

Law in the Kingdom of God

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Labuhn

For the last couple of Sundays we've been looking at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Overlooking the sea of Galilee, Jesus taught his disciples the blessings or the Beatitudes received by those in the Kingdom of God. He also went on to share with them that they are the salt and light of the world. This most likely would have made the disciples feel good and somewhat important as representatives of God's Kingdom. But in our Gospel reading last week, Jesus also shared that He would not change one dot or one iota of the Law. Meaning that the Law would have to be fulfilled perfectly. More than the religious rulers of the day, more than the Scribes who knew the Law well, and more than the Pharisees who did what was right. Proverbs 21:2 says, ***"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart."***

There's a story of a man who went to his high school reunion 17 years after he graduated from high school. He returned to his hometown and was reunited with many of his classmates. Together with his classmates, Greg relived some of his "glory days" and they all enjoyed finding out what was going on in each of their lives. But as the night was coming to a close, Greg noticed that one of his classmates was becoming teary-eyed. He asked Debbie if she was alright, but trying to hold back her tears, all she seemed to muster was, *"There are some things that you just can't forget."* Now, feeling certain that something else was going on, he asked her what she meant. And Debbie finally told him that in the second grade – some 27 years ago – a girl named Karen had started the "Debbie Haters' Club." Karen was at the reunion but after all those years, Debbie had not gotten over the pain nor had she ever forgiven Karen.

Jesus shared with His disciples that they will be held to a higher standard, fulfilling the Law perfectly in both word and action. He gives to them an even greater understanding of the Law in His Kingdom. A disciple of Christ in the Kingdom of God needs to ensure that their heart is pure especially as it relates to the Law because nothing we do as His disciples is done in

isolation. Break the Law of God, and not only do you sin against God, but you also sin against your brother or sister.

In our reading for today Jesus shares the Spirit of the Law and what it means to fulfill the Law perfectly when it comes to murder, adultery, divorce, and in taking an oath. Regarding murder (5th Commandment), He says, ***“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”*** (v.22) Regarding adultery (6th Commandment), He says, ***“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”***(v.28) Regarding divorce, He says, ***“But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”*** (v32) And regarding taking an oath (2nd Commandment) He says, ***“But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.”*** (v.34- 36)

Given this greater understanding of how Jesus said the Spirit of the Law is applied, you might wonder: Is my heart truly with God? Meaning, am I fully reconciled with my brother or sister in Christ before I come before the Altar of God? Have I gone so far as to rid myself of parts of my body rather than continue in sin? Have I in some way increased the sorrow of someone who has gone through an unfortunate divorce? Have I ensured that my “yes” means yes, and my “no” means no, so that anything more I might have said did not come from a misguided, impure or evil thought? Jesus would go on to say in Matthew, ***“For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person...”*** (Matthew 15:19-20a)

God sees the attitudes and motives of your heart. He sees into the secret parts of your life and knows you even better than you know yourself. He knows your relationship with Him and He knows your relationships with others. He knows about all the guilt, the pain, the shame, and the cleansing needed in your heart. He sees the brokenness in you and in your relationship. He wants you to know that when you humble yourself and repent of your sin, there is nothing that can stand in the way of His love.

His love for you is real. He made a vow and kept the Spirit of the Law perfectly for you, and has fulfilled that vow through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Because of what He has done, all of your sins are forgiven.

His relationship with you is true and genuine. He gives to you His grace, mercy, and forgiveness so that you might enter His Kingdom through Baptism. His Spirit guides and directs you along the way so that you might continue to live with Him in His Kingdom as His beloved child. He encourages you, having been reconciled to Him, to be reconciled with others. So that your heart might be at peace as you receive Jesus' body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine and be reminded of His continued grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

Well, did you wonder what ever happened to my story about Greg at his reunion? As Paul Harvey once said, here is the rest of the story... Knowing that Karen was at the reunion that night, Greg encouraged Debbie to talk with Karen. Even though initially she refused, Greg continued to insist and made sure that the two of them could talk together in a separate room alone. Not hearing anything after a while, Greg decided to check on them. When he walked in, they were getting ready to leave and...smiling. And at that point, he knew he didn't have to say a thing, he simply smiled himself, knowing that the two had been reconciled once again. Proverbs 20:5 says, ***"the purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out."***

God knows that there is no way to serve Him in our own strength because so often our hearts are tainted with sin. Without His love and grace, at best we only bring mixed motives to our relationships. Yet He draws our hearts out and reconciles us to Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. By His Spirit, His Kingdom grows within our hearts, and as His beloved children, our hearts begin to share the Kingdom of God with the world around us. When this happen, together we fulfill our mission here at Our Savior's way, which is to glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by: forming relationships, experiencing Jesus together and sharing God's love.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Service Notes: Law in the Kingdom of God

1. In our Gospel today, Jesus teaches:
 - a. how to fulfill the Law perfectly.
 - b. the Spirit of the Law.
 - c. the Commandments of Moses.
 - d. all of the above.
 - e. a and b.

2. When I break the Law:
 - a. it only affects me and my salvation.
 - b. it only affects me and those around me.
 - c. it only affects me, those around me and my relationship with God.
 - d. it does not affect me at all because I am above the Law.

3. Keeping the Spirit of the Law:
 - a. enables me to be part of the Kingdom of God.
 - b. was completed by Jesus.
 - c. only applies to Jesus' examples.
 - d. all of the above.
 - e. a and b.

4. The Kingdom of God
 - a. begins in our hearts.
 - b. begins with God.
 - c. begins when we are born.
 - d. all of the above.
 - e. a and b.

5. Because Jesus fulfilled the Spirit of the Law for me perfectly, I plan to: