We are continuing in our Fall sermon series today on the Ten Commandments, looking at these ancient words that Yahweh—the God of Israel—gave to His people after they had been freed from slavery. Because this was the start of Israel becoming a people that represented His Name. These commandments exemplified how they were meant to live as His people.

So as I've been saying each week, these commandments need to be seen in light of that sharing of identity. Because who Israel was directly reflected who their God was. They were 'holy' or set apart because of that connection. That was the whole point of the covenant that He made with them. They needed to be devoted to him alone in order to represent Him to the nations.

And I know that I might be starting to sound like a broken record, but I want this to be stamped onto your brains by the time we get to the end of November. I don't want any of you to ever read the Ten Commandments the same way ever again. Because now every time you read these words, you will know that this about Yahweh and His people in identity together.

As a people who are identified and associated in name *with* Him, everything they do going forward—as they enter into the land that was promised to them—is to represent this God and who He is. To mirror what He's all about and what His mission is.

So with that again in mind, let's read **Deuteronomy 5:1-17.**

Now, this commandment is the first of five commandments that in our modern and western sensibilities seem to be common sense upon first read. This one in particular seems to be quite obvious. Not many of us get through life without never having stolen something or lied to someone. I remember stealing a piece of bubble gum from the Dollar Store when I was probably seven or eight years old, and I felt guilty about it for a week.

But murder? That's a far greater mistake. It feels like it should be on a different level. It's so much more dramatic than these other commandments. Like, of course we shouldn't kill other people. Shouldn't this have been obvious?

But I wonder if we humans are more violent than we might think.

Take Martin Luther King Jr, for example. Martin Luther King is of course known for his efforts in the civil rights movement and breaking down the barriers between 'whites' and 'blacks' in American society. He was arguably the most influential figure in the 20th century for fighting racism.

But he fought it how? In the way of non-violence. Martin was famous for urging that every demonstration, every speech, every activist event was done without violence. Many, when they hear the term 'non-violence,' think of MLK for this reason.

And the fact that he's *known* for this conviction says to me that a non-violence is less intuitive to us than we might think. Because Martin himself was *murdered* for the work that he was doing.

So if its less intuitive than we might think, **where does it come from,** this violent and murderous spirit in our humanity? What motivates it? If we try to answer those questions, we might realize why God put these four little words here in the first place.

When we read this verse, *"You shall not murder,"* it's helpful to remember that Scripture is its own best interpreter. So rather than making immediate assumptions about what that means, we should ask ourselves, "Where have seen murder so far in the Biblical story?"

There's one key example that I think helps to add some definition to this commandment. If you're familiar with the early chapters of Genesis, it doesn't take very long—once Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden—before we see murderous behaviour.

Adam and Eve have two sons—Cain and Abel—and the two men bring offerings to the Lord. Cain brings fruit, which is fine; and Abel brings fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock, which is a significant difference. The text seems to intentionally emphasize the difference.

Abel brings a far more costly sacrifice. It's the firstborn of his flock—so his most prized item—*and* it's the fatty bits, which later on in Israel's story were reserved only for the priests. So it's not surprising, then, that the text says, *"The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering."* His offering cost him something.

So you would think that Cain would take note of this and do the same, if gaining the Lord's favour was in fact the priority. But in a horrible turn of events, Cain becomes furious with *his brother.* And even though he's been thoroughly warned by God about sin crouching at his door and wanting to take control over him, Cain goes out to the field and attacks and kills his brother.

Now, in light of the whole story, this feels like a bit of an overreaction, right? But let's think through this. What happened here that made Cain think that this action was appropriate? What created that murderous spirit within him?

Three things. First, Cain doesn't seem to want to give Yahweh his best. He then gets angry when his offering isn't good enough. And that possessiveness and anger combine together to create a hatred directed at his brother.

As the Lord said to Cain, *"Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."* But he doesn't. He lets himself be ruled *by* it. He allows it to take possession of him. And it results in an impulsive act of aggression, a violent outburst of hatred.

Hatred, in other words, is the seed of murder. And the Bible makes it clear that this violent impulse continued on through the generations. Because one of Cain's own descendants, a man named Lamach, brags to his two wives that he has killed a man simply for wounding him—as if aggression and violent retribution is now a sign of strength. When someone injures or dishonors you, you have permission to do even worse to them.

