.

Marriage is a symbol of the New Creation which God is pulling people towards: two very different beings joined in union, through God and with God, in a state of shalom. Sharing everything, in love.

Jesus' teachings may give an idealized vision of life – but that is what He is saying our heavenly Father desires – this idealized life is what we are actually created for, a life of shalom. What is preventing you from living this idealized life? If you are married, how can you and your husband / wife live closer and closer to shalom each day? Regardless if you are married or not, how can you live closer to God each day?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 366: Oaths

"Again, you have heard that it was said to an older generation, '***Do not break an oath, but fulfill your vows to the Lord***.' But I say to you, do not take oaths at all—not by heaven because it is the throne of God, not by earth because it is his footstool, and not by Jerusalem because it is the city of the great King. Do not take an oath by your head because you are not able to make one hair white or black. Let your word be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no.' More than this is from the evil one. (Matthew 5:33-37)

What's the problem with oaths? Aren't they an indicator of the seriousness with which we are committing to something, the truth of something we're claiming, the belief we have in something?

So… if we don't say an oath, does that mean we're not committing, or not being truthful, or not believing?

Our words matter. Words can encourage the heart and bandage up brokenness or wound the heart and inflict wounds. Our Father is everywhere, and everything is His. Everything we say is spoken before Him. Our words honour or dishonour Him, for they all are spoken in His presence. Anything we would make an oath by – belongs to Him anyway.

Let your "yes" mean yes, and your "no" mean no – and honour God in how you speak.

How do our words, even the most innocuous, honour or dishonour God?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 367: Resisting Evil

"You have heard that it was said, '***An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth***.' But I say to you, do not resist the evildoer. But whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him as well. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your coat also. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and do not reject the one who wants to borrow from you." (Matthew 5:38-42)

Do not resist the evildoer.

But aren't we supposed to resist evil? It is so tempting to change the meaning of this saying to what *we* want it to say, and many have done this over the years.

Jesus emphasizes his teaching by giving examples which, if anything, would seem to encourage evil, not discourage it. Can you imagine someone thinking, "if I target a Christian for 'x', I'll get 'x, y, and z.' They'll also probably offer to pray for me as well!"

In Jesus' teaching, the best way to resist evil is

a.) Not to do evil ourselves
b.) When evil is done to you, use it as an opportunity to bless the one oppressing you.

How does this glorify our Father in heaven (without looking at the next day ☺)?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 368: Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets

"You have heard that it was said, '***Love your neighbor***' and 'hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be like your Father in heaven, since he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors do the same, don't they? And if you only greet your brothers, what more do you do? Even the Gentiles do the same, don't they? So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48).

Love my *enemy*? Pray for those who *persecute* me?

Doesn't that just lead to an early grave?

Perhaps! It did for Jesus after all.

Jesus is saying, "If you really want to love God with all you are and love your neighbour as yourself, you'll love even those who hate and persecute you, just as much as you love yourself. You'll try to be just like God, your heavenly Father, giving good to all." Or, using different words,
"In our Father's House, everyone pursues what is healthiest for the other – whether they like them or not, whether they need forgiving or not. Everyone tries to be just like our Father, for He is the head of our household."

And Jesus realizes how unrealistic this is!

"Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." No one is perfect, and we will never be perfect. However, we can pursue being like Christ, like our heavenly Father, using the unique gifts we have been blessed with. In that pursuit, others will be blessed and our heavenly Father will be glorified – which is what Christianity is all about – to bless others and glorify our Father in heaven.

Repeating a question from last week: how, in the name of Jesus, can we fulfill God's Word?

Record your thoughts and share with trusted friends.

Day 369: Motivation

"Be careful not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven. Thus whenever you do charitable giving, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in synagogues and on streets so that people will praise them. I tell you the truth, they have their reward! But when you do your giving, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your gift may be in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-4)

Almost everyone wants to be well thought of by others, sometimes going to extreme lengths to please them or justify their actions. Coercive people can sometimes manipulate this to their advantage.

And Jesus is saying, "In my Father's House, people do what is right 'automatically', without thought for how it makes them look in others' eyes, neither caring if it gains them any benefit at all. In fact, they prefer things to be known only between them and God, so that the person being benefited doesn't even know who did it. No one does anything for show. They would rather have gladness from our Father than the thanks of the whole world."

This comes down to, "what is your motivation? What do you love?" Is it your ego, and you want others to glorify you up so your ego gets inflated, or you gain fame, fortune, or power? Is it God, and you want God alone to be glorified?

Share your thoughts with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 370: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.