That's more-or-less how the ancient world operated, based on the literature. If someone stole a sheep from you, you could do worse to them. If someone broke your arm, you could cut off theirs and no one would bat an eye at it.

We have to remember; ancient society was a different world. It was a violent world. Genesis 6:11 states that *"the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence."*

So part of God's intention, as scholar Christopher Hays puts it, behind giving the Israelites this commandment wasn't because it solved their violent behaviour but because it *put limits* on it.

In other words, an eye-for-an-eye was a boundary. If someone knocked your tooth out, you were not allowed to be driven by such hatred that you punch their whole mouth out, or worse.

Yahweh had called Israel to Himself to demonstrate a different way of being—a way that *more closely* aligned with who He was. So to be His people meant that they could not reflect the hostile and violent ways of their context. To murder was to allow hatred to have a foothold; and He would not let His people be driven by hatred, because that's not who He is.

And when we see this commandment through that lens, I don't know how this *isn't* still applicable for us today.

We've talked in previous weeks about how we live in an age of anxiety. I would also argue that **we also live in an age of anger**—in large respect because of that anxiety.

Because how many of our 'issues' in society come out of situations where individuals are fueled by possessive and self-serving attitudes, like Cain? How much hatred is out there because people are obsessed with picking a side, getting their own way, or withholding what is most valuable to them? How many murderous threats are made regularly because people *so deeply hate* a politician or an activist because of what they stand for?

I did a bit of online searching, and I found out that Martin Luther King Jr. received hundreds of documented death threats (along with constant bomb threats, hate mail, and FBI intimidation) from the mid-1950s until his assassination in 1968. Barack Obama received roughly four times more death threats than previous U.S. presidents, according to Secret Service assessments.

This still happens today. We think we live in 'civil' North America, but when people don't like what you're doing, you'll experience how much hatred there still is. History and human nature tell us that evil crouches at our door closer than we might want to admit.

Just in the last number of weeks, you might have seen news articles written about a woman on death row named Christa Pike. In 1995, Christa had been found guilty of joining with two accomplices in murdering a classmate when she was 18 years old. She has spent 30 years on death row, and just recently on September 30 she was strapped to a gurney in Tennessee's death chamber to be killed by lethal injection.

However, with her spiritual advisor next to her, and family members of the victim watching from the observation room, much to the doctor's horror, she remained conscious throughout the whole event. And eventually the prison officials closed the curtains on the witness observation window.

Because Christa survived. Not just one, but two lethal injections. And the whole event has sparked no little amount of outrage.

Now, the conversation about capital punishment deserves more attention than what I can give here. But what I want to focus your attention on is a *response* that was offered in the wake of this event.

The mother of the victim, May Martinez, told journalists that she broke down in tears when it was clear that Christa wasn't going to die. An eye-for-an eye, right? A life for a life. According to old covenant law, Christa had taken life and so deserved to lose her life.

May Martinez stated that watching Christa talk and move on the gurney made her feel as though Christa was laughing in her face. (Of course she wasn't, but that's how this grieving mother felt in that moment.) And May believes that the state now owes her an apology because it didn't fulfill justice appropriately

Now, I don't want to minimize the trauma that this woman experienced in having her daughter's life ripped away from her. But notice the reaction here. She's clearly been waiting thirty years for this. And rather than being horrified by another death, she expresses a raw kind of hatred for Christa. As if Crista *is evil* staring her in the face. *Christa* is the enemy that must be destroyed.

And if we were still an old covenant people, we could be forgiven for thinking this way. Because a life for a life would still have its place. Israel was asked to be a community that simply put limits on violence and retribution.

But for us now, in the new covenant with Christ, His desire is that we wouldn't just put limitations on violence and retribution and anger, but that we would see it transformed.

I say this because, in His sermon on the mount, Jesus expands on the definition of murder.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder,' and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry [enraged, in a hostile way] *with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,'* [an Aramaic term of contempt], *is answerable to the court,"* (Matt. 5:21-22).

Whoa. Doesn't that just blow the roof off this commandment? Similar to what we saw last week, the boundaries of this commandment have been expanded. It's no longer about simply withholding yourself from violence, because to be hostile or to even look at someone with contempt is *just as worthy of judgment.*

He's upped the ante. Jesus is saying here that His followers are to look like Him, and contempt and hostility *are not of Him.*

Because just as hatred is the seed for murder, so is contempt the seed for hatred.

See, Jesus is redirecting our hate *away* from people entirely and *towards* the evil that has controlled or destroyed them. He's drawing us even closer to the realities of evil, where sin is crouching at every single one of our doors trying to get a foothold. Because whenever we see another person as evil, we're giving evil itself a foot-in-the-door to our own lives.

For example, yesterday Danny and I were driving down East Hastings Street in Vancouver, which is a geographical area that is known for incredibly high rates of homelessness and substance abuse. And seeing a number of these individuals reminded me of what Jesus was getting at, and where we're meant to direct our hatred.

I *hate* drugs. I *hate* what it does to people—to disfigure them, to dehumanize them. But it's not the addict who is evil. Because I believe that the transforming power of Jesus is for everyone. And if I believe in the transforming power of Jesus for everyone, then I must *also* believe that His mission is to see these dehumanized individuals *healed* of this evil. That His desire is to *unravel* the impact of evil and restore them, in every capacity.

Think about the apostle Paul. Imagine how the early Christians would have felt about *him*—a former persecutor *and executer* of Christians, now planting and leading churches.

But look at what he writes in 1 Timothy 1:15: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to <u>save sinners</u>, of whom I am <u>the worst</u>."* That's not just an exaggeration for effect. Paul sincerely looks back on his life before Jesus and proclaims powerfully that if *he* can be saved by Jesus, then it must mean that *no one* has fallen so far from grace that they can't yet be redeemed.

In other words, **no one deserves your hatred. No one should have your contempt.** Jesus gives no room for it.

Or don't you remember that Jesus told us to love our enemies? If Jesus told us to love our enemies, I'm pretty sure that includes everyone, no matter what they've done.

Shane Claiborne—you may have heard his name before—has said this: "It is worth remembering that Moses murdered someone. David murdered Uriah to cover up his rape of Bathsheba. Paul oversaw the torturous execution of Stephen. If murderers are beyond redemption, we can rip out most of the Bible, because it was written by them."

He continues, "When people say of someone like Christa Pike: 'She is sick,' I cannot help but remember the words of Christ: *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick"* (Luke 5:31)…. No one is beyond redemption, even someone who has committed murder."

This is where, I think, our persecuted brothers and sisters have so much to say. Because many of them face death threats and murder on a regular basis. They know what human hatred feels like. They know what Jesus meant when He said that the world will hate us because of Him.

But they are the ones who will often be the first to say that **no one, not even the most murderous of people, can't yet experience the transforming love of Jesus.**

So I want to encourage you today to invite the Spirit to reveal to you where you might be holding contempt—or even hatred—for someone else. You might not think that you're a hateful person, and that might be true. But there may yet come a day when you *do* feel hatred towards someone.

Do the work now, so that if-and-when the day comes that you stand face-to-face with someone who has broken the 6th commandment, you can say to them, "It is not my job to decide your fate. You are in God's hands; He is your judge. But from my vantage point, although evil seems to have won, I stand before you today to declare that not even you have fallen so far that grace cannot yet find you. And I hope that it does."

Paul himself reminds us of this when he writes in Romans 12: *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil…. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live in harmony with one another. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord…. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'*

In other words, violence and hatred and even contempt have no place in the life of the Christian who has been saved by a non-violent *and executed* Messiah, a Messiah that thousands of Christians every year are murdered *for* because they bear His Name.

They are hated, but they do not hate in return. "An eye for an eye" is no longer necessary. Because the power that is within them is stronger than the power that is in the world.

I want to encourage you today to consider that just as Israel was called to stand out, you too—in Christ—are to show the world a different way, a way that represents who our God is.

Consider what He's done for you in taking onto Himself the murderous spirit of our humanity.

And consider the fact that His gospel can only be transformative for those who know that their own sin contributed.

Because no one—not one—is so overwhelmed by evil that grace can't yet find them.